

Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA)
Meeting Minutes November 11, 2025
(DRAFT)

11/11/2025 - Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Members Present: Chair Robin Gibson, Keith Thompson, Mayor Jack Hilligoss, Carol Gillespie

Members Absent: Daniel Williams

Staff Present: James Slaton, Executive Director; Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk; Albert C. Galloway, Jr., City Attorney

Chair Gibson called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

2. COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Howard Davies, resident, commended the staff and CRA on working with Lincoln LLC to have a Laundromat in the Northwest area.

Joy Pruitt, Mainstreet Director, gave an update on upcoming activities including Make it Magical on December 12, 2025.

Michelle Martin, resident and business owner, expressed disappointment on recent decisions concerning Lincoln Ave and said that those affected should have been asked for input.

3. Minutes - October 10 & 13, 2025

Mayor Hilligoss made a motion to approve the minutes of October 10th and 13th. Commissioner Thompson seconded the motion.

by voice vote:

ALL "YES"

Motion approved 4-0.

4. Service Agreement With Kimley-Horn To Provide Professional Surveying Services For Walesbilt Hotel Boundary Area

[Begin Agenda Memo]

SYNOPSIS: The CRA has requested Kimley-Horn to provide a quote for Survey services

RECOMMENDATION: Approve Kimley-Horn Professional Surveying Services for Walesbilt Hotel Renovation and authorize the Executive Director to sign the Agreement and related documents.

BACKGROUND Kimley-Horn has entered into a Master Consulting Agreement with the City of Lake Wales. Lake Wales requested a quote from consultant to provide a boundary survey for the Walesbilt Hotel boundary area. The Agreement also allows for an optional topographical design survey.

FISCAL IMPACT \$38,700 – if both surveys are requested

[End Agenda Memo]

James Slaton, Executive Director, reviewed this item.

Commissioner Gillespie asked who owns the properties that will be surveyed? Mr. Slaton said the CRA, the Lake Wales Care Center, and Ray Brown. Commissioner Gillespie asked if the survey will affect the other property owners. Mr. Slaton said no and clarified that the surveying firm would establish the precise legal boundaries and elevations, and the resulting documentation would be used internally by the CRA as the engineering basis for any future construction activities at the hotel site.

Commissioner Thompson made a motion to approve this agreement. Mayor Hilligoss seconded the motion.

by voice vote:

Commissioner Thompson "YES"

Mayor Hilligoss "YES"

Commissioner Gillespie "YES"

Chair Gibson "YES"

Motion passed 4-0.

5. Woman's Club Restoration Repairs Project

[Begin Agenda Memo]

SYNOPSIS: Staff is requesting CRA Board approval of restoration repairs at the Woman's Club (275 East Park Avenue).

RECOMMENDATION It is recommended that the CRA Board take the following actions:

1. Approve request to allow for restoration repairs at the Woman's Club.
2. Authorize total expenditure of \$88,576.

BACKGROUND In FY 25/26, the CRA Board allocated \$100,000 for Woman's Club Restoration. The Woman's Club obtained several quotes for proposed work to include: Main Room Ceiling, Windows (12), and Exterior/Interior Walls. The lowest bid received was Mitchell Construction with a bid total of \$88,576.00.

By preserving the historic structure of the Woman's Club, the following Lake Wales Connected Plan Action Steps are addressed:

Action Step #17 (Complete) Adopt historic preservation building code

Action Steps #32 & #61 (On-going) Market and expand façade improvements fund, emphasizing historic restoration; encourage property owners to restore historic facades.

In accordance with the CRA Redevelopment Plan, one of the goals is to "preserve and maintain historic and architecturally significant structures within the redevelopment area." The Woman's Club is a historic community asset and use of the CRA funds for this historic structure would support both the Lake Wales

Connected Plan and CRA Redevelopment Plan.

OTHER OPTIONS Do not approve funds for historic preservation repairs at the Woman's Club.

FISCAL IMPACT The fiscal impact for the total project cost is \$88,576.00 (#105-559-600-663-989).

[End Agenda Memo]

Deena Drumgo, Assistant City Manager, reviewed this item.

Commissioner Gillespie inquired about how the Woman's Club would manage the repairs if the CRA did not approve the funding. Jessica Bray, representing the club, explained that the entire project was based on a partnership with the city, noting that the building reverts to city ownership if the club cannot maintain it. She stated that without the CRA's assistance, the club, which uses its operational budget primarily for programming, would have to intensely increase fundraising efforts, as current side funds (\$22,000 raised to date from grants and local businesses) are aimed only at preventing further deterioration, not full restoration.

Commissioner Thompson agreed on the wisdom of the investment, calling the support a great partnership and noting the city's need to ensure the historic structure's survival. Commissioner Thompson asked about previous City help. Ms. Bray said the City helped with a loan to repair the roof that was forgiven.

Commissioner Gillespie made a motion to approve this item. Commissioner Thompson seconded the motion.

by roll call vote:

Commissioner Gillespie "YES"

Commissioner Thompson "YES"

Mayor Hilligoss "YES"

Chair Gibson "YES"

Motion passed 4-0.

Chair Gibson commended the Woman's Club on their efforts.

6. Housing Rehabilitation Bids For Phase II CDBG Grant

[Begin Agenda Memo]

SYNOPSIS: Approve the bids from NOUVEAU Construction, LLC. for the homes approved through Lake Wales Community Development Block Housing Rehabilitation Grant and approve funding shortfall in the amount of \$183,835.26.

RECOMMENDATION It is recommended the City Commission consider the following action(s)

1. Approve the bids given by NOUVEAU Construction, LLC. for the Lake Wales Community Development Block Grant for the rehab of remaining three (3) homes, and demolition and replacement of one (1) home.
2. Authorize the City Manager to sign all related documents.
3. Approve funding shortfall of \$183,835.26 to complete two of the homes.

BACKGROUND On July 12, 2019, the City of Lake Wales received an award letter for \$750,000 through the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

Phase I of the project was completed in 2023 with \$266,566 left over in grant funds. Another set of homes were chosen for the program, using homes that were already on the Legacy Program list to have work done. These four homes were removed from the list and placed in this program in October 2023.

Since being placed in the CDBG program, the Legacy Housing Program list has grown and staff had to put a hold on taking new applications until October 1, 2026. There are currently 13 people on the Legacy Program waitlist, the CRA removed these applications from the waitlist with an understanding they would be able to be completed under CDBG Program. Without the additional funding from the CRA the rehabilitation of two (2) of the homes will not be possible.

FISCAL IMPACT The City of Lake Wales was awarded \$750,000. During Phase I, \$533,434 was expended leaving \$266,566. Budgeting for two of the homes only \$13,981.72 remains leaving a shortfall of \$183,835.26 for a Phase II.

OTHER OPTIONS

1. Not approve the bids from NOUVEAU Construction, LLC for the Lake Wales CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Grant and select another proposer.
2. Not approve the additional funding request of \$183,835.26.

[End Agenda Memo]

Onya Bates, CRA Coordinator, reviewed this item.

Commissioner Gillespie inquired if the costs were fully covered by the original grant. Executive Director Slaton confirmed that while there was a grant balance of \$266,566, the bids for the remaining homes (which were pulled from the Legacy Program list) came back higher than anticipated. Therefore, the proposed action was two-part: first, approving the full expenditure of the \$266,566 grant balance, and second, approving the additional \$183,835.26 from the CRA fund (drawn from a \$1 million line item) to cover the difference and ensure the completion of two of the homes in Phase II.

Chair Gibson asked the amount in the line item that this is coming from? Mr. Slaton said a \$1 million.

Commissioner Thompson made a motion to approve this item. Mayor Hilligoss seconded the motion.

by roll call vote:

Commissioner Thompson "YES"

Mayor Hilligoss "YES"

Commissioner Gillespie "YES"

Chair Gibson "YES"

Motion approved 4-0.

7. Sale Of CRA Owned Parcel At 1130 Dr. M L King Jr. Blvd.

[Begin Agenda Memo]

SYNOPSIS: The purpose of this request is to consider the sale of property owned by the CRA to Ivory & Nerida Wilson.

RECOMMENDATION It is recommended the CRA Board approve the following actions:

1. Authorize the sale of the CRA owned property located at 1130 Dr. M L King Jr. Blvd. to Ivory & Nerida Wilson for \$5,000. This property is identified by parcel number 27-30-02- 899000-008140.
2. Authorize the City Manager to enter into a redevelopment agreement that includes a reverter clause provision.

BACKGROUND The CRA placed 1130 Dr. M L King Jr. Blvd. out for bid on September 23, 2025 (RFP 25-02). The purpose of the request was due to an inquiry about purchasing the property. Staff informed interested party of the bid process, including that the process is open to the public.

The CRA received two bids on the property:

- Jennifer Dos Santos, 3399 Patterson Heights Dr., Haines City, Fl. offered \$4,000 for the property.
- Ivory & Nerida Wilson, 287 Ruby Lake Ln., Winter Haven, Fl. offered \$5,000 for the property and included a proposal to construct an approximately 2200 sq. ft. duplex. The RFP was only put out based on the inquiry so there were no requirements for the proposal.

FISCAL IMPACT The CRA will be receiving \$5,000 for the property located at 1130 Dr. M L King Jr. Blvd., valued at \$2,482 according to the Polk County Property Appraiser.

OTHER OPTIONS Not accept CRA staff recommendation.

[End Agenda Memo]

Onya Bates, CRA Coordinator, reviewed this item.

Chair Gibson asked if these were blind bids? Ms. Bates confirmed that they were sealed bids.

Mr. Slaton said the neighbor inquired about the property and has been caring for the property. So the CRA put it out to bid.

Jennifer DesSantos, resident, introduced herself and said she is the neighbor caring for the property and had no plans to improve the property.

Chair Gibson emphasized the board's duty to accept the more cost-effective bid that benefits the community, siding with the staff recommendation to approve the Wilsons' \$5,000 offer. Discussion focused heavily on the reverter clause and the requirement for development. Although the RFP itself did not explicitly mandate construction, Executive Director Slaton confirmed that the standard development agreement would be enforced, requiring the Wilsons to build the duplex within a specified timeframe to ensure the property generates tax increment. Commissioner Thompson reinforced that improving property values is a primary job of the CRA, justifying the mandatory development clause.

Commissioner Thompson made a motion to approve the sale. Mayor Hilligoss seconded the motion.

by roll call vote:

Commissioner Thompson "YES"

Mayor Hilligoss "YES"

Commissioner Gillespie "YES"

Chair Gibson "YES"

Motion passed 4-0.

8. Trade Of CRA Owned Parcel At 206 C Street (27-29-35-879000-003110) For Parcel Located At 0 D Street (27-29-35-880000-002040).

[Begin Agenda Memo]

SYNOPSIS: The purpose of this request is to consider the trade of property owned by the CRA for another residential property.

RECOMMENDATION It is recommended the CRA Board approve the following actions:

1. Authorize the trade of the CRA owned property located at 206 C Street (27-29-35-879000- 003110) with LW Lincoln LLC for property located at 0 D Street (27-29-35-880000-002040).

BACKGROUND The CRA placed 206 C Street out for bid on September 23, 2025 (RFP 25-01). The purpose of the request was due to an inquiry about the property. Staff informed interested party of the bid process, including that the process is open to the public. The CRA received one bid on the property:

- LW Lincoln – proposed the trade of an equal or like parcel in order to have two parcels together to have adequate parking for the proposed development. The proposed development is a laundry facility and the CRA owned parcel would be utilized for the parking lot. The RFP was only put out based on the inquiry so there were no requirements for the proposal.

FISCAL IMPACT The CRA will be receiving an equal or like parcel for the property located at 206 C Street, valued at \$18,024 for the property located at 0 D Street, valued at \$13,130, according to the Polk County Property Appraiser.

OTHER OPTIONS Not accept CRA staff recommendation.

[End Agenda Memo]

James Slaton, Executive Director, reviewed this item.

Chair Gibson asked to confirm that this is a swap, no money involved. Mr. Slaton confirmed this.

Commissioner Gillespie made a motion to approve this property trade. Commissioner Thompson seconded the motion.

by voice vote:

Commissioner Gillespie "YES"

Commissioner Thompson "YES"

Mayor Hilligoss "YES"

Chair Gibson "YES"

Motion passed 4-0.

9. CRA RESOLUTION 2025-27 Release Of Reverter And Development Covenants

[Begin Agenda Memo]

Synopsis: By Warranty Deed dated July 21, 2025, Abuland, LLC, purchased Lots 4, 5, 6, and 25, LONGLEAF BUSINESS PARK, from the Lake Wales Community Redevelopment Agency ("CRA"). The Warranty Deed included reversionary rights and development covenants in favor of the CRA. Abuland, LLC, has arranged a land swap with CRV Development, Inc., whereby it will receive title to Lots 20, 21, 22, and 23, LONGLEAF BUSINESS PARK. These Lots will be subject to the same reversionary rights and development covenants as the lots acquired from the CRA. These contiguous Lots better provide for the contemplated commercial development by Abuland, LLC. CRA Resolution 2025-27 has been prepared to provide for the approval of the requested release of reversionary rights and development covenants.

Recommendation: That the CRA Board approve the adoption of CRA Resolution 2025-27 and authorize Chairman Robin Gibson to execute the Release of Reverter and Development Covenants.

Fiscal impact: The contemplated commercial development will enhance the City's ad valorem tax base. Alternatives: None which will facilitate the contemplated commercial development.

[End Agenda Memo]

Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk, read **RESOLUTION CRA 2025-27** by title only.

RESOLUTION CRA 2025-27

A RESOLUTION OF THE LAKE WALES COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY APPROVING THE RELEASE OF REVERTER AND DEVELOPMENT COVENANTS ON LOTS 4, 5, 6, AND 25 OF LONGLEAF BUSINESS PARK AND AUTHORIZING THE CHAIRMAN OF THE AGENCY TO EXECUTE THE RELEASE

Albert C. Galloway, Jr., City Attorney, reviewed this item.

Commissioner Gillespie inquired about the comparable value and size of the planned construction, and Executive Director Slaton explained that no detailed plans were yet submitted, but the swap was needed to consolidate the land. Mr. Galloway clarified that the transaction is a private trade between the two companies, with no property returning to the CRA.

Commissioner Gillespie made a motion to adopt **RESOLUTION CRA 2025-27**. Commissioner Thompson seconded the motion.

by roll call vote:

Commissioner Gillespie "YES"

Commissioner Thompson "YES"

Mayor Hilligoss "YES"

Chair Gibson "YES"

Motion approved 5-0.

10. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

James Slaton, Executive Director, provided an update on the Northwest Sidewalk Phase II construction project, announcing that the construction documents have at long last been completed. The project is now

moving forward on a defined timeline: the documents will be issued for a 30-day bidding period next week, leading to a contract award sometime in January, and construction is anticipated to begin in February.

11. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Chair Gibson identified the hotel as the most important project the CRA has undertaken. He updated the board on the hotel's development, explaining that the CRA now owns the hotel due to previous litigation. The restoration effort will proceed as a public-private partnership or joint venture between Restoration St. Louis (the developer) and a Marriott affiliate, which is expected to list the hotel as a Marriott historic property, providing a huge benefit to the community. The immediate challenge is acquiring additional property adjacent to the hotel, currently owned by the Care Center, to create a necessary hotel complex that includes parking and space for features like a courtyard. The Chair defended the Care Center, acknowledging their past role in stabilizing downtown properties, but noted that this particular property is their "cash cow." The proposed concept involves the administration negotiating a land swap wherein the Care Center would voluntarily move to an equivalent, or slightly better, facility to allow the hotel complex to proceed. Chair Gibson preemptively addressed potential "small town politics" and criticism, stressing that the goal is to base decisions on merit for the community's benefit. He concluded by outlining the procedure: the Executive Directors of the CRA and the Care Center will negotiate an agreement, which will then be brought to the policy board (the CRA Board) for final approval.

Commissioner Gillespie reported on a discussion with Rob Quam, Care Center Director, confirming that the organization's current operations are complex, involving a bicycle shop, bookstore, and temporary housing across various locations. While the Care Center is open to moving or consolidating their businesses, a replacement location has not yet been determined, leaving the relocation up in the air. Commissioner Gillespie stressed the importance of the CRA recognizing that any expense incurred by the Care Center in moving their entire operation, whether acquiring a new property or covering relocation costs, must be fully reimbursed by the CRA as a matter of goodwill and fairness for accommodating the city's need for the parking and complex space.

Mayor Hilligoss agreed that the Care Center has been a long-standing and good partner, and that the city and CRA must show generosity and consideration for the adjustments they are being asked to make. He expressed confidence that both the CRA's executive director and the Care Center will negotiate the land swap with this cooperative spirit in mind to ensure a win-win outcome. Mayor Hilligoss noted that the only alternative to the proposed swap would be offering a flat fair market value offer that includes all associated expenses, allowing the Care Center to find their own replacement property, but he reaffirmed support for the current path based on the Care Center's long-term partnership with the city.

Commissioner Thompson fully supported the concept of the land swap, but he urged the administration to be creative and highly accountable with the financial protocols and accounting. He emphasized the Care Center's historical contribution to downtown Lake Wales, stating that their maintenance of buildings over the past 40 years was a significant payment in kind that kept properties from failing, which must be considered in the negotiation. Commissioner Thompson views the property behind the hotel as pivotally valuable to the city's future, making it a critical moment in history to capitalize on the opportunity regardless of associated costs, though he insisted on a public, specific accounting of all money to prove the equivalent value of the swap to the taxpaying constituents.

Commissioner Gillespie questioned the decision to suspend adding new applicants to the housing assistance program's waiting list, stating that the reason given—too many people trying to take advantage of it—didn't make sense if the program was popular. James Slaton, Executive Director, clarified that the intent was to manage the existing backlog: there are currently 13 unfunded people already on the list, some of whom have been waiting for years. The pause is to prevent this list from growing to an unmanageable size (like 50) until the current 13 can be addressed. Mr. Slaton said that people who were previously eligible for the CDBG program were pulled from the legacy housing list, and due to insufficient funds left in that grant after phase two bids, these homes couldn't be covered. This pushed them back to the legacy list, meaning they lost their position and are now waiting even longer.

Commissioner Gillespie expressed support for funding the Women's Club restoration efforts, commending the group for keeping the historical building serviceable and available for other community groups. She

stated that supporting the restoration aligns with the CRA's mission to preserve historical buildings as part of community life.

Commissioner Gillespie also addressed a comment made by a constituent (Martin), expressing disturbance over the assertion that people affected by a prior decision regarding a business were not informed about the committee taking action.

Commissioner Thompson began by wishing all veterans a Happy Veteran's Day, expressing gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

On the issue of business impacts related to the BizLinc decision, Commissioner Thompson acknowledged the concerns but stated that the CRA's contract is not with individual businesses, but with the Florida Development Corporation (FDC) and the entity called BizLinc. Therefore, the directors of BizLinc are the primary party responsible for communicating how the decisions affect the individual businesses operating under them. He stressed that while the livelihood of local businesses is of utmost importance, the CRA is dealing with BizLinc as the primary, accountable partner. Commissioner Thompson identified the core problem as a conflict between CRA law and the mission of BizLinc. If BizLinc cannot align its mission to be more "CRA-oriented," the law may not permit the CRA to use its funds to support it. This creates a difficult crossroad, and he noted that continued funding for the business incubator might need to become a separate conversation for an enterprising person to champion.

He mentioned that there are still complexities and things to work through with FDC, including an extension granted regarding property FDC owns. He emphasized the need for the CRA board to be "very, very careful" about how they proceed due to the precarious legal and procedural moment, and he looked forward to hearing more details about a meeting scheduled for Thursday.

Commissioner Thompson said it's an exciting time to be a citizen of Lake Wales. He acknowledged that the problems ahead are hard to solve but expressed incredible hope for the future of Lake Wales, especially the downtown area, and looks forward to "rolling up our sleeves and getting after it."

Commissioner Gillespie expressed excitement about the city's festive atmosphere, noting that she saw the holiday lights being installed and illuminated around town, as well as the Christmas tree decorated in front of the building. She announced the details for the upcoming Christmas Tree Lighting event: it is scheduled for December 2nd at 5:30 PM and will feature a performance by singer Jeanie Howard Wilson.

Chair Gibson shifted focus to a critical piece of legislation, the planned vacancy ordinances, which the City Commission will soon consider. Although it is a city initiative, he emphasized its major impact on the CRA area.

He explained that the ordinance is designed to address buildings that are owned but remain vacant because the owners fail to make necessary repairs or efforts to rent them. The core mechanism involves registering vacant properties. If the property remains unfilled for approximately six months, the owners are subject to fines that continue to accrue.

Chair Gibson underscored the urgency of this policy by referencing his work with the city's pension fund. He noted that investment managers consider a standard occupancy rate of 90% for rental real estate to be classified as "investment grade." Due to the high number of existing vacancies, he stated that the properties in downtown Lake Wales are currently not investment grade, calling this situation "reprehensible." He concluded that the vacancy ordinance is key to the city and the CRA's success in revitalizing the downtown district.

12. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 3:28 p.m.

Chair/Vice-Chair

ATTEST:

City Clerk/Deputy City Clerk