



**COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY ADVISORY BOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 14, 2026**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Larry Cappleman called the meeting of the Community Redevelopment Agency Advisory Board to order at 6:04 pm in City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

Quorum was declared present.

Present: Chairman Larry Cappleman, Vice-Chairman Nick Asma and board members Derek Blakeslee, Sharee Hodge (arrived at 6:05), Jamie Quantora Holley (arrived at 6:14), Carmen Horne, Torrance Rhodes and Donald Wingate.

Staff Present: City Manager Jon C. Williams, Economic Development Director Marc Hutchinson, Assistant City Manager for Public Services Steve Pash and Planning Director Kelly Carson as recording secretary.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Cappleman stated the minutes from previous meeting were sent out as part of the meeting packet. Everyone acknowledged receipt and no one stated any changes needed.

Motion by Chairman Cappleman to approve the December 9, 2025 minutes as sent out. Seconded by Board Member Rhodes. All approved the minutes of regular meeting minutes of December 9, 2025. The motion carried unanimously 8 – 0.

DISCUSSION

3. Retail Strategies Consulting Proposal

Economic Development Director Hutchinson introduced the discussion item, providing the reasons for presenting it to the CRAAB Board this evening. He introduced Retail Strategies Inc. and outlined their scope of services and the proposed consultant fee of \$50,000 per year annually for three years.

Sarah Beth Stewart from Retail Strategies Inc. then gave a (virtual) presentation about her company and the array of services they would provide to benefit downtown businesses.

Discussion and questions ensued from Board members:

- Board Member Rhodes asked City staff to clarify whether the services would be limited to downtown merchants. Director Hutchinson explained that initial efforts

would focus on downtown but could be expanded to other areas of the City, such as the Historic East Winter Garden Neighborhood, in the future.

- Chairman Cappleman inquired whether the business recruitment component targeted national retailers or local “mom-and-pop” establishments. Ms. Stewart responded the firm focuses primarily on local and regional concepts rather than national chains. She noted they analyze comparable municipalities for recruitment strategies and many of the challenges facing Winter Garden, particularly those involving commercial property owners, are common nationwide.
- Board Member Blakeslee questioned whether the proposal was appropriate as a CRA expense, whether it was a response to recent public concerns regarding commercial property sales and whether it would be more suitable as a City Economic Development initiative. Chairman Cappleman responded the CRA’s mandate includes the continued revitalization of downtown, emphasizing ongoing planning is necessary to sustain long-term success.
- Board Member Wingate observed downtown does not appear to have significant vacancies and suggested the east side of the City might benefit more from these services. Vice-Chairman Asma concurred, noting the current strength of the downtown market. Chairman Cappleman added maintaining the right mix of businesses is equally important and a consultant could help guide that balance.
- Director Hutchinson noted small business operators have been most impacted by recent events and the consultant’s value lies in leveraging data and analysis to align emerging needs with targeted recommendations and incentives, particularly for local businesses.
- Board Member Blakeslee emphasized affordability remains the primary concern, questioning how small businesses can be protected from larger entities capable of paying higher rent. Board Member Wingate asked whether earlier implementation of such services might have influenced recent outcomes. City Manager Williams acknowledged the challenges of countering market forces but stressed the importance of cultivating a balanced business environment and providing incentives to support small businesses.
- Board Member Blakeslee stated he would support the contract provided there is an option to terminate after the first year if results do not meet expectations. Director Hutchinson confirmed the agreement includes a termination clause. Chairman Cappleman agreed a one-year review would be prudent.
- Board Member Wingate highlighted the importance of securing buy-in from both landlords and business tenants. Chairman Cappleman noted vacancies are costly for property owners and access to market data could assist in attracting stable, long-term tenants.
- Board Member Wingate requested the consultant’s scope include the entire CRA area, not just downtown. Board Member Hodge agreed, emphasizing the need to

include the Historic East Winter Garden Neighborhood. Director Hutchinson responded the scope could be tailored to address the needs of the broader business community.

- Vice-Chairman Asma asked to what extent City policies and regulations can influence or counteract market forces, and whether incentives alone are sufficient to limit the proliferation of national chains. Director Hutchinson replied while market dynamics are difficult to control, regulatory tools—such as design standards—can discourage certain types of development and incentives can help local businesses remain competitive. City Manager Williams added the City cannot deny a chain business that meets all code requirements, though stricter standards may make compliance more challenging.

Motion by Board Member Wingate to recommend approval of Retail Strategies Inc. Consultant Proposal in the amount of \$50,000 for three years, with a performance review after the first year. Seconded by Board Member Blakeslee and the motion carried unanimously 8 – 0.

4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 7:17 pm.

ATTEST:

/S/

Recording Secretary Colene Rivera

APPROVED:

/S/

Chairman Larry Cappleman