

Reading Redevelopment Authority votes to convey old house to nonprofit Our City Reading Inc.

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By Valdis I. Lacis - Reading Eagle correspondent

The Reading Redevelopment Authority board has voted 4-0 to convey an old three-story stone house at 243 Washington St. to Albert R. Boscov's nonprofit Our City Reading Inc.

Adam Mukerji, RRA executive director, said he expects the nonprofit to demolish the structure to create access for the planned Artists in Residence Program, also known as GoggleWorks II, where artists will live and work.

The small house was built flush with the main building of the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts at its eastern end, and has a crumbled front porch where a car had crashed into it.

Board member Daniel F. Luckey said that engineering and architectural work is in progress to create about 18 reasonably priced apartments for artists.

In a related matter, Mukerji said, "We'll soon be inking the deal for 301-313 Washington Street, which we believe is a strategic corner based on the millions of dollars that we've invested in the immediate area, also known as Entertainment Square at Washington and North Second streets."

Mayor Vaughn D. Spencer noted that the city looks for properties that can play a strategic role in revitalizing specific neighborhoods.

"We've got to be selective with what we can and can't take so both the city and RRA can benefit," he said.

Tod Auman, authority board chairman, said: "We're trying to be good stewards of blighted properties. But if we accept too many, we could get hit with a tidal wave of maintenance costs that could drain our resources."

Solicitor Keith Mooney advised taking only properties that have strategic value to the master plan.

The board also approved conveying a three-story brick row home at 144 N. Second St. to Neighborhood Housing Services.

The home is a half-block behind the new GoggleWorks Apartments and the main GoggleWorks building.

"It's so far gone on the inside that it may need an estimated \$167,000 to fix it, but next door there's a viable property bought by an investor, so we're having a block that's starting to show improvement," Auman said.

Also on RRA's monthly board agenda Wednesday was Project Mango, which Luckey said now refers to the authority's 50-acre Riverview Industrial Park site in northwest Reading that it bought at a sheriff sale in November for \$1.56 million.