CITY OF EAST CHICAGO BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD MEMBERS

Milton Reed, President
Linda Thompson, Member
Frank Smith, Member

Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 27, 2026, at 5:00 p.m

Reported by Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde

Call to Order: 5:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call: Present: Milton Reed
Frank Smith
Linda Thompson

Staff Present: Shana Levinson, Attorney for Board
Olga Cosme, Recording Secretary
James Portalatin, Building Commissioner
Lee Watson, First Group Engineering
Kevin Smith, Attorney for Building

MR. REED: Call to order the regular meeting of the Board of Public Safety, April 27th, 2026. We'll follow the agenda in front of us.

May we have a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of April 13th, 2026 as written?

MR. SMITH: I'll make a motion.

MS. THOMPSON: Second.

MR. REED: Motion has been properly moved and second. Any questions? (None)

Hearing no questions, we'll take a vote. All in favor?

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(All signify aye.)

MR. REED: Motion carries.

We have no correspondence. New Business, Building Department.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Evening morning -- good evening, the day has moved along. Good evening to the Board.

We do have a couple, three new demolition orders. I do have a binder for the Board for the photos and I would like to set the record on these, if I could.

So just setting the record on behalf of the Building Department and Building Commissioner, these properties that are on the agenda this evening all, according to the Building Department, have met the definition of unsafe condition according to the Unsafe Building Act.

Notice has been given pursuant to the statute, including by regular certified mail, posting on the premises, as well as publication. So we do believe that proper service has been made and a good faith effort at service has been made.

I believe that the City's position on all three of these properties that are up on the agenda, the City's position is that the demolition order should be affirmed. And I would assume that the Board would explain to the owners what that means, if the Board takes that action.

I can inform the Board that all the owners on all the properties are present tonight. So it is up to you on which order you go. If you want to go down the agenda list, I think that would probably work.

MR. REED: Sure. And maybe we can have similar responses maybe, unless it's a unique circumstance.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: The owner of 410 Spring is also the owner of 414 Spring -- I'm sorry -- is also the owner of 412, Miss Ruby Garza, who is here present. She can come up if she likes.

So the background of both of these properties is that they were originally owned by Paul Meyers, who owned a lot of properties in Marktown as we know. Miss Garza obtained these properties about a year ago. It's my understanding that she does want to start rehabbing them, beginning with the roof, and the City is fine with that. Obviously there is a process involved

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since it is on the demolition list.

As I mentioned, given the condition of the property, which we believe is significantly deteriorated, I would note that there are open windows to the elements. It's boarded up. The entry stairs are in poor condition. The rear side windows and facia is boarded up with very visible holes and disrepair. A porch entrance appears to be open to the elements. As I mentioned, there's broken windows on the second floor of 410. Both the roof at 410 and 412 have visible holes in the roof.

So, given that condition, we'd request that the demolition order as presented by the Building Department be affirmed. Of course, I'll hand it over to Miss Garza if she would like to say anything. We would stand on the photos of the property and the condition as related to the Board.

MR. REED: One quick question, when she acquired this about a year ago, was that a tax sale or direct sale?

MR. KEVIN SMITH: I don't believe it was from -- I think that somebody else acquired it at tax sale and she may have acquired it from that person.

MR. REED: I just want to get the history.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: I have a note, I could probably give you that name for the tax sale, but I would have to look it up. But I think it's like Tamra somebody. I could look that up while Miss Garza is presenting to the Board.

MR. REED: State your name and address please, for the record.

MS. GARZA: Good evening. My name is Ruby Garza. I own the properties at 410 and 412 Spring Street. So I am a first time home buyer. The reason for having purchased these two homes was in order to rebuild them and possibly either rent or move in myself. I am kind of new to this. It was kind of more or less one of my parents idea in order to have me purchase the homes. So I am not really sure, like, what is even going on really, but I was brought in by the Notice for Demolition.

I still, if possible, want to move

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on with the process of being able to rebuild on the homes. We have been trying to look for a contractor. I know it's very short notice how long you guys are looking to see improvements in the home, but that's kind of where I am at right now.

MR. REED: Okay. Well, I guess I'll say this and it may refer to everyone that's coming forth this evening. This is the start of the process. And it is not an automatic that the home will be demolished, but this is the start of the process. It's a very serious process where it's measured all by progress.

And taking a home like this, looking at the pictures, you have to speak with the Building Department and find out exactly what they need for it to be considered acceptable as far as the level of repair. It sounds like these could be quite expensive whatever you need to meet, but you have to get their satisfaction.

So, I encourage you to reach out to them and you have to show progress. If there is no progress, then yes, there will be a demolition. If you are showing progress -- I mean again we go into a lot of different areas. Investment in the neighborhood, the blight remediation we are eliminating across the City.

You will find the Building Department to be very understanding. If there is any activity and substantial activity, you will be getting this off the demolition list. So thank you for coming out.

Do you have the contact information on who to contact?

MS. GARZA: No.

MR. REED: You talk to Mr. Watson, Lee, he will get you lined up and be very, very aggressive, you know. If you make a call and don't get a call back, it's okay to call again and they will call you back. Be very aggressive if you want to save these two homes.

MS. GARZA: Thank you so much.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: To update the Board, it was obtained by a Tamatha Mallard, from Tampa, Florida, in March of '24. The tax deed was recorded in April of '24 and then she quitclaim deed -- warranty deed to Miss Garza, Miss Ruby Garza, on January 3rd, of '25.

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MR. REED: So this is -- in all it's been awhile. There's been some time for the transaction, so I think you need to be as aggressive as you can and we will see what goes from there.

Thank you for coming.

MS. GARZA: Thank you.

MR. REED: Thank you for coming out.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: And then the last property is 414, and I believe Mr. Maurico Matta is here on behalf of his parents. These homes, 410, 412, 414 Spring Street, I believe they are all connected, you know, Marktown. Mr. Matta is here, if he'd like to come up.

In the meantime, while he's signing in, I just want to mention that Mr. Matta was also subject to a prior demolition order back in '24. This is a new demolition order. This is a two-story structure. The paint is chipping and peeling. The property is boarded up. The entrance doors are boarded up and fence is in disrepair. I do have some photos, I think, there in the binder.

Because of the condition of the property it's the City's position that we request to affirm the order.

Mr. Matta indicated to me earlier he believes there may be a buyer for this. They did want to know what was going to go on with the property next door because if they sold it and demolished the other two, how would that work. I'll turn it over to him.

MR. REED: One quick question, do you have any, you may not know, way back in '24 a demolition order was enter, was the Building Department satisfied?

MR. KEVIN SMITH: No, actually I think there was some discussion about fixing it up, it just never happened, and then the order expired. So sometimes that happens and we just have to renew it.

MR. REED: You don't have to go there, it's good enough. Thank you.

MR. MATTA: Maurico Matta, I'm here on behalf of my father. He's out of town right now, that's why he is not present. As far as 414 Spring Street, two years ago we already agreed that people were interested

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in buying it. The deal kind of fell through because they wanted to buy all four houses put together. So eventually my dad didn't reinvest in the property and let it be demolished.

Recently I come across a family friend who is interested in purchasing the house from us, and technically we're giving it away to him. He wants to start rebuilding for him to live there, but I want to know the status. What would happen with the two middle property? If they were demolished, how does that work with the two homes on the outside. There's a wall that would be distressed that they share. How would that work?

MR. REED: That's a technical question and we wouldn't know that. I would encourage you to call the Building Department.

MR. MATTA: That's fine, I understand. I tried contacting James at least a couple times.

MR. REED: He's here tonight and you can ask him about. If the two get demolished and one is still standing, I'm sure there is a process for making sure everything is safe, but even outside of the other two.

The unit that you own, it already had a demolition order. You committed to let it be demolished. This is going to be a pretty new owner, so there is not going to be the time extension and things like that. Basically off our current status, regardless of the order, regardless of the owner, the current status has been their awhile, as we move toward with demolition.

So I would just encourage you to -- sounds like you pretty much are resolved at not doing any repairs and let the new owner deal with it. I would just encourage you to let him know that the clock has started.

MR. MATTA: I actually spoke to him and I spoke to James, the year in between that, and he informed me what the process was going to be. This is not something quick, but I know you want to see progress now.

MR. REED: I would say after this, if you have a moment to talk about the technical question with James.

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MR. MATTA: I appreciate that.

MR. REED: Thank you for coming out.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: So we would request that the orders on the three properties be affirmed.

MR. REED: Is there a motion to affirm the three properties with new demolition orders?

MR. SMITH: I'll make a motion.

MS. THOMPSON: Second.

MR. REED: Motion has been properly moved and second. Any questions? (None)
Hearing no questions, we'll take a vote. All in favor?
(All signify aye.)
MR. REED: Motion carries.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: So based upon the work performed on the properties under the Unsafe Building Code, we need the Board's action to be able to record these liens. I can relate to the Board the amounts of the liens, which you have before you, are representative of the invoiced amounts to the City Building Department related to the demolition of 515 Narva and 403 Vernon.
So we'd request that they be approved based on the information given to the Board by the Building Department.

MR. REED: Is there a motion to approve demolition liens for 515 Narva and 403 Vernon?

MR. SMITH: I'll make a motion.

MS. THOMPSON: Second the motion.

MR. REED: The motion has been properly moved and second. Any questions? (None)
Hearing no questions, we'll take a vote. All in favor?
(All signify aye.)
MR. REED: Motion carries.

MR. KEVIN SMITH: Thank you.

MR. REED: Thank you, Attorney Smith.

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Is there anyone else in the audience that would like to offer comments, audience participation, anyone else to comment?

If you can please come forward and state your name and and address, please. Take your time. State your name and address.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: I own the property at 4835 Baring Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana.

MR. REED: What would you like to say to us?

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Just hearing Mr. Smith saying that they have took several opportunities to reach out to the owners before me who didn't know this was going on. When I found out, I did what I was could. And what I was told, as far as getting the $10,000 check, that I was told that was needed -- well, $10,000 bond. When the bond was brought here, I believe James made a copy and that was what allowed me into my rehab agreement.

So, with the $10,000 check that was made out to the City of East Chicago. When I came here with it, he said it needed to be made out to Ashley Dunlap from D & R Construction. So we changed the money order or cashier check at PNC from City to contractor.

The contractor walked away from the work. I asked James, like, basically where do I stand now? What was asked for was the bond, because I know it serves a purpose, is there going to be a claim on that? It was, like, well, anything that has to do with the construction contractor, that's civil. Okay.

But then I'm asking, what about the $10,000 check that you asked me to give you that you told me to give to him. Long story short, progress was made, but to you it hasn't been fast enough. The last time that work was done was because of storms. The time before that, trees were getting cut back down was because of storms. The work that got done on what the contractor did, I don't know every name, but that man had contractors coming in. And when I asked about certain names, there seemed to be a problem with even identifying themselves.

There was a problem with the property that -- I live next door. So these properties, I think 4837 -- 4835 is under demolition order.

I have water problems at 4837 and I kept calling the Water Department to address it. They

said it was my portion that I was responsible for. So when I had plumbers come out, they said, no, it's the City's headache. When that happened I brought it to the City Water Department. I talked to Maria. She said she had to talk to James to even discuss anything water related.

I was like waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. My bills were increasing and increasing and increasing. I said, you know, whatever is going on here, can you also send them to do the inspection for both properties for the water, check to make sure nothing is broken or cracked. Make sure everything is good. There's a lot of construction going on. I felt -- I always have water pressure problems. I didn't have hot water. When I explained to her, she was, like, we'll send them out. The Water Department came out several times. Mason was there plenty of times. I don't know what to tell you. Two weeks my water was out. It makes me think, can you check 35 since you are here.

They said, we can't move on to 35, if you are living on this property. I said, I own this property. I have proof that I own this property. While you are here, before I even continue, I want to know what is going on with the lines to see if I got to get a plumber over here as well. By the end of '24 they finally end up sending Calumet Plumbing and my water was off for another two weeks while they are there. They said they weren't going to check anything. It's cold, wintertime, just focus on getting you your water for 37, where you live, so you have water for toilet bowl, take a shower, eat, whatever. I was patiently waiting.

I was also in the hospital for a infusion. I told him, I'm sick and if you can't reach me, call my daughter, Donna Rodriguez, or or my son. There was no communication, lack of communication. So when you are saying call and call, be persistent, I have been. When Miss Chandler was there, there was a lack of communication.

Tanya -- I called in February of this year and asked Tanya, I want to put in for permits for contractors to come in. I filled out the paperwork. February passes. I call them, it's going on a month now. Is there going to be any kind of motivation? Yes or no. The contractor is waiting.

I'm wanting to know because right now I am going for an infusion. I'm getting an MRI. All of this dealing with my MS again. If you need to get ahold of me, this is where you are going to have to

call me, in the hospital.

Contractors were told, when we came last Friday, I know the house is on the demolition list. I was told I couldn't sell it and that they are going to proceed with the demolition. I'm, like, there is too much work in there and why haven't you called me back since February. Tanya called the wrong number. She said she called. I asked her what number. It was the wrong number and that was in February.

For him to tell me like in April nothing has been done and I have been waiting on him. This is the not the first circle going around for waiting for him or whoever else to relay a message to see where I stand to do any work. That's what I wanted to say to you. I have proof of the check that he said I have, that he says that he didn't say that. It's not my opinion. I have paperwork to verify what I am saying. If you guys want to me to submit that.

There were certain things. I asked police officers that came to the property and they said that it was orders of James. James had ordered Joe Markovich to do asbestos inspection. Nobody communicated that information with me. My gates were cut, the lock. When I told the police officer I wanted to make a report, breaking and entry, they didn't have to do all of that. Joe kicking my gate down and breaking it to get in there. That's unacceptable. He used to be my landlord before I moved on Baring. You have my phone number Markovich and he didn't know what to say. When the officer didn't want to make the report, I'm, like, you know what, the attorney that I got, he said he didn't want to touch it because it was too much stuff that didn't make sense and he did put my paperwork in order for it to be finalized correctly in the books, for it to be properly done because too many times the County rejected it because it was improper legal description.

MR. REED: Okay. Well, you know, generally during public comment it's not appropriate for us to respond, but everything that you said is in the record. I wanted to get it all. Generally we ask you take 2 or 3 minutes. I didn't want to rush you.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Mr. President

MR. REED: I have seen you before. So, you know, if you want something addressed in a Board meeting it might be better to have formal correspondence

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with a request or something like that, formal letter, so that it's entered on the agenda.

In this period you said a lot of things and I just didn't want you to think we are not being respectful. It's not appropriate for us to respond in public comments, but thank you for coming for sure.

Anybody else in the audience for participation?

MR. VELOS: Can I say something?

MR. REED: Yes. Come forward and state your name and your address. We generally request, you know, just a couple minutes. Feel free.

MR. VELOS: On her behalf, I want to say --

MR. REED: Come up front, give your name and address.

MR. VELOS: My name is Juan Velos. So I live -- I don't live in the City of East Chicago. I live in Hegewich, which is Chicago. I am just across the State line.

The only thing I wanted to say was, I have been to the property because I know her through church. We go to the East Chicago church right here and she has asked me to come look at the property. And, you know, just kind of get some kind of assessment. So I did come and look at the property.

And from what I can see, I have been in construction 20 years with the Carpenters Union in Chicago. I have actually held a license here in the City of East Chicago back in 2000. I pulled permits here. I have done work here in the City. I have lived in the City before. I no longer do now, but I just wanted to kind of basically see what she was saying. She's had a lot of stuff done already in there from what I could see.

What I can tell you is that property could be put together in about 90 days. So what would probably be in her best interest would be to request a 90-day stay of the injunction or the demolition, and give her an extra 90 days. I can help her and assist her in getting the rest of the work done in accordance with the City codes.

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MR. REED: Okay. Thank you for sharing those comments. They are definitely a part of the record. Thank you.

Anyone else in the audience for participation?

I think we are good. Our next meeting is on Monday, May 11, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

We'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

MR. SMITH: I'll make a motion.

MS. THOMPSON: Second the motion.

MR. REED: The motion has been properly moved and second. We'll take a vote. All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. REED: Motion carries.

Meeting adjourned.

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Approval of the Public Safety Minutes
of April 27th, 2026
Approved and Signed, Monday, April 27th, 2026.

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Milton Reed, President

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Linda Thompson, Member

_____
Frank Smith, Member

_____
Olga Cosme, Secretary

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 28th day of April, 2026.



Peggy S. LaLonde

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