

Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board (BHA RAB) External Minutes 12-7-23—Hybrid meeting, held at 52 Chauncy Street, 11th floor conference room

Ground rules & minutes from last meeting approved.

1/ BHA Administrator's Remarks to RAB—Kenzie Bok introduced herself to any of the RAB members who didn't know her, and noted today was the 4th month since she started in August, succeeding Kate Bennett. She noted that she had been at the BHA previously working for Bill McGonagle & Kate Bennett on a number of issues, and then had served on City Council for 4 years, where a major goal of hers was getting more City resources for BHA and its residents. She said the work is both very hard & very exciting—pace is like drinking from a fire hose. BHA and its residents have to rebuild from the isolation & limitations of COVID—a lot of routine work had been put off to just prioritize emergencies. At the same time, it's a time of real opportunity where the Federal, State & City administration were all willing to put resources in. The Mayor's helping with capital funds, youth programs, and BHA police. In my 3rd week on the job, the new Commissioner for the Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities (EOHLC)--what took over for DHCD—asked that BHA show him not just the shiny stuff, but the warts, so showed him bad vacancies at West Broadway, and flooding at Franklin Field. The Governor's recent proposed housing bond bill proposes \$1.6 billion for public housing, in comparison to \$600 million in the last bond done 5 years ago. On the federal side, there is \$20 billion in green retrofitting money in the Inflation Reduction Act, and this matches with the Mayor's and Kate's commitments that BHA would go fossil-fuel free by 2030. When BHA does this, it's an opportunity to do kitchens/baths at same time, central air/ventilation--trying to move public housing to the front of the line to get these funds and address out capital backlog.

Another goal I have is to recover the units that we lost during prior redevelopment. We have an opportunity to bring 2,900 units back—while feds will not fund us building these units, they will provide operating funds (Faircloth to RAD) if we can get them built, and so we're approaching City/State on that. We're looking at what neighborhoods don't have public housing. Kenzie noted the need to reorganize how work is apportioned to make more rational assignments so people aren't driving all over the City (and not spending time doing repairs). We're going to a new iPad real time reporting on devices on work orders & repair progress (and avoid paper tracking). BHA also recently got \$5 million from HUD to help Leased Housing

tenants with housing search, and we're building tools so people can help be better informed on options given their life circumstances (travel for work, family pick-ups, etc.) As people may know, we expanded from 100 to 1,000 Family Self-Sufficiency Leased Housing participants, and we want to do this in public housing as well. And we're working with City to promote first time homeownership through use of federal ARPA funds. We've had a Section 8 homeownership program over a while which can help pay mortgage, etc. Expenses, but for many people, the downpayment costs are a deterrent, and only 24 families used this over 12 years. The City has upped the downpayment assistance to \$75,000, and over the last 6 months, we've gotten as many people in this as we previously did over 12 years (24 new families). I'm open to suggestions from RAB & residents on what we should do and how we can do it better.

A RAB member said all these initiatives were good, but wondered if tenants will be able to accumulate equity--this has been a barrier in the past for homeownership programs. Also, it would be good if tenants could get a Right of First Refusal over outside purchasers. She asked if BHA issued electric stoves. Kenzie said with the retrofits, electric stoves would replace gas ones--she'd check into whether there were any "one-off" options. The RAB member also noted that it would be helpful for the RAB to advocate for these housing initiatives, like the housing bond bill. She asked if, for the Housing Search help for Leased Housing, if that was going to be done by BHA or contracted out. Kenzie said it would be by BHA staff, and would expand what had been in the ECHO pilot as a smaller program. However, in response to a comment, she noted that BHA was not going to require people to go to neighborhoods where they felt they might not have access to support services, etc., they needed--issue is to expand options & get people info they need.

Another RAB member noted that in Mixed Finance sites, there were the same issues as Kenzie mentioned about getting back to doing routine repairs, etc.--but in addition, there was the problem that the private owners weren't listening (at least BHA listened). A different RAB member noted that sometimes landlords were getting more on rent than would be the case if there was homeownership and wondered if Section 8 homeownership could cover utility costs. Kenzie said that this depended whether the gross rent (contract rent plus tenant paid utilities) was within the payment standard (the maximum subsidy that could be paid--if it was, utilities could be covered to that extent. She noted that another issue was that the HUD Section 8 homeownership

program was for 15 years, but most mortgages are for 20 years—so BHA/City have another initiative to shore this up with City-funded voucher program so the full 20 year can be covered. (Mac McCreight from GBLs had a question on this aspect, since it hadn't been in documents shared with the RAB, and Kenzie will follow up on that.) Another RAB member asked, how can the RAB help you? Kenzie said let BHA know if there were problems, and lend support to funding, or other things that will help get the work done. She gave the example of just being on a call with BPDA about getting a waiver so that where BHA is just doing renovations (like the green retrofits), and not major redevelopment which does require larger review by community, it wouldn't have to go through long reviews which can delay work. Another RAB member talked about problems with filters not being checked by maintenance as go into heating season. Kenzie said she'd check into this, and need to get people out of their pandemic practices into doing the things they usually did to make sure everything's running well.

2/ Joe Bamberg (BHA)—Presentation on Mixed Finance Redevelopment. Joe provided a handout which was from Section 15 of the Annual Plan Supplement and described updates to Mixed Finance Modernization or Development. He noted that Phase III of Whittier Street redevelopment is underway, with an 11-12 story tower started in 3/23, and slated for completion in 2025. Old Colony work started 15 years ago, and every original unit has been demolished. 2 phases are in construction now (phases 4 and 5), and a final phase 6 will break ground in 2024. When phase 6 is completed, there will be more affordable units at the site than prior to redevelopment (going from 840 to 887). In response to a question from a RAB member, he indicated that there were a number of 4 BRs (and possibly 5 BRs—will check) [update: there will be 44 one-bedrooms, 11 two-bedrooms, 23 three-bedrooms, 7 four-bedrooms and 5 five-bedrooms] in new phases, and there are no condos—all are rental housing. There will be some space that's just elderly housing (43 of 80 units). At West Newton, the last building that's being completed is going to be 5 Section 8 VASH units (E. Springfield St.). At Amory Street, new buildings are underway, and one will be using Faircloth-to-RAD. At St. Botolph, BHA will be going back out to bid (a RAB member noted it would be good for Joe to come there to meet with residents early in the New Year, and also asked that Mac attend). Work at Bunte & Ausonia will likely be announced in 6-9 months. At Long Glen, this really isn't BHA, but because there was Orchard Gardens HOPE VI money, BHA does retain a seat at the table in this RAD PBRA conversion. At Eva White, Winn & Castle Square Tenants Association are

involved, and a closing is expected by spring. Lenox Street work is done. At J.J. Carroll, they anticipate completing work and offering relocation close to the holidays (will be additional units there from what was originally on site). At Patricia White, energy efficiency is being explored, and BHA is due to get architects' cost estimates back 12/8. At Torre Unidad, it's taking longer to assess path there, and elevators are a challenge.

A RAB member asked about lack of any Capital Improvement Plan items for Commonwealth (Family or Elderly side) in 5-year plan. Joe didn't think that was right, and will follow up with Randi Holland on 12/8. [Update: Randi confirmed that there is current capital work ongoing at Commonwealth Elderly including elevator and fire alarm work (more details to come). The plan that Betty references is forward-looking for the next five years of funding; and currently there are no future funds budgeted for work at Commonwealth Elderly.] Another RAB member asked what happens to subsidy in Mixed Finance if people move. Joe said that it stays with unit, and people are drawn from the Section 8 Project-Based Voucher (PBV) waiting list. In addition, one benefit of the PBV program is that after a year, if you're in good standing and BHA has vouchers to give out, you can request a voucher to find a new place and you're at the head of the line to get vouchers—but people are NOT required to move, and this is just an option.

3/ John Kane (BHA)—Annual Plan and Public Hearings. John noted that an additional email and handout was the 4-Factor analysis of language access, and he went through part of the report to talk about how many interpreter requests there had been in past year (972 in 17 languages) and how much use of language line or interpreters for phone calls (over 14,000), as well as breakdown of what the needs were (Admissions, Leased Housing, Operations, etc.) Sheyla Carew from BHA would be willing to meet with RAB on language access issues if they wish.

John noted that there would be the in-person public hearing on the PHA Plan by Monday, 12/11 at 1 p.m. at Room 801, Boston City Hall, and the on-line public hearing on Tuesday, 12/12 at 6 p.m. (you have to register in advance for the on-line one). He asked if any RAB members might be attending either of these and if they could discuss the RAB's role at the hearings. One RAB member said she could do that for the Monday in-person one, and three others agreed they could do that for the on-line one. A RAB member asked whether there could be any RAB Reading Committee. Mac noted this had been discussed at prior RAB meetings and no one expressed interest (and GBLS had shared with RAB

various comments or questions it had on the plans) and noted that Friday, 12/15 is the last day to submit comments. The RAB member said it would be important to do this next year and to present things from the Reading Committee as comments of the RAB.

4/ Committee Reports–Budget. The Committee chair noted that because the Budget Committee had met right before the RAB meeting, it didn't have an opportunity to prepare written notes yet, but will get those out prior to January RAB meeting. The Treasurer described opening & closing balances for November 2023 bank statement (6,172.55 opening, withdrawals \$742.44, checks \$1,153.50, and ending balance of \$4,246.51) and that there were two outstanding checks that hadn't been cashed (one to a restaurant issued in early Nov. 2023, and one for a RAB member's reimbursement—the member said she did not receive that check. BHA did issue its 3rd installment to the RAB for the balance of the fiscal year. The Committee will be reviewing forms and reimbursement levels and bring this to the Board for January. The Committee did make a recommendation to the Board to authorize expenditure of up to \$250.00 for a filing cabinet for the RAB office, since the cabinet is broken & BHA does not have another cabinet it can offer. There was some debate on this. A motion was made to table the recommendation for a month to get more research, and this was voted down (with some ayes and some abstentions). A second motion was made to approve the recommendation (with several abstentions). It was noted that John & the Treasurer had worked on compiling expenditures year to date and comparing them to what the Board had allocated for items in its Budget, as well as thoughts for what would be in next year's budget (John noted there would be a modest increase suggested, but noted this was the Administrator's decision, and it was proposed for most items to remain the same, but to increase transportation slightly as well as do a breakout of \$3,000 for training in the budget and reduce the conference item slightly to account for this). The form they worked out will be shared with the full RAB and would ask for them to share thoughts with their chairs or John on this. The Committee will work on finalizing a proposed budget at its January meeting (and the RAB would then review its recommendations).

5/ RAB Elections. John reported that he had been speaking further with BHA Procurement, and they were asking if, instead of just adopting the approach used in 2016 elections, there could be a reduction in forms but still use the Professional Services Contract and Certificate of Insurance. If this didn't work, then might just have to do everything by mail, with the bulk of the work done by the

Ad Hoc Election Committee. Mac asked if there was a way to cut through the incredible delay with all of this if GBLS and others (perhaps Mass. Union of Public Housing Tenants, although he could not speak for them) were just willing to do this voluntarily, without compensation and contractual arrangements. John said he could bring this back if this was put into an email. A RAB member said she could check with Mass. Union. A RAB member suggesting checking with City Life/Vida Urbana.

6/ Unfinished/New Business, Announcements, Evaluation

Attendance—The Treasurer said she had heard from a family member of a Leased Housing RAB member that he had passed away earlier in the year.

NARSAAH/Mass. Union Reports—These had been tabled on a few RAB meetings given press of other business. One RAB member said she had written reports which could be distributed to RAB members. Another RAB member gave an oral report on NARSAAH, and discussed attending workshops on grants & grantwriting, as well as NSPIRE (HUD's new physical conditions inspection standards for both public housing & Section 8). She noted that they went on a tour of developments in New Orleans, but that people were not calling the sites public housing, but there was one-for-one replacement, use of vouchers, and new private owners (not Housing Authority of New Orleans). There was also a workshop about "rebranding" and how the term "affordable housing" is being used instead of public housing. Another RAB member said she also went on the tour, and that New Orleans also has a "Mass. & Cass" issue, but they do a better job of cleaning up & providing services & treating people like human beings. The first reporter noted that Sandy Henriquez (formerly of BHA and HUD) had mentioned the "rebranding" because in the public often there are negative stereotypes of public housing and trying to get past that. For the Mass. Union conference, the RAB member said her report was for everyone who went. Ed Augustus, the Secretary of EOHLC, attended the conference, and there was a lot of discussion about the bond bill that Kenzie mentioned earlier. Nicole had also testified about that on Mass. Union's behalf at the State House. We should all go and testify as additional hearings come up.

Northeastern scholarships and upcoming info session--John noted that in the handouts, there was a piece about Northeastern University scholarships for public housing tenant households, and there are 10 free slots for those otherwise admitted (last year, 5 people took advantage of this)--wanted to make sure people knew about the

BHA/Northeastern info session on Wed. 12/13 from 5-6:30 on Zoom. He acknowledged that there needs to be advocacy with other universities, as well as to open up the Northeastern program to Leased Housing households.

Evaluation—Good meeting, but always room for improvement. Didn't like it, too many cliques.