

External Notes, Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board (BHA RAB) Meeting of December 8, 2022

Minutes from prior meeting approved.

1/ State and Federal Annual PHA Plans:

(a) Resident Participation Policy: Lydia Agro from BHA noted that BHA has presented a number of revisions in this policy, and has retitled it as “Resident Participation Policy” (from “Tenant Participation Policy”). Some things were streamlined and reorganized. BHA made clear that the policy applies to Mixed Finance sites (where BHA is no longer the owner) or where there has been a subsidy conversion. During the pandemic, the policy was revised to allow for meetings, votes, etc., to be done remotely, and revisions indicate remote or hybrid models may continue post-pandemic but will need to be detailed in bylaws. BHA clarified on what topics it would provide training/support. The policy will allow for stipends, both to recognize additional work taken on by Board and for particular residents doing tasks to support resident participation (such as flyering, child care, and interpretation), but this will need to be in bylaws and since this will come out of LTO budgets, they’ll need to balance using stipends against other needs they have. Gift cards can be used in same way as stipends (a “one-off” or continuing, as appropriate). Stipends are capped at \$200/month/household from whatever source. There will be a process for LTOs to review each development’s operating budget—have yet to figure out best way to do that (for example, maybe a meeting after the Annual Plan is done). On demo/dispo, terminology was changed to reflect how BHA actually engages with residents when redevelopment occurs. The Resident Empowerment Coalition was added as another way in which residents participate. Mac noted that another potential stipend source would be if someone was on an Election Committee and carried out certain election activities at a site—but then it would come out of the LTO budget where the election was being done as part of their election expenses.

Mac McCreight from GBLS noted that at the Budget Committee meeting on Dec. 1st, the issue about the RAB having stipends had come up. In the past, the RAB had voted not to have stipends, but that was a while ago and this could change now that it was opened up elsewhere. He asked whether RAB stipends would need to be explicitly in the RPP policy. Lydia said based on an email exchange, she didn’t think so, but the RAB would need to follow similar rules since it uses unobligated HUD public housing tenant participation funds (TPF) and some Section 8 administrative fees; it would need to be detailed in the bylaws and budget, and there would need to be balanced use of stipends versus other activities. There was some discussion about whether there should be a cap on what’s used for stipends (33% of TPF? 10%?) and a recognition that different sites have different needs and budgets. Lydia said REC planned a meeting in January with LTOs to discuss the policy, and RAB could also be invited. Mac noted that the policy also provided for an “equitable policy” about deciding who gets stipends (so not always friends/family of Board members), and that Charlestown had done a draft on this which it could share with BHA—would be good to have templates about what’s acceptable. Lydia noted that similar issues arose about stipends for Boards—for example, what about the Board member who comes to a lot of meetings, and the other one who rarely does—here too, there’d need to be a

policy about what was fair. A RAB member/alternate asked about whether LTOs knew about this yet. Lydia pointed out this was a proposed policy, with the public hearings next week, and it then is submitted to HUD and only is finalized after HUD approval; LTO Boards were sent a copy of it along with other Annual Plan documents (but they only went to Board presidents).

(b) Language Access Plan/Four-Factor Analysis: Sheyla Carew from BHA did a presentation on the BHA's Language Access Plan (LAP). She noted that while HUD uses the term "Limited English Proficiency (LEP)" policy, she and others at BHA prefer using the term Language Access Plan (which is what City Hall also uses). She noted that BHA's plan began in 2009 (she was one of 4 interns that started on this then, and has remained throughout—now there is a team of 4 full-time interpreters, one part-time interpreter, and herself). There is also an intern (hope to get another), about 300 volunteers (mostly students), and vendors where language needs can't otherwise be addressed by staff & volunteers, as well as use of a Language Line. Providing language access is part of addressing national origin discrimination, and is a civil rights issue. The 4 factors are the number of persons for whom English is not their primary language, the frequency with which they might need language access (translation or interpretation) in interacting with the BHA, the nature of the interactions (for example, applying for housing, understanding signing a lease, doing recertification of income), and what resources are made available. Assistance has been provided in 22 languages during past year. HUD has a "safe harbor" where you need to translate all "vital documents" into a language if 5% or more of the local population speak it—using that, BHA translates into Spanish and Chinese (and does oral translation in 3 Chinese dialects). "I speak" cards are used to help identify the person's language. The pandemic has changed how BHA does business, and that's changed the demand—for example, with Leased Housing doing recertifications by phone, mail, or on-line rather than through in-person, in-office meetings, this has increased the language access phone demand by 35%. Use of the volunteers has saved the agency money.

Chhaya Kotwani of GBLS asked if LTOs could get help through the Language Access team. Sheyla said that BHA staff requests are what generate the assistance—thus, if a manager at a site was having a resident meeting, Language Access staff would respond. Chhaya asked what if it was an LTO only matter; Sheyla then said that might come out of the LTO's own TPF budget. Lydia said Sahar Lawrence from BHA could also generate the request.

(c) Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing; Upcoming Public Hearings: John Kane from BHA noted it was planned that Bob Terrell of BHA would address the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Goals and Objectives that were in the Annual Plan, but he had a last minute scheduling issue. John will try to convene another time with the RAB (this isn't yet a required part of the PHA Plan). John also reminded the Board that on Monday, Dec. 12th, there will be two public hearings on Zoom (one at 11 a.m. and one at 6 p.m.) and they need to register to participate in the hearing (once registered, you get a link, and it's good for both sessions). Two RAB members had volunteered to discuss the RAB and its role at the two hearings. Period to submit any comments ends Dec. 15th.

2/ Budget Committee Report: The RAB treasurer reported that the RAB had a balance of over \$29,000, and then the BHA's latest installment was deposited, so the balance should now be \$36,162. [Other items left to internal notes.]

3/ Other Items, Unfinished & New Business, Etc:

Medical Leave: It was confirmed that a RAB member was requesting a medical leave until March 2023—this was OK'd. [Other item left to internal notes.]

City Hall Program for Calls Anywhere: A RAB member announced that on 12/16, City Hall was sponsoring free phone calls to anywhere, and will get materials out on this.