

Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board Meeting Feb. 9, 2023 (external notes)

Elderly/Disabled Public Housing chair facilitated. There were some questions regarding the minutes from prior meeting (question about a chair signing a reimbursement for the Treasurer, and whether economic equity should be added to Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing), but the minutes were approved with 2 abstentions. Agenda was approved (clarified that it was the same as what John Kane from BHA sent out at the start of the month, with the addition of a Real Estate Development piece).

1/ Real Estate Development (Hailey): Joe Bamberg from BHA reported that BHA working with Centre Street Partners (a combination of The Community Builders, Urban Edge, and Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation), is proceeding with a redevelopment of a portion of the site (buildings near Jackson Square T stop and on Centre Street)—about 1/3 of the 780 units on the site with demolition and rebuilding of a number of buildings and the Anne Mae Cole Center and full replacement of public housing units with Section 8 units, plus additional income-restricted units. There was a closing at the end of 2022 which covered phase one of the redevelopment, and construction will begin soon. BHA is also moving forward to do a renovation of other buildings on the site, utilizing \$50 million in funding provided by the City, but additional money will be needed to pay for needed work, and so there will be a disposition proposal to switch the other buildings to Section 8 to generate additional funds. However, the balance of the site will remain with BHA (rather than with redevelopment partners), and there will not be building tear-down and reconstruction. It is anticipated that relocation would happen on site (unless a resident wished to relocate off site) and all would have a right to return, guarantee of 30% of income rents, and utilities still included in rent. In response to a question about timeline, it is anticipated that the work could be done in 3 years (as opposed to say more than a decade for full redevelopment). BHA is not ready yet to submit a draft disposition proposal to the RAB, but plans on doing so in the next 6 weeks and getting it to HUD in as little as 60 days if possible. The disposition proposal would include any questions that were raised by the RAB, site residents, and others, and BHA's responses. In the interest of time, chair asked that if there were other questions, people should get them to Joe in writing.

2/ Proposed RAB Budget for 2023-2024: John presented at Budget Committee chair's request on this. He noted that a draft budget for the RAB for the new fiscal year starting April 1st was circulated to the RAB for roughly \$48,000, same amount and categories (and amounts within categories) as for past year. John said it was

anticipated that the RAB would be going back to in-person meetings and the budget amounts (for food & taxis) anticipated that. Mac McCreight from GBLS noted that it was necessary to get this acted on now before the new fiscal year started (particularly since BHA might not be available for any RAB meeting in March and the RAB might choose not to meet then). **It was moved, seconded, and approved to adopt the draft budget.**

3/ Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with BHA on Funding: John presented this. The MOAs cover RAB/BHA funding arrangements and accountability, and have a 3-year term—the current one runs out March 31, 2023, and the new one would run until March 31, 2026. Most of what’s in the proposed new MOA would be the same. Language is added about the State Plan (as well as the Federal Plan). Since BHA will be changing how it provides staff support for the RAB (to be discussed next on the agenda), the description of how any BHA/RAB disputes gets resolved is revised to reflect the appropriate supervisors. Language is added about how RAB internal budget disputes should be resolved. And there is revised language about checking requirements. There is additional flexibility, so that for the 5 names listed on the RAB checking account (the 3 chairs, the Treasurer, and the Vice-Treasurer), any combination of 2 names can sign (and 3 if the check is over \$1000), and no person can sign or co-sign a check for which he/she/they are the beneficiary. Rules about transparency were added, so check signing would normally take place at a Budget Committee meeting or RAB meeting with quorum, but there would be provision to allow check signing outside such meetings as long as there was a email sent to all Budget Committee members, the BHA, and a RAB technical liaison. The MOA was revised to include current officer names (and with a cc to GBLS), and as with the current MOA, there could be mid-term amendment if both parties agreed. A RAB member asked questions about the level of expenses for parking, how many times people were in RAB office where that had to be reimbursed, and the cost of meals for Committee. It was noted that this was more of a Budget Committee discussion which could be covered later on the agenda. **It was moved, seconded, and agreed to adopt the new MOA. Mac noted, in addition, that the Budget Committee had recommended that the existing MOA (which runs from now through end of March) be amended (and BHA was fine with this) so that the new checking rules would be applied, as this would make things work more smoothly. This, too, was moved, seconded, and adopted.**

4/ Change in BHA RAB Liaison; Question Whether RAB Would Meet in March: Lydia Agro from BHA noted that Lueteshia Raymond had been the RAB liaison, had gone on a leave in December, and John (who normally is involved with the Annual Plan process) had agreed to step in as acting RAB liaison until it was anticipated

that Lueteshia would return. Lueteshia did return from leave, but has taken a new position as a contract attorney in the BHA Legal Department. BHA in the meantime had been in the process of hiring two new Resident Capacity staff to work with the Resident Capacity Coordinator Sahar Lawrence, who in turn reports to Lydia. It was thought that one or possibly both of the new staff would be the new RAB liaison. The new staff don't start at BHA until next week, and there will be training needs, so realistically BHA would not be able to staff RAB meetings until April, and there was a question whether there should be a RAB meeting in March. (Lydia clarified that both John and Lueteshia could help train the new staff on RAB related matters.) Initially it appeared that there was a split among RAB members, and with Eugenia's permission, Mac started to do a straw poll. But it became clear, doing the poll, that a majority of the Board wanted to keep a March meeting and GBLS agreed that it would be available. (BHA would not be able to help out with Zoom support, and Mac noted his Zoom challenges, but Chhaya Kotwani from GBLS said she could help.)

5/ Bylaw Amendment: Mac noted that at the January meeting, it was recommended to amend the bylaws to incorporate the long-standing RAB practice (similar to what was in the new MOA checking rules) that a beneficiary of a check not sign or co-sign their own check—i.e., no “self-reimbursement”. This couldn't formally be done last month, since bylaw amendments require that all Board members get the amendment in writing at least a week in advance of the RAB meeting—but the amendment had now gone out in the RAB packet. **The bylaw amendment was moved, seconded, and approved.**

6/ Budget Committee report: The Budget Committee chair started this report, but was having technical difficulties (voice kept cutting out), and John & Mac helped with making sure the latest bank statement was available for review, showing a starting balance of over \$33,000, deposit of \$60 (returned per diem from a RAB member), and electronic disbursements without checks for flowers and 3 dates with the parking garage near the BHA (totaling under \$500) and a net balance over \$32,000. Mac noted that the flowers were for get well flowers for 2 RAB members on medical leave and condolence for a deceased former RAB member. There was a lot of discussion about why wasn't the RAB getting checks and check images (Mac noted that for this month, there were no checks), and John said that was a Bank of America issue about how they presented info. There also was a discussion about RAB as a whole seeing reimbursement back up (not just Committee) and whether there should be reasonable caps on expenses for certain items and how often trips requiring parking were done in between RAB meetings. It was noted that certain expenses had not yet resulted in checks because of the Leased Housing chair's absence due to illness and the need for her sign off on

Vice-Treasurer's expense report (it was also noted that there are no vice-chairs for Leased Housing or Elderly/Disabled, nor are there 2nd Budget Committee members for each of those constituencies, although RAB had been asked in the past if anyone wanted to serve in those capacities).

Mac noted that the full Budget Committee report hadn't gotten out, and given the Committee chair's tech difficulties, the Board was fine with Mac presenting. He noted that last month, the Board had voted that the Treasurer should reimburse the Board for roughly \$400 in a reimbursement that didn't have proper backup, approvals or the right signatures, and this should happen by tonight's meeting, the Committee had sent a letter to that effect to the Treasurer, and had gotten no response by the deadline. He also noted that when the Budget Committee called to see if the Treasurer was coming to its February 2 meeting, it appeared that he picked up but there was no response. A RAB member noted that she had a similar experience in the past, but the Treasurer had later gotten back and said he was not aware that his phone was on and hadn't been aware of the call. **The Committee, in light of this, had recommended that the Board reconsider its vote from last month (which was a tie) about whether the Treasurer should be suspended pending an investigation as to whether he could carry out his duties, to add the failure to make the reimbursement as the Board had directed. A RAB member revised the motion somewhat so that the suspension would be either until the investigation was completed or until the Treasurer came forward and gave an adequate explanation of himself (noting that he had not been at the last 3 Board meetings and this one). This was seconded. Since voice votes were not clear, the roll was called, and the vote was 9 for suspension, 6 opposed, and 2 abstentions, with the motion carrying.**

The Budget Committee had also considered issues with outstanding expense reports associated with Mass. Union per diems, etc., since this would be relevant to whether RAB members/alternates would be eligible for funding for future conferences, like the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) in D.C. in March. One outstanding issue from prior RAB votes had to do with a RAB alternate who had been listed to attend the Mass. Union conference, and a hotel room was paid for and conference fee paid on her behalf but she did not attend. As provided in the bylaws, she was requested to repay the RAB for this expense unless she could provide an adequate excuse for what occurred. The alternate did respond to Budget Committee's inquiry and said she had informed the Treasurer in advance that she could not attend but this information wasn't relayed to the Vice-Treasurer, etc. The Board had said before to have both the alternate and the Treasurer address the issue with the Budget Committee. However, since the Treasurer was not communicating with

the Budget Committee, the Committee was recommending that the alternate be excused, and not be required to repay this amount. That was approved by the Board.

Since the meeting was at its usual time limit but conference attendance issues hadn't been resolved, it was voted to extend the meeting time. The Vice-Treasurer clarified that only 2 RAB members who attended Mass. Union had ultimately not provided acceptable expense reports, so these two should be the only ones who could not get RAB funding for events until per diems paid back or expenses resolved. There was no issue with these exclusions. The Vice-Treasurer went on to say that the NLIHC conference would be March 20-23 in DC and that in the past, the RAB had sent 9 people, so a RAB member had agreed to help her with this and they had booked 9 rooms anticipating that many people, but could cancel them if there wasn't enough interest. It was noted that the hotel, airline and per diem costs would come to roughly \$2,000 per person (Conference fees would add to that, but even including them and factoring in 9 people, there would be sufficient funding in the RAB budget.) Those at the meeting were polled about interest, and 5 members indicated they would go, and a 6th member was interested but needed to check his schedule (he agreed to answer within 24 hours about this). So this would mean 5-6 attendees. (It was pointed out that selection of conference attendees has to happen at a RAB meeting, so after-meeting polling wouldn't work.) It was emphasized that any personal data necessary for tickets should be promptly provided and the burden on the person wanting to go (rather than on chairs or vice-treasurer to chase information). The Vice-Treasurer noted that travelers would have to sign the Travel Policy agreement, understanding what items the RAB was paying for, and responsibility to reimburse the RAB if they did not attend and give adequate notice so other arrangements could be made. Mac noted that RAB did not yet have information about a NARSAAH conference (date, time, topics, location), but as soon as this was available, information would get to the Board.

7/ Other Business:

Secretary Report: The Acting Secretary said that she checked with a RAB member about whether she'd be rejoining the RAB after her leave or needed a further extension—and the member was here tonight (welcome back).

Possible Expense Caps, Other Topics for Policy & Procedures: Mac noted that there hadn't been a Policy & Procedures meeting, but given the amount of discussion about the whole issue of expenses for parking, etc., the question of whether there should be caps and what was reasonable could be discussed at Policy & Procedures. This was moved, seconded, and adopted. Mac noted that he would be

away until 2/25 so would need to check with the Committee chair about scheduling when he was back, and she said that was fine. A RAB member asked whether it might be possible to get free or reduced parking for RAB when at BHA, and this could be explored. Another RAB member also mentioned the whole issue of lack of tenant participation funds for Section 8, and people thought that could also be discussed at Policy & Procedures.

Annual Plans and Resident Participation Policy: John updated the Board that the annual plans have been submitted and will keep the Board informed of any responses from HUD and DHCD. John reminded Board that the proposed Resident Participation Policy (RPP) didn't go to HUD/DHCD with Annual Plan. BHA is having a meeting next week through the Resident Empowerment Coalition (REC) to get more feedback on the policy. It's likely that the RPP would then go in as a mid-year amendment to the PHA Plan (and people would have an opportunity for further review & comment then). A RAB member asked if there could be an evening meeting for resident leaders who couldn't attend in the day, and John said he would pass on this request to Lydia and Sahar. It was also suggested having a recording of the REC meeting, so that if people couldn't attend, they could hear what was said and either find that their concerns were addressed or add more. John will pass this on as well.

8/ Evaluation: Good meeting. Some issues both with Treasurer and with transparency of Budget Committee process still need to be addressed.