

Boston Housing Authority RAB Meeting 1-11-18, at 125 Amory Street

Family Public Hsg: *Members* Val Shelley, Concetta Paul, Phyllis Corbitt, Meena Carr, Arlene Carr, Cassandra Ledesma, Betty Rae Wade. *Alternates* Ron Johnson (Alt 1), Janis McQuarrie (Alt 4), Pamela Lewis-Hoyt (Alt 9), Cheryl Semnack (Alt 10): 11

Elderly/Disabled Public Hsg: *Members* Michele McNickles, Jeanne Burke Patterson, David Turney, Bettie Cutler, Marlena Nania, John Maloni. *Alternates:* Arthur Alexander (Alt 2), Eddie Hartfield (Alt 3): 8

Section 8: *Members* Edna Willrich, Minnie Jackson, Stephen Tracey, Jung Wing Lee, Tara Ruttle, Lennox Tillet, Judith Frey, Arlette Coleman. *Alternates:* Anita Morris Merriman (Alt 2), Karen Stram (Alt 2), Therese Browne (Alt 4), Robin Williams (Alt 5), Georgia McEaddy (Alt 6): 13

Absences excused: Betty Carrington (Family); Modesta Ballester (Elderly/Disabled); Lerona Diggs (Section 8)

Others: John Kane, Wilbur Commodore, Bill McGonagle, David Gleich, Vivian Lee, BHA; Mac McCreight, GBLS.

The meeting was chaired by Edna Willrich, with assistance from Therese Browne; Val Shelley was Timekeeper and Phyllis Corbitt was Sergeant at Arms. Minutes of prior meeting were approved.

1/ **Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing:** Wilbur said that BHA's initial intention had been to file a final version of the Analysis of Fair Housing (AFH) submission with HUD by Jan. 19th and to present on that this evening. However, HUD recently announced that it was suspending any actions on AFH submissions until October 31, 2020. HUD had already told PHAs to hold off until a new On-Line Assessment tool was available. HUD made clear that PHAs are not obligated to submit and that even if they did, HUD will neither accept nor review the submissions prior to that date (anything already submitted, there will be no action on). This is distressing news. Wilbur spoke with the BHA Administrator who decided that BHA should still have goals along the lines of what was going to be in AFH, and will roll these into the FY 2019 Annual Plan process (starting this fall). HUD had thought it hadn't given enough technical assistance and about 1/3 of all AFH Plans were being rejected. BHA will continue to work with its staff to finalize the AFH goals. Wilbur is advocating with the City that BHA/City issue the latest version of the Assessment Document itself—but since this is a collaboration, the City needs to be on board with that. If they agree, this would get out in February and would be shared with the RAB.

2/ **Annual Plan; Visit from BHA Administrator:** Bill McGonagle arrived then, and talked a little about the AFH goals. He said there was some controversy in DC about the notion of assisting families who wished to move to opportunity neighborhoods (often in higher income areas) to have greater subsidy so rents can be afforded. Some had suggested that this could be offset by lower rents in lower opportunity areas, and Bill was NOT in favor of that, as people often have good reasons for wanting to stay in a particular area (health services, schools, etc.) and cutting subsidies in Roxbury/South End would just end up hurting Section 8 families who would have to absorb the difference or not be able to keep their housing. He favors families

making these choices, and noted that there are differences even within advocacy organizations (for example, the national NAACP favors the idea of redistributing the subsidy levels, and the local NAACP does not). He noted that vouchers were not “completely useless”, but there are challenges in the current market—BHA’s current “success rate” (what percentage of those issued vouchers are able to find an apartment within the search period) is 65%. BHA is limited in what it can do with regarding to displacement and rising rents. BHA has changed its attitude toward redevelopment—in the past, we might say, development should be smaller, but now we are saying, we need to preserve all the affordable units and where we can, have more. There’s a planned groundbreaking for Whittier Street in March, and the plan is to come up with 20 more affordable units, besides the replacement of the 200 public housing units with deeply affordable units. Similar at Amory Street.

Phyllis said she had a concern about the unit mix after redevelopment, and developments don’t have the same number of larger bedroom sizes as they did previously. Bill said that BHA does seek to address the housing size needs of all existing residents, but then the unit sizes are taken from the waiting list demand—and the demand for largest unit sizes has fallen off, while there is a lot of demand for 2-BR units. He said that all households have the right to return (clarifying that if a family was in violation of its lease and for example engaged in serious criminal activity, BHA would go through the eviction process), but past history has been that roughly 50% don’t elect to return, and here again, the family is in the best position to make that decision of where to live. Bill noted that Kate Bennett could give a better explanation about how BHA makes these decisions. He noted that at Orient Heights, the plan is to do more relocation on site—thus, they expect that roughly 1/2 of the families in Phase II there may elect to move into the newly rehabbed units in Phase I, which would avoid multiple temporary moves.

There was some discussion of underhoused/overhoused transfers—Bill said they are being done, but BHA is trying to not be punitive, recognizing many households may only be slightly overhoused and have been in place for years. Concetta asked about getting public safety funding support and pushing City Councilors. Bill said BHA had gotten \$4 million last year (vote 13-0) and expected a similar request this year—he would let RAB know if help was needed.

Tara asked about the City of Boston’s 2030 goal of creating 55,000 new housing units, and whether any of this is discussed by the City with BHA? Bill said that most of this relies on private developers, but of course certain things BHA is part of, like the redevelopment at Charlestown, Whittier Street, Hailey, and McCormack, are counted among the new units generated. His focus however is on the preservation of the deeply affordable units.

Jeanne mentioned problems with elevators at Peabody/Englewood, and how the 5-year plan has no funding for this until 2021, but it was supposed to have already been addressed. Bill said BHA was analyzing the problem and there’s a consultant looking into it—he will get back with Jeanne.

Ron asked if the AFH would apply to the mixed finance developments. Wilbur said it would apply to anything BHA owns. (Ron also asked a separate question about the mixed finance lease, how many keys were promised to residents, etc., and Bill/Wilbur said residents could enforce what was in the lease).

3/ **Leased Housing:** David Gleich, the new Director of Leased Housing at the BHA, introduced himself to the RAB. He said that he had previously been at the BHA in a number of capacities between 2002 and 2012, first as a legal intern, then an attorney in the Legal Department, and then with a variety of responsibilities for the Leased Housing division, including being director of the tenant-based program. In 2012 he left the BHA to work with a consulting firm that dealt with public housing & Section 8 issues in a number of parts of the country (Florida, NYC, Chicago). He was glad to be back at the BHA in his new capacity.

He said a major challenge of his work is the uncertainty of funding and how to operate within an uncertain budget. Thus, in 2017, BHA didn't know until 6/28 what money it would have. For this year, there are different levels of pro-ration discussed for Section 8 funding, ranging from 96% to 99%. But that 3% different translates into \$6 million for the BHA, and into 400 families who can or can't be served. He also noted that increased rents have been a major challenge—generally average HAP payments have increased from \$1100/mo. to \$1250/mo. This is often cyclical (increases & declines in the real estate market), but it's not clear when this upward cycle will end and it has been steep. While HUD has increased Fair Market Rents, they lag behind the market (thus, for example, there was an increase in the 1-BR FMR by 38% recently).

David asked if there were questions. Georgia said that the lease amendment process for rent increases wasn't satisfactory—her landlord was asking her to sign a BHA lease amendment, but it didn't say what the client's rent share would be. David agreed that the process was that the caseworker was supposed to share with the client what the tenant's share would be before the tenant made any decision about a proposed increase. He said he was working with a team on the rent increase process and BHA will be making procedural changes on this.

Karen asked about the unit sizes that private developers built, as well as them passing on a number of costs to residents, like sewer fees. Mac and David discussed how state law does permit sub-metering of water costs if certain conservation devices and meters are installed, but BHA staff reviews this to see that there are necessary improvements; in addition, there is a utility allowance schedule for such water costs, just like other utilities, and BHA periodically reviews those allowances.

Phyllis said that some of the residents in mixed finance developments had two leases—one with BHA and one with the developer—and the rents might be different—which one is the tenant supposed to follow. Mac confirmed that he has seen this for Section 8 project-based voucher units at Beacon Residential (Old Colony). BHA said there should only be one lease and BHA's determination on the rent share should be what controls.

John M. asked what focus David intended to bring to his new job. David said he was very interested in good customer service, in taking advantage of technology improvements, and in the mobility counseling to help residents relocate to opportunity areas. Anita discussed a problem she had with an absentee owner, and David mentioned that with Amazon looking for 1 million square feet in office space, this would likely have some displacement effect (Bill agreed, saying it would probably translate into another 1,000 employees, and would likely affect South Boston, which is turning into an area of those with low-income who are in public housing and those with high incomes, and middle group squeezed out. John K. noted that the RAB had identified the value of a symposium on affordable housing & challenges in Boston, and this could be a joint goal for the BHA and RAB in the coming months.

4/Committee Reports:

a. *Policy & Procedures:* Meena was asked if the Committee had met yet; she said no meeting had been set up, and wasn't sure who was on the committee. Mac confirmed that there is a pre-existing list of those who signed up to be members (of course, more can request to join as long as they aren't on the Budget Committee).

A question came up of convening a committee meeting, and doing it on a Wednesday evening. The normal meeting schedule would be the 3rd Wednesday of the month, which would put it for Jan. 17th. Mac noted that while he wasn't on the committee, he has worked closely with the Committee over time, and has a scheduling conflict for that evening. It was agreed to set up the meeting for the evening of Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2018. John will need to check on whether the normal RAB space is available or if we'd use other space at Amory Street, and will get the word out. The committee needs to pick a new chair and figure out its regular meeting schedule.

b. *Budget and Treasurer's Report:* Val did a report from the Committee, which was handed out. She noted that while the report listed a few people who were not in good standing, they had gotten reports from Pam, John M., and Lennox (have yet to check with Eugenia and Anita). One question was about whether alternates who never appeared at any meetings should be removed (particularly Donna Criel, Safia Mohamed, and Miatai Davis). Mac noted that the bylaws don't require a minimum attendance for alternates, but do say those who don't meet the minimum attendance of 4 meetings in prior 12 months would be bypassed in filling any vacancies in member positions. In addition, in the past the Board has sent letters to such alternates, asking if they wanted to continue to be listed, or if their names could be removed; the Board voted to do that. The issue of revising the alternate attendance issue can be taken up by the Policy & Procedures Committee.

A draft budget for the RAB for 2018-2019 was provided, and members should review this and give suggestions to the chair. One idea was to get a list of top ten ideas for local events/trainings/workshops that could be done locally, and prioritize spending on this.

Concetta gave a treasurer's report on income/expenses, and indicated that reimbursements were provided on childcare, and transportation. A printout was provided of utilization of taxi vouchers (it was noted that people should limit tips to \$5). It was noted that some members might have higher expenses if they were attending extra meetings (like the Budget meeting).

Betty Rae Wade asked about reimbursement of transportation expenses for committee meetings. This needs to be reviewed & clarified. There had been a discussion about childcare expenses, and those would ONLY be covered for "mandatory" committee attendance (i.e., if a person was one of the appointed members of Policy & Procedures), but not for committees where participation was voluntary (like policy & procedures). But there was a feeling that transportation costs were different. This will be reviewed by Policy & Procedures and if change is needed, Committee can bring it back.

EVALUATION: There wasn't sufficient time to finish all of the items on the agenda, nor did the Board wish to extend the meeting time since taxis were arriving. An evaluation was done, and general comments were that it was a good meeting.