External Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board (BHA RAB) minutes 1-9-25 Hybrid Meeting at Bellflower

Vice-chair Family Public Housing facilitated as chair absent. Ground Rules were read, agenda reviewed, and minutes from prior meeting approved.

1/ BHA Resident Surveys

Maya Harel from BHA described work on resident survey & want feedback before launching. Will come out this year. There will be reports of results. Can come back to present to RAB on results at your request. 2 types – Public Housing (PH) & Leased Housing (LH), very similar. PH version – will go out w/rent recert docs. Will have QR code & link. Will have your name already. Reviewing questions: series of statements asking how much you agree. Recommend property as good place to live, feel safe on properly, would recommend neighborhood, feel safe in neighborhood. 1 thing you like best about living at property. 1 thing you’d like to change about prop. Are there spaces where you & neighbors can gather – dropdown options depend on yes/no response. If yes, what are best spaces, what do you like about them. If no, what types would you like? (Maya confirmed there was just one form for all public housing—nothing separate for Family and Elderly/Disabled. Next question – what’s most important thing you want BHA to know re your experience as PH resident. Preferred language. Remaining Qs are demographic – education level, work status, gender ID – not required. Free response – anything else you want BHA to know

A Rab member-- why ask re educational background & gender? Maya: how to best serve people & where gaps exist. If someone in high school doesn’t feel comfortable using spaces vs. those w/university degrees do, why the discrepancy. More to track where people respond differently on survey. Another RAB member: Available in several languages? Maya: yes, this is draft. Once finalized will be translated. Another RAB member: will have resident’s info so not anonymous. Will be tough for some residents. Some may choose not to answer because of retaliation. What about only having development listed? Maya: no data will be used to affect anyone’s eligibility or rent or anything. Resident survey is optional – encouraging but not required. Another RAB member: some feel retaliated against when they speak up. If you want people to do survey, you’d get better results if anonymized. Mac McCreight from GBLS: will it be used for mixed-finance sites? Maya: will be given on rent redetermination statement. Mac: Trinity for example will do for BHA and then send in? Maya: yes. On anonymity, we don’t want to track down what people are saying but want to be responsive if egregious things need to be fixed. But understand concern & can think about it Another RAB member: Concern about how Trinity would do it. Some properties have lot of problems with safety, stealing, supposed to have security. They need these surveys so you can know what’s going on. Maya: Surveys will be available for all residents regardless of management company.

Maya: suggestions for changing survey? Another RAB member: online – what forum? will it be Google doc? Maya: it’s on Cognito. Another RAB member: I’ll have trouble with people filling it out. I live in community that’s mostly Spanish. Already have tough time getting them out of houses. When I see them in a group, would love to say just fill it out. Hope it’s going to be accepted & you get a lot back. I’ll try to talk people into filling them out.

Earlier RAB speaker: consider putting in Qs re services at site. Maya: we kept Qs vague/general on purpose because want it to be up to interpretation. If people want to discuss services, there’s places they can write that down. (reviewed Qs) Some Qs hint at things. Same RAB speaker: instead of asking what’s “1 thing” you want to change, suggest “what would you like to change” Another earlier RAB speaker: what’s timeframe when you need feedback aside from right now? Maya: ASAP. I’ve been visiting some LTO boards for feedback. Over next month or so will be visiting leadership groups. I’ll leave my card w/Elizabeth Aguilar from BHA, anyone can email me. Or send to Elizabeth & she can send to me.

Maya--Moving to the Leased Housing survey – name, how are likely are you to recommend this apt as good place to live, 1 thing you like best about apt, 1 thing you’d like to change, how safe do you feel in your apt w/ranking, most important thing you want BHA to know re your experience as voucher holder. Statements: housing specialist/LO is responsive to my needs, feel connected to community I live in, BHA accessible in my preferred language. Experienced discrimination during housing search. Remaining Qs same as PH – work experience, gender ID. Mac: suggest adding some to Leased Housing. Real differences between tenant based vs project based voucher program. Major part of experience = recert. Asking about experience with leasing officer is key question. Another is rent changed w/landlord and BHA re that process. When LL says asking for rent increase – could mean tenant doesn’t pay more or pays significantly more & has to decide to ok or not. All affect experiences with Leased Housing. Heather: suggest asking re LL experience. Inspections. Safety – conditions and physical safety. Earlier RAB speaker: if work orders not done that becomes unsafe. Need to look at how work orders taken care of at PH & LH. We had mouse problem for months, had 5 people come in, each only did 1 piece. I’m allergic – I feel safe in my home but not really. If health depends on critters & staff can’t manage that… so distinguish environmental vs. public safety, DV, etc. Another earlier RAB speaker:. Agree whole PH work order system needs work. Mac: work orders & inspections = important. Other thing at LH that’s unique is if your LL doesn’t do the work, BHA shuts off $ & tells you to look for another apt. Then you need to restart housing search, so avoiding that = important. Earlier RAB speaker: people bounce back & forth & end up in shelter. W/time limits

RAB member—Why do you need gender identity? Maya: it’s so we can look at the cross-section of how people fill it out. If someone who checks nonbinary says they don’t feel comfortable in common spaces, that’s something to look into to figure out why it’s not inclusive. Or if woman doesn’t feel as safe as man in neighborhood. Tells us re needs. Earlier RAB speaker: DEI – multiple levels of intersectionality, people expressing self, how people want to feel, be seen. For safety reasons, it helps to be put where you’re less likely to come across gender based violence. Several earlier RAB speakers: similar to last point, some don’t want others knowing how they identify. Maya: it’s optional. I hear that. RAB member-- when you give info, what is BHA prepared to go with it other than collect dataset. What will you engage with properties to do differently with that information? Maya: we don’t have a way to get this right now, collecting info meaningfully & consistently. Hasn’t been done before – trying something new. Can tweak it & involve you in our follow-up. Tanya read chat Q: if you’re not filling it out because you’re not safe & it’s not confidential, how would that help anyone?

2/ RAB Travel Policy and Selection of People for Upcoming Conference

Mac did a presentation on the Travel Policy portion of the bylaws, as well as the Traveler Agreement, Guidance on Per Diems, Logs on Who’s Attended Conferences, and Logs on who might be in bad standing because they didn’t account for expenses, failed to attend conference (entirely or in part), or didn’t provide reports. Mac also summarized Travel Policy. The bylaws provide that people who are selected to go to conferences with RAB funding have certain responsibilities -- to account for per diems and return excess funds, to give quick notice if they cannot attend so funds can be refunded or another person can attend, to go to the sessions (including any lobby day if they’re paid for that day), and to provide a written report about what was learned. Treasurer has responsibility to set up travel arrangements (hotels, airlines, advance per diems) and Travelers must get info promptly so arrangements can be made. Chairs have responsibility if an original person can’t go to contact backup travelers (those who would be willing to go if original people selected can’t), and secretary keeps track of attendees and bad standing (so we know when selecting for future events who’s already attended and therefore others get first shot, or if people aren’t eligible to attend or run for office because they didn’t follow through on things. Once paperwork in, chairs have duty to approve expense reports, but can ask for more info if things are incomplete or it appears an expense wouldn’t be approved (like renting a movie while at conference). If RAB funds can’t get refunded from conference or used to cover someone else, the member may be liable to pay back, but there can be extenuating circumstances where it wasn’t the person’s fault (medical emergency at last instance) which Budget Committee or RAB as a whole can excuse. Similarly, an officer who doesn’t follow through on duties related to travel could lose the right to travel or to run in future election (also subject to RAB review if disputed).

Mac noted that we know there is a National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) conference in DC in the last week of March which traditionally the RAB has sent people to. RAB has to decide how many people to send—usually in groups of 3, so that one from each constituency (Leased Housing, Family Public Housing, Elderly/Disabled Public Housing) can go. How many may depend on the cost per person (airfare, hotel, conference fee, per diems), what is left in RAB budget, and other likely expenses for balance of year. In addition, we just got info from BHA that the Baltimore RAB is holding a conference in early March. This is a new thing (although a RAB member noted it may have happened a while ago) and a lot of unknows about costs, benefits of it, etc.

The sense of the group was to hold off on the Baltimore conference since it was a relative unknown on costs, etc., and to just select people for the NLIHC conference. (A suggestion was thrown out about possibly sending one person to the Baltimore conference just to check it out, but no action was taken on that.) It was confirmed that action on NLIHC needed to be done in January to confirm hotels (although there had been some booking of a block of six rooms, just to be sure to have them). Acting Treasurer said that he had costed out airfare, hotel, conference fees, and per diems (and some extra fee for awards dinner—RAB had skipped that some times, but this year, Mac was to be honored) and it came to roughly $12,832.28 and RAB had sufficient funds. Six slots were authorized, and six RAB members/alternates (all new RAB members), 2 each from each constituency, were selected, with four others ( one each from two constituencies, and 2 from one constituency) were identified. They should contact the Acting Treasurer and their chairs for logistics.

3/ Committee Reports

* *Budget Committee*

Budget Committee Chair (and Acting Treasurer): all should’ve gotten December bank statement mailed or emailed. $22,195 balance opening; got deposit from BHA. $37652 balance at end of month. Have some outstanding invoices for ITOA and conferences. That’ll be adjusted for next report. Working w/John Kane from BHA, Mac & others on projected 25 budget – hope by early Feb if not sooner. Treasurer took leave of absence, so there’s a transition and I’m trying to get my head around paperwork. Visited office on 1/3, met w/John to review things. I’ve reviewed voicemails – several 100. We’re caught up. Similar with emails. We’ll be leaving outgoing message on voicemail to bring it current. One problem is that people use the RAB phone and email as another way to reach BHA when direct phone doesn’t work. Talked with Elizabeth, we’ll revise voicemail greeting in top 3 languages. Other highlights: membership dues for NLIHC paid for 3yrs until 2028. Check for $926 taxi invoice will be written tonight. I’m streamlining process to make things more detailed & transparent. Looking at reimbursement – please be clear in filling out taxi vouchers. We won’t pay if something’s not clearly documented. When you submit personal invoices, need preauthorization or justification. Vice Chair: want to discuss after meeting what’s proper way to fill out vouchers. Prefer a printout of a wrong one corrected. Don’t understand why it’s not in policy & procedures manual. Budget Committee Chair: there are challenges. We’re trying to optimize things. Another Chair can be helpful and was at the budget meeting. Others can join too to get corrected taxi vouchers info. I’ll hold self to task as Acting Treasurer, get you timely reporting – will try to get you bank statements 24-72 hrs in advance. Don’t want to do it too early because people lose them. Want you to be able to prepare before meetings. Still tracking the key for file cabinet that’s missing; let me know if you know. Working on FY budget. RAB office has computer up & running, 1 other system still to be connected. Want to see vertical cabinets but I’m projecting no more than 2 days for cleanup of clutter in RAB office and will let people know cleanup days. Creating archival list binder for all officers as far back as we can go. On data privacy, the office is secure and has a new lock. We’ll put new procedures in place for sign-in for accountability going forward, and will bring that to the board to make decision on that.

* *Policy & Procedures Committee (including Bylaw Amendment)*

Policy & Procedures Committee Chair: we approved in committee to change the bylaws regarding RAB election process. Ballots will be sent to all LTO board members in the future instead of having LTOs designate whose voting on their behalf. However BHA decides to hold it, whether in person, online, or combo. We voted to recommend that change. Bylaw amendment was moved, seconded, and passed with all in favor. Bertil: We’re also setting up new handbook for members with a code of conduct, consequences for not adhering, within next month or two. Hope to have some work done by early February.

4/ Unfinished/New Business

* *BHA Response to Comments on PHA Plan*

Mac and John noted that John had just provided the RAB (right before the meeting by email) with an email with the BHA’s summary of comments that it received about the PHA Plan (either in writing or at the public hearings). The federal plan has to get to HUD by Jan. 15th, and BHA will take any last minute feedback up until 9 am on Monday, Jan. 13th (email to John). For the State plan, there’s an extra week for feedback (Monday, Jan. 20th at 9 am).

* *Nomination of Alternate for Family Public Housing*

A Family Public Housing member requested that a resident in attendance be appointed for an alternate slot for Family Public Housing. Mac clarified that although this resident receives Section 8 PBV benefits because she lives at Washington Beech, which is a Mixed Finance development that was formerly all Family Public Housing, she is classified as a Family Public Housing member. The resident said why she wanted to serve on the RAB again. It was moved, seconded, and approved by the Family Public Housing members/alternates. The resident is added to the RAB Board as Family Public Housing Alternate 10.

Evaluation –Very good, on topic, grateful for new blood. All business. Educational. Got stuff done. Only negative — food was late.