

**Boston Housing Authority RAB Meeting 2-23-17, at 125 Amory Street (rescheduled meeting due to snow day)**

Family Public Housing: *Members* Kassandra Ledesma, Concetta Paul, Phyllis Corbitt, Betty Rae Wade, Aracelis Tejada, Meena Carr; *Alternates* Arlene Carr (Alt 1), Alyce Lewis (Alt 2), Janis McQuarrie (Alt 6): 9

Elderly/Disabled Public Housing: *Members* Michele McNickles, Norman Younger, John Maloni, Richard Gurney, Jeanne Burke Patterson, Merle Haynesworth-Thomas, Betty Cutler; *Alternates* Modesta Ballester (Alt 1), David Turney (Alt 2): 9

Section 8: *Members* Edna Willrich, Judith Frey, Lennox Tillet, Marilyn Lopez, Tara Ruttler, Yvette Moore, Stephen Tracey, Lerona Diggs; *Alternates:* Arlette Coleman (Alt 1), Karen Stram (Alt 5): 10

Absences excused: Val Shelley, Carole Sullivan, Ron Johnson (Family Public Housing); Jung Wing Lee(Section 8)

Others: John Kane, Vivian Lee, Bill McGonagle, Edna Rivera Carrasco, BHA; Mac McCreight, GBLS; Sherdain Carter (Washington Beech family); Arthur Alexander (Franklin Field elderly); Steve Meacham (City Life/Vida Urbana)

The meeting was chaired by Michele McNickles, with help from Kassandra Ledesma; Kassandra was also Timekeeper and John Maloni was Sergeant at Arms. Minutes of prior meeting were approved. The agenda item on Assessment of Fair Housing was tabled for discussion at a future meeting (BHA attorney was not available and agenda fairly full).

1/ **Grievance Procedure:** Bill McGonagle followed up on this issue. (He also announced that he had approved the RAB budget for the fiscal year starting April 1.) BHA had proposed to eliminate the grievance panel and substitute a single hearing officer, but a number of RAB members had expressed concerns and this wasn't done. Bill said there was still the problem of getting a solid core of volunteers to serve on the panel. He said one idea would be to let the person making the grievance pick—do you want a hearing officer or a panel? A number of RAB members said they liked this idea—kind of like the choice between a judge or a jury of your peers. Question was asked about Section 8 participants serving on the panel; Bill said this might be affected by regulations, but Mac indicated he thought BHA had flexibility to do this, and Bill said if so, he thought they should be able to serve and this would expand the pool of possible volunteers. (The panel would not, however, hear Section 8 matters, since there are different HUD regulations on that.) There were questions about how people would be selected and the importance of keeping information confidential. Mac noted that in the past, BHA had sent out a notice to residents, residents who were interested in serving responded, and they had to attend a training put on by BHA and GBLS in order to serve. There might be a holder agreement just like task forces have if they're maintaining any private information. A question was asked about training for hearing officers; Bill said they were all lawyers, and it might be that if the question was more legally complex, a grievant might prefer having the case heard by a person with legal training. A handout included a summary of what has been in the Grievance Panel training. Meena noted that not all residents are aware that they have grievance rights. RAB members were encouraged to think about ways to get volunteers and to discuss this with task forces.

**2/ Budget Committee (Selection of Persons to Attend NLIHC):** Arlene gave a report, but indicated that she had stepped down as notetaker for the committee; it was noted that the Committee does need to pick a notetaker. The main thing that the Budget Committee reported was that the Board needed to make a decision about which 3 persons would attend the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) conference in Washington DC on April 2-4. The RAB budget would allow 3—one from each of the RAB constituencies (family public housing, elderly/disabled public housing, and Section 8).

In response to questions, Mac said that he understood that the issue of who would attend this conference was discussed at a conference call that took place on February 9 (the evening that the regular RAB meeting was canceled due to weather); this was not a mandatory call, and people had been told that this was just a “test” to see how well a conference call could work. Mac was contacted after the conference call and told that nine persons had expressed interest (3 from each constituency), that time was of the essence, and he was asked to pick one name out of a hat for each of the 3 constituencies. He did that and reported it back by email.

The RAB, upon motion and second, voted to rescind the prior action taken on selection, since it wasn't done as part of a RAB meeting (and there was enough time to select representatives tonight). There was then discussion on what criteria should be used to select from among those interested in attending the NLIHC conference. A motion was made and seconded, but did not pass, which would restrict those going to RAB members (not alternates). A second motion was made, seconded, and adopted, which would give RAB members a preference over alternates among those eligible to attend from each constituency. Another motion was made, seconded, and adopted, which would for this particular conference bar attendance by those who had attended a prior national conference since the RAB elections in July 2016. (A number of other suggestions and questions came up about what the overall criteria should be generally, including any involvement of LTOs, but it was noted that the whole travel policy was to be discussed further—see later agenda item—and there wasn't enough time to have a general discussion, and the discussion tonight would just focus on selection for this NLIHC conference.)

Applying those criteria, the following persons indicated interest in attending NLIHC:

- Family public housing: Cassandra Ledesma, Alyce Lewis, Aracelis Tejada. Since Alyce is an alternate, and there would be a preference for a full member, the choice was between Cassandra and Aracelis.
- Elderly/disabled public housing: Merle Haynesworth-Thomas, Betty Cutler, Richard Gurney. A question was raised about Merle's eligibility under the “good standing” rule, but it was clarified that although she had been selected for the New Orleans trip last fall, she had dropped out and a substitute was found without any cost to the RAB, so she is eligible (all 3 are members).
- Section 8: Yvette Moore and Karen Stram. Since both Yvette and Karen are alternates, there would be no member preference issue.

The chair asked if John Kane could pull the names out of a bag, and he did so. Aracelis, Merle, and Yvette were selected as the 3 delegates, with Cassandra, Richard (by another pull from the bag), and Karen as alternates if the primary delegate could not attend.

**3/ Policy and Procedures Committee (Including Bylaw Amendments):** David permitted Mac to present on this. Mac noted that while the Committee had made some recommendations on a travel policy (and a related bylaw amendment), John Kane had circulated to the RAB a number of additional thoughts on things that should go into the travel policy (particularly around selecting people to go to conferences), and the thought was that this should be discussed further in Policy & Procedures at their next regular meeting and the committee could report recommendations back to the Board. This was so moved, seconded, and adopted.

There had also been a discussion in the Policy & Procedures Committee about the use of email among RAB members/alternates. Some thought that matters discussed within a committee should not be aired outside it; others felt that people had the right to share with other RAB members their thoughts, particularly if they might want to influence what the final decision was on an issue. The Committee recommended no curb on the use of email, other than a bar on “flaming”—i.e., no derogatory, insulting, or disrespectful personal remarks directed at others, but airing disagreements in a respectful manner. This was so moved, seconded, and adopted (likely a “ground rule”).

The Committee recommended a bylaw amendment on moving up alternates and what to do if there is a tie. This was moved, seconded, and adopted.

The Committee recommended a combination of 4 bylaw amendments on RAB elections: (a) elderly/disabled public housing election to be separate from family public housing election; (b) clarifying who can sign papers designating a person as an LTO delegate in public housing elections; (c) shortening the notice period from 30 to 15 days; and (d) allowing a person who is unable to attend the election night but is interested in serving to be nominated as long as certain procedures followed. These were moved, seconded, and adopted by a majority.

Finally, the Committee recommended a bylaw amendment changing the disqualification rules for those hired by BHA or a BHA management company to not be as strict and to be more similar to the rules used for public housing task forces. This was moved, seconded, and adopted by a majority.

The meeting was running late, and the chair asked for permission to extend the session to finish up some other important business.

**4/ Memorandum of Agreement Between BHA and RAB:** John K. noted that there had been a conference call of an ad hoc committee to review and make recommendations to “tweaks” to the existing Memorandum of Agreement between the BHA and the RAB, since there will be a new MOA as of April 1, 2017. A handout summarized these. It was moved, seconded, and adopted to adopt these changes.

**5/ Secretary Report; Moving Up Alternates Due To Removal of Members for Unexcused Absences:** John M. reported that there were 2 family members (Betty Walker and Emilia Perez) and one elderly/disabled member (Jackie Rice) who had missed 3 or more RAB meetings without excused absence, and he had sent them correspondence and did other follow-up. Betty Walker had responded and said she intended to come to future meetings; others did not respond to him or the respective chairs. Betty R-W said she had been contacted by Emilia who said there was a cab problem (questions were asked why the chair was not contacted); David said he had

tried to reach Jackie and had heard from others at her site that there may be a health/hospitalization issue. John M. recommended that Emilia and Jackie be removed as there was no response through the normal channels, and that the Alternate 1s (Arlene Carr and Modesta Ballester), who have met minimum attendance, be moved up, but that no action be taken yet on Betty Walker given her contact. This was seconded and adopted. It was noted that Modesta Ballester may be away for a month or so on family matters, so would not assume her member responsibilities until she returns. Notice should be given by the Secretary to the members and alternates of this action.

6/ **New Business:** Judith had suggested inviting City Councilor Tito Jackson to a RAB meeting, but given limited time, this discussion was tabled to a future meeting.

Steve Meacham alerted the Board to a struggle that City Life/Vida Urbana is having with an owner of about 20 buildings owned by the Mayo Group and managed by Advanced Property Management, trying to insure that the rents demanded are within BHA Section 8 payment standards so tenants can afford to stay; Arlette is one of the affected tenants. There is a rally about this on March 2, and RAB support for this struggle could be discussed at the March meeting (handout given, but without details on the March 2nd rally).

7/ **Evaluation:**

Positives: Good info, civilized, organized. Tried to include everyone in the discussion.

Needs Improvement: Stayed on one topic too long, and meeting was too long, too much repetition. Need to continue to learn to respect each other.