

Boston Housing Authority RAB Meeting 3-9-17, at 125 Amory Street

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

Elderly/Disabled Public Housing: *Members* Michele McNickles, Marlana Nania, Norman Younger, John Maloni; *Alternates* David Turney (Alt 1), Alex Rosin (Alt 2): 6

Section 8: *Members* Edna Willrich, Jung Wing Lee, Lennox Tillet, Marilyn Lopez, Tara Ruttle, Stephen Tracey,; *Alternates*: Arlette Coleman (Alt 1), Karen Stram (Alt 3): 8

Absences excused: Val Shelley, Carole Sullivan, Ron Johnson, Betty Carrington (Family Public Housing); Jung Wing Lee(Section 8); Jeanne Burke-Patterson, Bettie Cutler, Richard Gurney, Eugenia Smith, Modesta Ballester (Elderly Disabled)

Others: John Kane, Vivian Lee, Bill McGonagle, Edna Rivera Carrasco, Wilbur Commodore, Tanjirene Smith, BHA; Mac McCreight and Lauren Song, GBLS; Pamela Hoyt (Franklin Hill); Ethel Hall, Stanley Smith, Therese Brown, Robin Williams (Section 8); Steve Meacham (City Life/Vida Urbana)

The meeting was chaired by Kassandra Ledesma, with help from Edna Willich; David Turney was Timekeeper and Phyllis Corbitt was Sergeant at Arms. Minutes of prior meeting were approved.

1/ **Assessment of Fair Housing/Amendment of Memorandum of Agreement**: Wilbur Commodore, BHA General Counsel, noted that federal law requires HUD, and HUD in turn requires those getting funds from it, to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH). In 2015, there was a new rule issued on this. The BHA and the City of Boston are collaborating on doing an assessment of fair housing with an analysis of data and recommended fair housing goals which will become incorporated into the annual and five-year plan for the BHA. The BHA is also to have a community participation process, and this is where the RAB comes in—it is the body which will review BHA’s data and recommendations and give feedback on that.

There was a computer projection presentation which shows the Assessment Tool and mapping data that HUD has provided in its analysis of fair housing and some examples of pulling out data. One of the key areas is reviewing racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty. HUD provides data for Boston and its region (Boston/Cambridge/Newton). Wilbur distributed a data printout and can make available to the RAB guidance about how to use the Assessment Tool; there were handouts on links and a brief description of AFFH. Wilbur and John will discuss how best to get the slides from the presentation, etc., available for the RAB. Wilbur said there were 3 key questions RAB members should think about: (a) assume you can afford to pay higher rent, where would you choose to live? (b) Why? (c) What changes would have to happen in your community for you to want to stay there?

In terms of the timetable, the plan is to have a first draft of the assessment out by May 1st (that is ambitious), with a 30 day comment period. Wilbur anticipates it would be good for him to return to the RAB at its June meeting. By August, a 2nd draft would be out, and there would be a 45-day comment period. Plan would be to submit to HUD by October. Since BHA won’t hear back

from HUD by the time the FY 2018 PHA Plan is due (period on that would start in Nov. 2017), once HUD approves the BHA/City AFFH Plan, it would be part of the PHA Plan for FY 2019.

John noted that last month, the RAB had approved a MOA with the BHA; BHA was making one small change, to reference the RAB's role in the development of the AFFH.

2/ **Grievance Procedure**: Bill said that he had taken the discussion from the last RAB meeting back to BHA Legal and the Division of Grievances and Appeals, and all of the recommendations were being adopted: (1) outreach to public housing & Section 8 tenants to be on the grievance panel (and Section 8 can serve); (2) grievants can choose to have case heard by panel or hearing officer; (3) there will be some training after the outreach; and (4) there will be confidentiality agreements (to not disseminate private tenant matters discussed at hearings). On the outreach, he will send a letter to all residents & participants, and thought it would be a good idea for this to also come from the RAB and be signed by the chairs. In response to a question, Bill clarified that the per diems that someone receives for serving on the grievance panel is exempt from rent calculation. A motion was made, seconded, and approved, for the chairs to co-sign the letter with Bill to aid in recruiting members to the grievance panel.

3/ **Request for Support of Residents Seeking to Limit Rent Increases (APM Properties)**: Steve Meacham from City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU) followed up on this item, which had been briefly discussed at the last RAB meeting. Steve asked for the RAB's support for a campaign they have involving 20 buildings with 300 units in the Hyde Park/Mattapan area where the owner has requested significant rent increases. About 1/2 of the tenants, including Arlette and another BHA Section 8 tenant who attended the meeting (Stanley Smith) have Section 8, and many of them are through BHA. The increases demanded by the owner would require Stanley, for example, to pay 67% of his income for rent. Section 8 tenants are no longer safe from displacement. CLVU is pressing to get the owner to commit to keeping rents within the Section 8 payment standard, so that tenants don't have to pay more than 30% of income. CLVU was successful after a long campaign in getting another big owner, City Realty, to agree to this. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously adopted (22 votes) to adopt the letter of RAB support that CLVU had proposed, and have it be signed by the chairs. If people want, they could come to rallies and refer to the RAB letter of support. Mr. Lee asked what BHA could do. Steve mentioned that BHA has agreed in the past, rather than put people on the voucher clock and press them to move out, to extend the search period so that negotiations can progress, and this collaboration has been helpful. Lauren Song from GBLs, who works on the APM campaign, thanked the RAB for its support. Edna asked her if there was anything residents could do if they are discriminated against for having Section 8; Lauren said there were a number of organizations who pursue fair housing complaints about this, and in particular there is a testing program through Suffolk University that can help.

4/Committee Reports/Discussions:

Budget Committee: Concetta noted that the National Low Income Housing Coalition informed the RAB that the conference is full and those selected by the RAB were wait-listed. She said that the Committee wanted to pass on concerns/issues to be discussed with Policy & Procedures on the Travel Policy & agreement that arose from the selection & then last minute drop outs, including: (a) what if there are issues with mobility, or a person would require a PCA, etc. to attend an out-of-town conference; (b) what if there are issues with needing a translator in order to

understand the conference, and this is not a service being provided by the conference; (c) if there were different ways to get to a conference, and some were cheaper, should only the least expensive way of traveling be covered (for example, if traveling by plane would be cheaper than traveling by train). The Committee also thought it would be beneficial to have a Travel Workshop once the Travel Policy & Agreement are finalized. In addition, there were some legal issues about what would be permissible for the RAB in terms of making these financial choices about use of conference budget (for example, if the decision was that a PCA's attendance would not be funded, but this might affect whether a particular person could attend). The Committee also thought the time period for pulling out (after initially saying yes to a RAB-paid conference/event) should be shorter, i.e., 48 hours. There was also some discussion about use of funds for equipment—i.e., conference call equipment; equipment to aid with interpreting. Apparently the cost for the conference call equipment would be too high, and should be held off until BHA makes some later changes with technology upgrades; John noted, however, that the interpreter equipment might still be available for an affordable cost.

A major discussion was whether to ditch the stand-by assignments, since costs will only get higher if done last minute before the conference (air & hotel), and to reallocate the money for other uses. Moreover, if money is not obligated by March 31st, the new RAB year would start, and any unutilized money from the RAB's current year would be rolled over (but then BHA would not provide the full increment for the new fiscal year, but only the difference). After some discussion, there were a series of motions, seconds, and votes approved by the Board: (a) The Board cancelled the stand-by assignments for the DC NLIHC conference; (b) the Board decided that the left-over funds (roughly \$5,000) should be used to increase the slots for the Mass. Union conference in May (it was originally to be 6), and to cover Mass. Union affiliate dues (\$100); (c) that there should be an allocation of up to 10 slots (cost of \$35/person) for the Mass. NAHRO legislative lobby day at the State House on April 13th; and (d) any left over money could be used to preregister for the NARSAH conference in the fall. For the Travel Policy/Agreement Workshop, it was agreed that other than food & transportation costs, there shouldn't be extra costs, since it would be held at Amory Street, and so could likely be covered out of the regular budget and not the conference budget. Concetta also reminded people to get in requests for reimbursement for travel or child care before March 31st, so that it would come out of the pre-April 1 budget.

The Board also decided that it made sense now to figure out who would be attending the Mass. NAHRO legislative lobby day (since it's the same day as the next RAB meeting). The volunteers were, for Family Public Housing, Phyllis, Janis, and Concetta; for Section 8, Marilyn and Edna; and for Elderly/Disabled Public Housing, David and Alex—i.e., a total of 7. There was a reminder that if people can't go, they need to let chairs know well in advance, so that we can recoup the \$35 for each.

The Board also decided to determine the volunteers for the Mass. Union event, since this would avoid having to do too short notice on hotel rooms. The recommendation is to go on Saturday and stay over that night, and just have one night over. Those volunteering were, for Family, Betty Rae Wade, Kassandra, Arlene, and Phyllis, for Elderly/Disabled, Michele, John, and David, and for Section 8, Karen and Edna. People decided that this allocation was OK even though it wasn't even (more for Family, less for Section 8), as it matched the volunteers. Karen asked that people be informed of the date by which they need to drop out without penalty.

Policy & Procedures Committee: David noted that the next Policy & Procedures Committee meeting is Wednesday, March 15th from 6 to 8 p.m. at Amory St., and the focus will be on both refining the Travel Policy and Travel Agreement. (The Committee had presented something earlier to the RAB, but John Kane had provided some further considerations, and the Board's recent experience with the D.C. conference—see Budget Committee notes above—also needed to be factored in.) The meeting is open to any RAB members (although you have to be a committee member to vote—but any committee recommendation must be approved by the Board), and David asked that people contact him in advance if attending. Mac noted that the Board had adopted a number of bylaw amendments last month, but the one that was tabled is still tabled as it related to the Travel Policy & Agreement.

4/ **New Business:** Edna asked the Board to approve adding Therese Brown as an additional Section 8 alternate; Therese spoke, referred to her prior experience on the RAB, and that she would look forward to learning more through new experience. The Board voted to add her as Section 8 Alternate 5.

Concetta asked that there be a pool of translators available so we could get translators on short notice as needed; a translator who was a BHA resident had been arranged for tonight. This was approved by the Board.

John Kane suggested that it might make sense to create an ad hoc committee to help with recruitment of new Grievance Panel members. There was a motion and second, and some discussion, but the Board then voted to table the item since it didn't appear final action could be taken until we knew more about when the Administrator's letter, etc. were going out.

Edna asked the Board to add Robin Williams as an additional Section 8 alternate. Robin referred to her prior RAB experience, said that she had had health issues that hadn't allowed her to continue, but that she was better now and interested in serving. The Board voted to add her as Section 8 Alternate 6.

/ **Evaluation:**

Positives: Good, wonderful, liked the food & the charring, kept out the side bars, no fighting, definitely had some progress.

Needs Improvement: Only heard part of what was said on Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, and only understood about 20% of it.