

MINUTES . . . REGULAR MEETING . . . AUGUST 12, 2024

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session August 12, 2024 at 4:00 P.M. (IN PERSON MEETING). Those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT

Mr. Rogelio Ortiz, Vice Chairperson
Mrs. Iris Linares
Ms. Rachel Leon
Mr. J. Marc Rittle

ABSENT

Mrs. Lindsey A. Clifton, Chairperson

Also present were: William W. Matz, Jr., Esq., Solicitor; John Ritter, Secretary-Treasurer; Diana Moreno, Assistant Secretary; Staff Members and members of the general public.

The Minutes of the **Regular Meeting** of July 8, 2024, were presented and approved as amended. Mrs. Linares made a motion to accept the minutes of July 8, 2024. Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Linares/Rittle/Ortiz; Nays, none; Abstain: Rachel Leon abstained from voting as she was not present at the previous meeting, new to the board.

Mr. Rittle noted two clarifications in the minutes. First, regarding Resolution No. 2595 approving the ACOP Changes. Mr. Rogelio Ortiz was not present, and the resolution showed Mr. Rogelio as a "nay." He also requested to add a comment on top of page 4, about the homeless preference in the ACOP. He noted that the definition of homelessness has changed since the decision was made to remove the preference due to complications. He offered his professional services to help clarify the new definitions, should the authority review the homeless preference again in the future.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the **Treasurer's report** for July Listing 2024. Ms. Leon seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Linares/Rittle/Leon/Ortiz; Nays – None

Under the Treasurer's report, Mrs. Linares inquired whether participants were paid to take the survey, to which Ritter confirmed they receive a \$20 stipend. He explained that the stipend acts as an incentive to increase turnout and helped significantly in obtaining signatures.

Under the Financial report, Mr. Snyder provided a correction to his report, updating the cash rent amount to \$3,295,491 instead of \$2,395,491. He discussed the agency's ongoing shortfall and a meeting with HUD. The agency remains in a shortfall situation, with funding expected by December. Due to the shortfall, no new vouchers are being issued, although those with existing vouchers can still use them or switch units. The landlords are still being paid monthly, as the agency has sufficient funding for now, but they will need to request additional funding from HUD by late November or December. He also noted that expenses, especially utilities, are steady but will increase towards year-end.

Mr. Snyder mentioned that if HUD provided full funding, there wouldn't be an issue; limited funding is the problem. Mr. Ritter added that they stopped leasing at 120% of fair market value, but those already on it remain for two years, causing the current financial strain. Mr. Rittle then asked if the issue stemmed from HUD policies, and Mr. Ritter explained that while the policies initially helped, they are now problematic as extra funds are retracted. When asked if the change was due to COVID, Mr. Ritter confirmed that it started because of COVID.

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**Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the Financial Report for July 2024.
Ms. Linares seconded the motion.**

Roll Call: Ayes – Linares/Rittle/Leon/Ortiz; Nays – None

Nothing reported under Courtesy of the Floor.

Under Old Business, Deputy Executive Director's position, Mr. Ritter explained that there was an issue with the Civil Service exam where a work behavior was mistakenly removed. This error was on their end, despite the submission being made three months ago. After some back and forth, the issue is resolved, and we're now waiting for the exam to be posted. Ms. Leon asked how long that position had been open and what happens to the budgeted money when it's vacant. Mr. Ritter explained that the position, which has been vacant for nearly two years, was previously held by him. The budgeted funds remain allocated to that position and are not used for anything else. Ms. Leon thanked him for the clarification.

Under Old Business, Lynfield Community Center Lease, Attorney Matz stated that all requirements with the organization have been completed, the committee has met, and he is now finalizing the draft to send to the Lynfield representatives for further action.

Mr. Ortiz raised concerns about the Lynfield Community Center offices, noting that since November 20th, when he was asked to vacate the space for BHA residents' use, the offices have remained unused for over eight months. He questioned whether he could regain access to the office, particularly for use by the Second Harvest food bank. Mr. Ritter responded that the front office is slated for renovation. Mr. Ortiz stated that the renovations were done six months ago. Mr. Ritter said he would follow up with the Northeast office to clarify its current use. Mr. Rittle asked for clarification about whether the office space is part of the lease or if it is a separate issue. Mr. Ritter explained that the space is divided into three sections: one for the Lynfield Tenant Council, one for Second Harvest, and one for the front offices. This arrangement was established in the new lease, ensuring that all parties could use the building.

Attorney Matz acknowledged the delays, citing various challenges, including gathering necessary information and addressing common area issues. He assured us that the process has been slow due to complexity, not due to intentional delays. Mr. Ortiz once again expressed his willingness to use the office if it remains unused. That Second Harvest would be willing to utilize it, especially given the community needs and rapid growth. He seemed resigned to the situation, acknowledging that if the Northeast is now using the space there's nothing more to do about it.

Under the Chairman's report, Attorney Matz stated Chairperson Clifton was unable to attend today's meeting. As a result, no report was submitted.

Under the Executive Director's report, Mr. Ritter reported that an NSPIRE inspection is scheduled for August 20th at the Parkridge and Lynfield developments, with 30-35 units to be randomly inspected. The first NSPIRE inspection for AMP 1 (Pembroke, Marvine, and Fairmount) concluded a few months ago, and we haven't gotten a definite answer yet, but we estimate a score of 86 out of 120, which is considered good, especially for Pembroke, the oldest development.

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Mr. Rittle asked if this is a point system, to which he replied yes. He also inquired if this is a HUD requirement or if it was implemented as his own policy to conduct inspections. Mr. Ritter stated that it's a HUD requirement that used to be a REAC inspection. They completely revamped their inspection process, resulting in a more effective inspection. High Rises get them all inspected at the same time because it's one AMP. We got our SEMAP (Section Eight Management Assessment Program) score for fiscal year 2024 ending March 31st and we received 100%.

The Choice Neighborhood Steering Committee meeting took place on March 25th at 9:00 AM at the Boys and Girls Club. As of today, seventy-three surveys have been filled out and checks have been mailed out, initiatives are ongoing, with the final day for submission set for August 17th during Field Day.

In addition, the team plans to visit a Choice Neighborhood project, but efforts to schedule a visit with Camden Housing Authority have been unsuccessful, necessitating consideration of an alternative location. Also, the Drug and Criminal Activity Meeting is scheduled for August 14th at 10:00 AM at the Monocacy Conference Room and the Resident Advisory Board Meeting is scheduled for August 15th at 1:00 PM at the Monocacy Community Room, with four new members joining, bringing the total to seven. Again, the City of Bethlehem will be hosting COVID-19 and flu vaccination clinics, with the first taking place on October 8th at Monocacy, from 9:00 to 10:00 AM.

Under Committee Reports, Resident Advisory Committee, Mr. Ortiz proudly announced that three more students were signed up for college, bringing the total to ten students sent to college in the last two and a half years through the program. Three players from the Southside Sluggers were selected by Moravian University, Desales University, and another university for a full sports scholarship. The program has seen success with one student recently signing with a major league team, the Minnesota Twins. He highlighted the success of the Southside Sluggers program, which recently won its first championship, and expressed pride in the program and its accomplishments. In addition, they have a college team called the East Coast Collegiate Baseball League, and some of their kids will be part of the Southside College team. In addition, he expressed gratitude to Mr. Ritter, his wife, and Grace Church for their donations of fruits and vegetables, and mentioned the ongoing success of the food bank, which serves over four hundred individuals every two weeks.

Mrs. Linares inquired about the funding for the scholarships, and Mr. Ortiz explained that they are provided by the universities through sports scholarships. And he emphasized the importance of matching students with universities that align with their career goals, ensuring they have a solid educational foundation. He said, "We aim not only to make a difference for one child but for many children, so they can return and give back to the community." He noted the upcoming Resident Advisory Board (RAB) meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 15th at 1:00 PM.

RESOLUTION NO. 2596 - APPROVING THE ELEVATOR CONTRACT FOR TWO HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS
(Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the elevator contract for two high-rise buildings.
Ms. Leon seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Linares/Rittle/Leon/Ortiz; Nays – None

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Under New business, the board welcomed the new Commissioner Rachel Leon, who expressed excitement about joining the board. Ms. Leon mentioned having hearing loss on one side and may ask for repetition if needed. Attorney Matz suggested she might find it helpful to sit on the side where she can hear better.

Nothing reported under Miscellaneous Reports and Other Business or Public Comments.

Vice Chairperson Ortiz noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, September 9, 2024, at 4:00 P.M. at the Monocacy Tower, community room. There being no further business to transact, Chairperson Clifton declared the meeting adjourned.

John Ritter

Executive Director