

MINUTES... REGULAR MEETING... JULY 8, 2024

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session July 8, 2024 at 4:00 P.M. (IN PERSON MEETING). Those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT

Mrs. Lindsey A. Clifton, Chairperson
Mrs. Iris Linares
Mr. J. Marc Rittle

ABSENT

Mr. Rogelio Ortiz, Vice 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 June 10, 2024, were presented and approved. Mrs. Linares made a motion to accept the minutes of June 10, 2024. Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Linares/Rittle/Clifton; Nays - None

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the Treasurer's report for June 2024. Mrs. Linares seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Linares/Rittle/Clifton; Nays - None

Under the Financial report, Mr. Snyder reported that the expenses up to May seem high for the Central Office, primarily due to reversing entries from the end of the fiscal year in March. Right now, he must do everything manually. But with the new computer system, which is still being implemented, it will simplify this process by automating reversals for future pay periods. He's not concerned about the current administrative expenses. Secondly, they had a meeting with HUD about the budget shortfall and as previously mentioned that we were allowed to lease up to 425 units. HUD has since changed its policy and has halted new leasing. Currently, 33% of housing authorities are experiencing a shortfall, with HUD having set aside \$2 million against a \$3 million deficit they're scrambling to find money. They advised us to maintain current leasing levels until further notice. Our cap is the current number of leased units. We can allow tenant transfers, but we can't add new tenants until HUD permits.

Mr. Rittle inquired about when the shortfall might be resolved. Mr. Snyder responded that it should be by November or December. HUD's deficit estimate is around \$300,000, while Mr. Snyder's estimate is about \$265,000 due to different calculation methods. He clarified that the shortfall means insufficient funds to pay current landlords and tenants, and it's related to HUD funding, not the internal budget. The cost of leasing has risen because they are leasing at 120% capacity but only receive funding based on 99.5% of last year's expenses, leading to overspending based on the current allocation. Mr. Rittle asked if the number of people leasing was high. Mr. Snyder responded that they are below the expected leasing levels. He explained that not leasing up to capacity eventually results in losing funding. Chairperson Clifton added that the issue is the cost of the vouchers, not the number of vouchers, to which Mr. Snyder agreed.

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 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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Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the Financial Report for June 2024.

Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Linares/Rittle/Clifton; Nays – None

Nothing reported under Courtesy of the Floor.

Under Old Business, Deputy Executive Director's position, Mr. Ritter reported that we are still in the process and hope to have the position posted soon.

Under the Old Business, Lynfield Community Center Lease, Chairperson Clifton reported that Mr. Ortiz and his team have submitted all necessary documents to complete their application. Mr. Ritter, Attorney Matz and Chairperson Clifton have a meeting scheduled next week to finalize the internal review of the application and lease draft. After that, they will schedule a meeting with Mr. Ortiz and his community support team to review and sign the lease. Depending on their availability, it could be completed by the end of the month.

Under the Chairman's report, Chairperson Clifton announced that the next Choice Neighborhoods Steering Committee meeting will be held on July 25th. She also mentioned that after the June board meeting, they held a board executive session to discuss Conflict-of-Interest disclosures and reviewed draft bylaws. A sub-team will revise these bylaws for the board's consideration and public discussion. While the completion timeline is uncertain, they are progressing quickly. Lastly, she informed Mr. Ritter that she won't be available for the August board meeting.

Mrs. Satullo added that the next Choice Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for July 11th at 9:00 AM, though there was a possibility of moving it to the end of the month. She mentioned a pop-up event scheduled for July 12th aimed at increasing survey responses. Mrs. Satullo provided an update on the survey progress, noting that thirty out of 180 Pembroke households had completed it, with a goal of achieving 70% participation. She also highlighted efforts to boost visibility through community engagement, including an upcoming pop-up event featuring music and grilling, which had generated excitement. Despite the survey's length, there had been no refusals to participate, and respondents were patient and cooperative. Chairperson Clifton thanked Mrs. Satullo for the update.

Under the Executive Director's report, Mr. Ritter introduced Mr. Joseph Long, former Chairperson of the Bethlehem Housing Authority, who was present to deliver a picture to Commissioner Ortiz. Mr. Long, served as a Commissioner and Chairperson for over 19 years before retiring in 2020, shared his extensive involvement with the youth in the community, including coaching in the Northeast Little League and Collegiate Ball. A passionate baseball fan and member of the New York Yankee fan club, he selected a picture of Roberto Clemente at his last meeting. Recognizing the importance of Roberto Clemente Park in Southside Bethlehem and his dedication to the youth, he presented the picture to the housing authority. Mr. Long emphasized, "Roberto Clemente is a revered figure for our kids, past and present." The board expressed their gratitude and honored Mr. Long for his contribution.

Mr. Ritter reported that twenty-five survey checks were sent to residents last week. They are planning a bus trip to the Camden Housing Authority for their Choice Neighborhood Project, though no date has been set. The Choice Neighborhood Barbecue Night on June 21st had a good attendance despite the heat, with many surveys completed. Mrs. Satullo is organizing a door-to-door canvass starting soon to gather more surveys. The Project-Based training session on June 28th with Dennis Morgan from HUD was informative, and another session is being scheduled as the initial meeting wasn't long enough. The Drug and Criminal meeting scheduled for July 10th is canceled due to Yardi training. The City of Bethlehem Health Center will offer cold and flu shots at all four high-rises to begin with Monocacy on October 8, 2024 from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM, Litzenberger from 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM, Bartholomew from 1:30 PM to 3:00 PM, and Bodder House from 3:30 PM to 4:00 PM. Information will be posted to encourage participation. Mr. Linares asked who will be attending the Camden trip. Mr. Ritter said the trip will include some members of the Steering Committee, staff, and others. They haven't finalized the list yet, but they plan to use a tour bus, so they should be able to accommodate a suitable number of people.

Mrs. Satullo added that the focus right now is the survey. They're at 14% of their goal for Pembroke Village with about sixty-two surveys completed. They have door-to-door canvassing starting tomorrow at 10 AM and will continue Wednesday evening from 5-7 PM and Thursday during the day. Just Born workers may join us once we finalize their schedule. The survey is lengthy, but residents have been very enthusiastic about participating. We aim to report the results at Field Day on August 17th. Chairperson Clifton asked if the 14% completion rate for Pembroke specifically? Mrs. Satullo said it's 14% of the goal for Pembroke, which is 126 households. Also, once they finalize the Camden trip date, they'll share it widely and invite all board members and staff. It's a chance to see a community that has completed the planning and implementation phases and to ask any questions.

Chairperson Clifton inquired about residents' reactions to recent nearby violence and the availability of support. Mr. Ritter noted that there hasn't been significant outcry from residents, with incidents occurring close to but not on housing authority property. There was one mental illness isolated incident. The police maintain a strong presence and effective communication. Ms. Zulma Rodriguez added that while there isn't a formal coordinated response, local officers effectively refer tenants to free counseling services, and management provides reassurance and support. Mr. Ritter added that it was nice to have the city's support for the barbecue night, especially since all our officers were either on vacation or occupied with other duties. The city sent out five officers who walked the neighborhood and interacted with everyone, which was a real asset and was seen as a positive outreach effort.

Under Committee Reports, Resident Advisory Committee, the next RAB meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 15, 2024, at 1:00 PM. Gwendolyn Flores announced that Bodder now has an official board. The elections took place on June 21st, and the newly established council and board will begin meeting in August.

RESOLUTION NO. 2595 - APPROVING THE ACOP PROPOSED 2024 CHANGES. (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the ACOP proposed 2024 changes.
Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Linares/Rittle/Clifton; Nays – None

The Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP) was reviewed by the board and staff. Under discussion were the preferences, various preferences are included in the plan, such as VAWA (Violence Against Women Act), veterans, and local preferences for residents or workers in Bethlehem. Preferences are specific to each Public Housing Authority (PHA). If HUD declares a natural disaster that would supersede the preference. Rent Calculations Transparency, questions were raised about the transparency of rent calculations. The current practice involves providing tenants with an amendment letter outlining rent changes, but there was a discussion on whether more detailed calculations should be provided to tenants proactively. Reviewed preferences and point systems such as VAWA, veterans, and local residency/work are still active. Over time, some preferences (like homeless preference) have been removed due to issues like misuse or logistical complications. The point system used for prioritizing applicants has been replaced with a date and time application system for newer applications.

Secondly, online applications and web-based waitlists are the current practice. This started during COVID but has been maintained. Assistance is provided for those who have difficulty with online processes. Thirdly documentation and transparency concerns were raised about whether tenants are given a copy of their rent calculation. The current practice involves providing an amendment letter but not a detailed breakdown of calculations. There was a discussion about whether including a detailed calculation would improve transparency and reduce misunderstandings. Fourthly, discussed the policy requiring over-income families to find other housing after 24 consecutive months plus a 6-month grace period. This policy was formally adopted last year and is in line with HUD guidance. Notifications are sent to residents, and the policy aims to ensure housing serves those in need. Lastly, the ACOP will be accessible on the BHA website. Due to its size, printed copies are not provided unless specifically requested.

Chairperson Clifton clarified that a mandatory 30-day public comment period is required following board approval to address any resident inquiries or concerns related to the ACOP revisions. Mr. Ritter added that we must be compliant, as we must do September re-exams under new HOTMA regulations. Chairperson Clifton thanked the staff for all their hard work.

Nothing was reported under New Business or Miscellaneous Reports and Other Business.

Under Public Comments, Bartholomew House resident expressed confusion and frustration about being asked to remove their roses and holiday decoration while similar plants on the other side of the fence remained untouched. They felt unfairly targeted despite maintaining their plants responsibly. Ms. Rodriguez explained that complaints from other residents prompted action and emphasized the need for consistency with HUD regulations to avoid chaotic conditions seen in other buildings. The policies aim to manage the high-rise properties uniformly, contrasting them with family developments where residents had more freedom to plant gardens historically. Chairperson Clifton acknowledged the potential inconsistency in policy enforcement and suggested considering communal gardening spaces, while Ms. Rodriguez and Mr. Ritter stressed the difficulty of pleasing all tenants while maintaining order and HUD compliance.

Chairperson Clifton noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, August 12, 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