

Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board (BHA RAB) external notes, July 13, 2023

Note--Meeting was held at 125 Amory Street and was hybrid. As noted below, there were major tech problems (lack of wifi in room, and Sahar Lawrence from BHA arrived later in meeting and managed to set up hot spot & Zoom projector so that members could see each other. All of those joining by Zoom entered during the “What does the RAB mean to me” portion of the discussion, and believe we lost some people who may have tried to join on time and did not remain on for almost an hour, waiting. For that reason, lack of “attendance” at this meeting will not count, since people may have tried to “attend” but ran into tech issues and thought they would not get fixed because they waited a good while.

Ground rules were approved. Minutes from last meeting were approved (with one abstention), with two corrections –chair said that the minutes implied she was assisted in chairing, and she was not, and a Leased Housing member said that she was ill for the last meeting and this had been relayed to her vice-chair, but this got missed for the attendance notes.

1/ Officer Elections—Mac McCreight from GBLS noted that John Kane from BHA wasn’t able to join yet, and so tried to briefly summarize what he believed John would say--I.e., no one had submitted a bid on the “redo” of the election Request for Quotes (for contract between \$10,000 and \$50,000 for Election and Outreach Partners). As a result, John was doing “market research” to determine if there would be a likely response for broken out requests for quotes in the range from \$1,000 to \$10,000, which wouldn’t require the same level of submission. However, it was not yet known what response was likely to this, or when the RAB elections might be likely to take place. So the same issue existed as last month when the RAB voted to hold officer elections—nothing to indicate that RAB elections would be soon (so officers of current board might only serve a few months).

Mac suggested that given the wifi problem, the officer elections be postponed since it would not be fair to have elections without Zoom working (and not knowing if people would drop out waiting even if eventually wifi was fixed). It was moved, seconded, and unanimously agreed to postpone the officer elections and extend existing officers’ term for another month in the meantime (from those RAB members in the room—quorum was present).

2/ Budget Committee—The Committee chair presented on this (notes didn’t appear in on-line packet). She noted that while a bank appointment to change signatories on the account had been set up (to remove the former Treasurer’s name), it was decided to hold off because of the likely change in officers which might again change signatories. It was noted that at the Budget Committee meeting two people were found to be in “bad standing” (with regard to ability to get RAB-paid conferences or run for office), either for lack of timely expense reports or return of unaccounted per diems. The back-up traveler was substituted for NARSAAH attendance. It was clarified that (a) a \$20 expenditure that didn’t have back-up was witnessed by a RAB chair, and so should be OK’d and (b) those in bad standing could, by getting in late expense reports (with approval of their chair), clear the “bad standing” issue prospectively to be able to run for a RAB officer position. One of those in bad standing had issues with vision, and so there should be

reasonable accommodation. It was clarified that six RAB members were approved for the Sept. 2023 NARSAAH conference—hotel rooms have been booked, and the Treasurer is arranging air flights.

The Committee had also discussed Chromebooks. One member clarified that she hadn't been furnished an extension cord when she was given Chromebook, and so there was none to return. The Committee had recommended that since Chromebooks have been upgraded, it really didn't make sense to return them (and that would raise issues of purging personal data, checking for viruses, etc., which otherwise might be involved with recycling), and so people who had gotten Chromebooks through RAB could just keep them (and if there were others interested in Chromebooks that the RAB still had at office, they could say so.) It was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved from those in-person (wifi not yet operational) to do this.

One of the RAB chairs turned in an expense report for a member, and it was acknowledged that with this, the “bad standing” issue for that person would be fixed prospectively. (Later in meeting, the Treasurer asked that the chair take back the paperwork since there was also an issue of reimbursement for food, and she wanted to have everything together to cut the check.) The chair and the second member lacking good standing (with the vision issue mentioned above) should resolve expense report issue and bring to Budget Committee.

It was noted at Budget that the RAB email list may still have some issues (for example, a corrected email was provided for an alternate). It was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved from those in room that chairs should contact each of their members to see if contact sheet information right, and share that with Fred & Simone at BHA.

The Treasurer reported on the bank statement (original balance, new deposits, withdrawals & checks) for end of June, and discussed parking, food charges, office supplies (including plant), and Zoom expenses. She noted that while the RAB had to renew on Zoom in May to keep Zoom going (and in fact had to pay late fees since Zoom still was using Lenox as contact & hadn't gotten a timely response), the Committee realized that there were 7 licenses and the RAB didn't need this many, but 2 should suffice. The Treasurer was able to get Zoom to change this, and got a partial refund on the Zoom payment for this coming year. People mentioned the need for a Zoom training for chairs, and Sahar from BHA said she could do this. In addition, she thought it might be possible to get lower costs, etc., through help of Tech Soup, and she will look into this for RAB.

3/ What Does the RAB Mean to Me? A RAB chair led this discussion, which had been put on last month's agenda as “homework” for RAB members to think about. Around this time, Sahar set up the hot spot and projector and RAB members who had been waiting on Zoom were finally able to get into the meeting—but it was identified that at least one RAB member had been on earlier but had dropped out because of the long wait. Mac gave a short recap including that the RAB officer elections were postponed.

The chair said she thought the RAB was here to help BHA with complaints from tenants, to help tenants know about their rights, and to advise on certain conditions that we see—not to bicker with each other about who did X or Y on the RAB. Are we heading to make BHA a better

place? When people go to conferences elsewhere, things aren't going so well with their housing authorities, and things are much better with tenants' relations with BHA. Our job should be to tell Chauncy Street how it can better assist tenants.

A RAB member said she was in state public housing & an immigrant—initially she thought she had no voice, and thought the RAB was a good idea to get residents' voices out there, but not an individual thing, but also to support those living in silence. Work in partnership to improve policies and get resident input.

A RAB member said the RAB was to work on the 5-year and annual plans, and particularly to see who needs what at what sites, say what was good and what needed change.

A RAB member said that she is partly affiliated with BHA and partly not because she is Section 8. Private management at her complex said she couldn't talk with neighbors. There used to be resident meetings and they stopped. Would be interested in hearing how BHA can better support Section 8 tenants.

A RAB member said people who are on a board should know what it is. HUD had mandated that RABs provide input on the annual and 5-year plans. Sometimes she wondered if we should be having all of the in-between meetings, as opposed to focusing more on reading & commenting on the federal and state plans in the fall. RAB is not an umbrella organization for LTOs—that's more of a role for BHA's Resident Empowerment Coalition.

A RAB member said she was new to Boston Housing, and thought there would be more networking, and help more on a local level. For example, St. Botolph has since 2017 supposed to be redeveloped, but things are still up in the air. Need to recruit more members from elderly/disabled sites.

A RAB member said that he joined the RAB for many of the same reasons he got involved with his Task Force, to be eyes and ears on issues at his complex and similar sites. He thought his background in maintenance was helpful because he could ask the questions when it seemed that conditions were not being addresses properly.

A RAB member said she had joined the RAB to help the community, and to bring things back to the community that she learned at RAB meetings.

A RAB member said that she really wanted to get knowledge to make the community better, and found out that the RAB's job was to advise on plan & get feedback (what residents like & what they don't like In what BHA has proposed). Bring back information, know about rights, not be intimidated or bullied either by management or by other residents.

A RAB member said she was gravely disappointed that Policy & Procedures hasn't been meeting to discuss issues—for example, for the Section 8 program, seems like private landlords can pass along utility costs and increase rent, discussed her 8-year battle with the owner of her complex.

A RAB member said that the RAB had helped her for herself & for her community, and she still finds that she is learning new things at each meeting.

4/ Unfinished/New Business, Announcements, etc.

RAB T-shirts--The RAB was given a choice of two T-Shirt logo designs, and voted by a large margin to go with the logo without the circles. These will be in white (doing colors would raise a whole bunch of logistical & cost issues). Goal would be to have these available by the RAB BBQ Networking session on Sat. Sept. 9th and for those going to NARSAAH. People should email Simone with size needed.

BBQ Networking Session: Need volunteers to help with planning (had some listed on last month's minutes). A RAB member said she could help on the day of the BBQ.

Evaluation—Good meeting, but obviously big issues with internet/wifi ("oh lord") as well as with being able to adequately hear people once Zoom worked. Good discussion.

Future Meeting Locations—A number of people mentioned that it was difficult where we kept shifting location, and there should be a permanent location where Zoom was reliable but people could come in person. Several asked about use of the BHA 11th floor conference room at 52 Chauncy Street, which does have good Zoom set up, but there are physical capacity issues. Others said it would be good to encourage more in-person attendance, but obviously some sites which had good internet (such as Urban Edge where we met last month) were tight for physical space. Hailey space is physically big enough but Zoom arrangements not good there. Sahar said she'd take all these suggestions and check back with others.