

Draft external notes, Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board

Meeting of July 14, 2022 (done on Zoom)

Minutes (with correction) from last meeting approved. While the last half-hour of tonight's meeting was set aside for United Front Against Displacement (UFAD) to do a presentation, they indicated today wasn't a good date.

1/ Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Update: Kelly Cronin from BHA Leased Housing did an update on this. BHA had presented this a few months back, but recent HUD regulation changes meant the plan had to be revised, all in a way that would help families use the program. She noted that BHA and Compass Working Capital had expanded the program since 2019, that BHA was up to 1300 Leased Housing participants in FSS and aimed at 1500 by end of 2022, and that BHA has opened this up to residents in 2 federal family public housing developments (Alice Taylor and Hailey), with 50 to be signed by end of year. In 2021, BHA had its largest graduating class (90), and \$835,000 in escrowed savings had been provided.

The HUD changes included: (1) allowing families earning between 50% and 80% to get full, rather than pro-rated, escrow; (2) letting any household member over age 18 to be the head of household for FSS use; (3) modifying the requirement about how long people have to be free from public assistance to graduate (used to be 12 months, now just on day of graduation); (4) can use FSS in the Section 8 Mod Rehab or Homeownership program (not just regular voucher or project-based voucher); (5) change to end date of contract allows people to be on longer (end of 5th year not from enrollment but from when regular recertification is after that). BHA also clarified that while they will work to minimize forfeiture of escrow, if escrow is forfeited, it will be split evenly among FSS participants.

A Section 8 member asked what the cause was of forfeiture, and how people could access homeownership. Kelly said forfeiture happened if someone was terminated from the Section 8 program for cause. She also said that while the homeownership program was a logical progression from FSS participant, you didn't have to be in FSS to be eligible, but would have to meet certain criteria in terms of credit score, participation in first-time homebuyer program, qualification for loan, etc., and BHA had a video on this and she'd get out links. Kelly also explained that the Homeownership Voucher program was not available to BHA public housing tenants (there might be other homeownership options for them, but not this one).

A public housing member asked if the escrow comes from BHA's portion of the rent; Kelly explained no, it was based on what the tenant's increased rent contribution was due to employment. So say the tenant's rent share went from \$0 to \$250/month as a result of a job, the tenant would have to pay that, but BHA would set aside \$250/month that could be used when the person graduated (or could be released to meet interim goals). There is no set amount of minimum hours for employment in order to participate. Kelly gave the example of drawing on escrow mid-term to meet FSS goals--resident's car broke down, used it toward new car so employment could continue.

Someone asked if there would be any problem with a family converted from federal public housing to Section 8 to take advantage of both the Earned Income Disregard when they were in public housing and then use FSS later for Section 8. Kelly said no. Several public housing members asked if Mixed Finance sites could use it; Kelly explained that if the tenant had BHA Section 8, could enroll, but only the two public housing sites were in the pilot, so would depend. Someone asked if this was only federal, and Kelly said yes. Mac asked if the LEAP program, that provided something similar for state public housing and MRVP (Rachel Goodman from BHA had discussed this at the RAB in the past), still existed). At first, Lueteshia Raymond said yes, and that Sahar Lawrence was the coordinator, but later, she corrected, and said that was the LAUNCH program for youth ages 18-24, and she'd have to check on status of LEAP.

2/ Committee Reports: Budget Committee notes were read & approved.

Policy & Procedures: While the Committee met on June 29, and had come up with additional questions to ask UFAD to address in their presentation, since UFAD wasn't coming tonight (and that material was shared with the Board already), no need for further discussion.

Picnic: Straw poll was done about interest in attending on proposed date in August near Orchard Gardens (limited to RAB members/alternates and those working with RAB), and 18 indicated yes. Ad Hoc Committee will further investigate box lunch options/prices, as well as any chair/table rental, and split up contacting likely attendees on menu preferences.

3/ RAB Elections: John Kane from BHA noted that the RAB last had elections in 2016, and had also made a number of recommendations after that (including that there would be separate elections for Family and Elderly/Disabled Public Housing. However, when election planning started in 2020, the pandemic hit. There was a recent meeting of an Ad Hoc Election Committee, including four RAB members, along with John, Lueteshia, and Mac McCreight from Greater Boston Legal Services. John summarized the Committee recommendations into 4 parts:

A. The RAB would authorize the Ad Hoc Election Committee to work with the BHA on developing a scope of work for outreach & election facilitation and hiring of people to do this (the Committee would report back on this regularly to the Board). John estimated that procurement would take 2-3 months, and then it would take 2-3 months to do the information meetings and elections, with the goal to get them done by Jan.-Feb. 2023. This was moved, seconded, and approved.

B. Someone asked if the information and election sessions would be virtual (on Zoom) or in person. John noted that the Committee had recommended in person (with requirement that people show vaccination cards); someone asked this be expanded to include negative COVID test within 48 hours. A number of people noted that it was unknown exactly what things would be like then. Eventually a decision would have to be made by the Committee. It was suggested to table the "in-person" versus virtual discussion for now, but have the guidelines be flexible enough to cover all options.

C. For public housing, bylaws would be revised to say that residents could nominate themselves or others, and the nominations would not need to be made by the designated LTO

representatives. The final vote on nominees would still be done by LTO representatives (to comply with HUD rules). There could be a process either of nominating at the information meetings or for a certain period of time afterwards; in addition, people would not need to be in person to be nominated or elected, as long as it was clear that the person was willing to serve and meet RAB requirements. This was moved, seconded, and approved.

D. The process of doing elections at Mixed Finance sites would be simplified, and would follow what the housing was prior to redevelopment--I.e., if it was family public housing, it would stay that way for the RAB, and same with elderly/disabled public housing. If it was project-based Section 8 but had never been a BHA public housing site before, it would be Leased Housing. This would avoid the problem of splitting up residents in confusing ways at the same site. This was moved, seconded, and approved.

Mac will work on a set of election bylaw amendments to bring to the RAB prior to its next meeting, and the revised bylaws would be used for the scope of work.

4. Unfinished/New Business, Announcements, etc.: It was OK'd to extend the meeting. John Kane noted that there was a nonsignificant change to the PHA Plan in terms of a plan to dispose of a small vacant lot near Orchard Gardens to sell to a plumbing company to allow a driveway. Someone raised a concern about not losing land and how development decisions were made. An Orchard Gardens tenant said that the residents at Orchard were familiar with this proposal and it made sense.

Question about putting external minutes on BHA website was tabled to next meeting given that meeting was over time.

Evaluation: Good meeting.