

Boston Housing Authority RAB Meeting 6-13-19, at 10 Lamartine St. (Anna Mae Cole Center, Hailey Apartments, Jamaica Plain)

Family Public Hsg: *Members* Val Shelley, Meena Carr, Phyllis Corbitt, Betty Rae Wade, Concetta Paul, Aracelis Tejada, Ron Johnson, Arlene Carr, Janis McQuarrie. *Alternate:* Nicole Beckles (Alt 1): Meriem Arachiche (Alt 2): 11

Elderly/Disabled Public Hsg: *Members* Michele McNickles, Dave Turney, Marlena Nania, Arthur Alexander, Eddie Hartfield, Jeanne Burke Patterson, Modesta Ballester : 7

Section 8: *Members* Jung Wing Lee, Edna Willrich, Stephen Tracey, Lennox Tillet, Karen Stram, Therese Browne. *Alternates:* Robin Williams (Alt 1), Georgia McEaddy (Alt 2): 8

Absences excused: Eugenia Smith, Dan Horne, Annaliese Cooper, Cheryl Semnack, Jeannie Archibald

Others: John Kane. Bob Terrell, Joe Bamberg, Bill McGonagle, David Gleich, Rachelly Suriel, BHA; Mac McCreight, GBLs; Judy Burnette, Gabrielle Rene, Steve Meacham, CLVU [check]; interpreter.

The meeting was chaired by Michele McNickles. Phyllis Corbitt was Timekeeper; Robin Williams was Sergeant at Arms. Minutes from the prior meeting were approved. It was reported that alternate Jeannie Archibald was in a cab accident while on the way to the RAB. RAB members welcomed Jeanne Patterson back after an extended absence.

1/Section 8 Small Area FMRs: Bill McGonagle, BHA Administrator, spoke with the RAB about this. He noted that the BHA administers about 13,000 Section 8 vouchers in the greater Boston area where tenants lease units in the private market, but the subsidies provided and the rents that can be approved are set based on a Section 8 Fair Market Rent (FMR) averaged for the entire metropolitan area. This figure often isn't close to the rent in some communities. During the Obama administration, HUD developed a new method of figuring out these FMRs by zip codes (small areas), and this would allow the rent and the subsidy to be more consistent with market conditions in those areas. BHA has now seen a good opportunity to take advantage of this, and has proposed adopting this as of July 1. It is in the middle of a comment period (going until June 24, with a public hearing the other night). BHA had hoped to coordinate with the other major providers of Section 8 vouchers in the area—particularly DHCD and Metro Housing Boston—so they'd take the same approach, and initially both MHB and DHCD staff liked this. But apparently the word has come from higher up that the State doesn't want to do this. BHA and the Mayor are trying to change DHCD's mind. Bill pointed to a recent Adrian Walker column in the Globe about this.

David Gleich said that BHA was able to use a significant increase in the Section 8 FMRs as the result of a rent appeal with HUD to do this. Someone asked if this was similar to what Wilbur Commodore had presented to the RAB about promoting fair housing opportunities; Bill said yes, and that Bob was carrying forward that work. Bill said that he had been pushed by some to do what Baltimore and Dallas had done—to cut rents steeply in some neighborhoods and increase them otherwise—and he was against that, as that really forced people into moving because of

economics, as opposed to letting residents make their own choices but improve their opportunities to access higher rent areas. The overall increase made it possible to avoid any significant cuts (largest would be \$30/month in some neighborhoods). Mac McCreight pointed out that under a “hold harmless” provision allowed by HUD and adopted by BHA, there would be no negative impact on existing tenancies.

Karen Stram said she really liked this change, as it recognized the difference in rents among different areas and would help people stay in or access areas that otherwise were too expensive for them to afford. Mac asked Bill if it might be helpful for the RAB to write a letter to its sister Participant Advisory Board at Metro Housing asking for their support in adopting a unified approach on SAFMRs, and Bill said it could. Mac suggested he could draft it for the RAB but suggested that it not have to come back to the full Board and leave it to the chairs’ discretion to approve the final version; a suggestion was also made that it could be cc’d to the Governor. A motion and second were made along these lines, and the motion was adopted. Steve Meacham also noted that City Life/Vida Urbana was sponsoring a zip code meeting in Dorchester on June 22nd and people there will be writing and asking the governor to support the State making this change, too.

2/ Redevelopment at Lenox, Bunte Apartments, and St. Botolph: Joe Bamberg gave an update to the RAB on this, and several members asked if Bill could stay for this presentation (he was going to meet with the head of the Chicago Housing Authority and Bart Mitchell of The Community Builders later in the evening, but said he could stay for a bit). Joe noted that while the initial plan at these sites had been to use RAD, part of the problem is that RAD doesn’t supply enough money. HUD had recognized this by allowing 25% of the units to use regular Section 8 tenant-protection vouchers. BHA wanted to keep the door open to getting more money through the Section 18 demo-dispo process (where Section 8 funding levels could be provided for all units), and therefore might simultaneously be doing demo-dispo applications and RAD proposals for these three sites, with Lenox likely starting soonest. Beacon has taken over ownership at the Camden state development, and BHA is finding out about the level of work needed there which will inform the Lenox proposal. Although it’s called demo/dispo, there would not be demolition, and the goal would be preservation of all units, no displacement, rents remaining at 30%, etc. In fact at Bunte and St. Botolph BHA would remain “on the ground” operating the sites, but to utilize tax credits would have to convey the property to a BHA-related affiliate. At Lenox, it would be a public/private partnership with Beacon. Joe guessed it would be about a year before there was any disposition to Beacon, but Beacon is the manager for both sites in the interim.

Mac noted that BHA has been holding regular meetings of a Mixed Finance Residents Group, in which a number of RAB members participate, trying to make sure that similar policies are applied for residents no matter what type of unit they may be in (public housing, Section 8 PBV, low-income housing tax credit). There’s been an effort to carry over a mixed finance grievance procedure currently used for public housing units to all the “affordable” units. For RAD units, there are guarantees of public housing grievance rights. However, at Amory Street, where there was a switch from RAD to Section 18, the closing process happened so rapidly that residents there ended up with a different set of grievance rights than has been contemplated. He was concerned that this not happen elsewhere. Bill said he wasn’t aware of this and agreed that everyone should get same rights and this should be revisited with The Community Builders (and

he'd mention this to Bart). Joe agreed that a Mixed Finance Grievance Procedure for all affordable units has been under discussion for a while and there's been general agreement by the BHA and private partners that it makes sense, and hopefully this will be finalized soon and then BHA can go back to The Community Builders to ensure Amory's policies are similar.

Janice McQuarrie said that Beacon had told residents at Lenox that there could be multiple recertifications. Joe said this was right, and was a product of the layering of subsidies. Section 8 and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits have different rules and reporting requirements. However, BHA will work with developers to try to avoid situations where people just completed one recertification and then have to go back for another.

Several residents also said they had heard Camden residents were fearful because of being asked new questions about immigration status. Joe said that Camden was a state site and the state does not have the immigration restrictions that HUD has, and that while BHA is using some federal (Section 8) resources to help with Camden redevelopment, BHA and DHCD have reserved state MRVP resources so that all families can be served. Bill emphasized that both he and the Mayor believe strongly that there should be no displacement of families related to immigration status, and are strongly opposed to HUD's latest proposed change in its immigrant status rules and will be getting comments to HUD opposing this. Mac pointed out that there is a hand-out in the materials distributed to the RAB about the proposed rule and recommended that people go to the website, keep-families-together.org, to learn about what actions can be taken to oppose the rule. Concetta noted that a number of Congressional representatives that came to the recent NAHT convention in D.C. discussed national opposition to the proposal.

Michele noted that as part of the assessment of capital needs at St. Botolph, people asked that showers be installed instead of bathtubs. There is also some confusion about what would happen with being switched to Section 8, etc. It will probably be helpful to bring back some of the training materials used at the March 2019 RAB conference/training on redevelopment to the site.

4/ Committee Reports

Conference Coordination: John Kane presented the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Training Committee that there be another RAB-sponsored conference in the fall, with a similar set-up to that done in March (at Anna Mae Cole center, with food provided, and divided into 3 segments of roughly 90 minutes each). The conference is tentatively titled, "How to Keep Your Housing (or Your Subsidy): Getting Help and Staying Strong". It would include workshops on how the eviction & Section 8 termination process works (including participation from management, grievance panel, Mixed Finance, and possibly the Housing Court); on how to get help for yourself or neighbors for different issues (Homestart/BHA collaboration on resolving rent issues; Tenancy Preservation Program on helping disabled tenants get services; role that Resident Services Coordinators play in private managed sites); and how tenants can organize together to resist rent hikes/displacement or to present legal defenses (with help from City Life/Vida Urbana and TAP/GBLS). It was moved, seconded, and approved that this recommendation be adopted. John will notify the full RAB when the next Committee meeting is to plan out next steps.

Budget Committee: There were a number of documents/reports from both David Turney and Arlene Carr. It was pointed out that members who attended conferences needed to complete expense reports and turn them into their chairs, and those would then go to Arlene and then to

David to be sure everything was done and consistent. The report identified where reports were incomplete (and where this would affect the ability of an individual to be approved for future conference attendance until the issues were resolved). It was also noted that Eddie Hartfield had satisfied the Budget Committee that his failure to attend the lobby day at NLIHC was excused, but it was noted how important this event is.

Policy & Procedures Committee: Meena Carr and John Kane reported on this—there was a meeting, and those in attendance unanimously agreed to table the meeting on resident participation with Bill McGonagle until after 4 members of the RAB who’ve also been active with the Resident Empowerment Coalition (REC) in the past—Meena, Val Shelley, Arlene, and Edna Willrich—had an opportunity to meet with BHA senior staff about what’s happening with the REC and report back to the RAB. Many of the issues in this area had to do with the REC and its function in supporting residents and resident organizations in getting and staying recognized and complying with BHA requirements. There was a write up of certain key questions/issues, drawn from Mac, Betty Rae Wade, and feedback at the committee meeting. In response to Nicole Beckels’ question, it was stated that people should hold off on sharing that specific list with task forces until after the REC discussion, but people should feel free to add to the list.

Outreach: Robin presented the recommendation of the Ad Hoc committee on organizing a picnic, and it was agreed that the term “RAB members” is intended to include RAB alternates. A motion was made, seconded, and adopted to adopt the date, location, and purpose recommended by the Committee (Saturday, August 10th from 1-4 p.m. at the Orchard Boys & Girls Club), but that the question of whether to hire a vendor or to purchase BBQ, etc. hasn’t yet been decided. Any members with suggestions should get them to the chairs/committee, since we’ll have limited time between the July RAB board meeting and the picnic and will need to finalize decisions by then.

5/ Unfinished/New Business, Announcements: Phyllis noted details about the upcoming NARSAAH conference in New Orleans in September, and the Board should at the July meeting select who’s attending. Karen noted that there will be an “anonymous” box where people can leave suggestions/recommendations in case they are afraid of retaliation.

Evaluation: Good, interesting. Too much side talking/talking over others, needs to be some more respect of each other.