**Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board (BHA RAB) External Notes, 3-13-25 – Hybrid meeting held at Bellflower Court, 6-8 pm**

Ground rules & agenda were approved (altered on BHA presenters & order). Later in meeting, minutes from last meeting approved.

1/ Presentation by Kelly Cronin, BHA, on BHA Rent Collection – Kelly Cronin of BHA (both as part of her presentation and in response to questions that came up from RAB) described what the BHA’s public housing rent collection process is and how the amount of rent owed by tenants has ballooned (Kenzie Bok, BHA Administrator, said now up to $13 million). There have been negative audit findings from both HUD and EOHLC on this. When BHA says to funders that it needs more help, the funders push back and say, but shouldn’t you be collecting the money due from tenants. So BHA’s process, if a tenant is behind on rent by 2 months or more (unless the tenant has an existing repayment agreement which it’s honoring), is to schedule a private conference to discuss the issue with the tenant. After the private conference, if rent is still owed, BHA will move forward to issue a notice to quit, along with a list of places where tenants could seek help. (The notice to quit is required to get help through the RAFT program.) If the rent still isn’t paid up by the time the notice expires, BHA will take the case to Court. If the rent is paid, BHA will dismiss the case. If there is a pending application for help with back rent (these often take 6 weeks), the court should continue the case. If there is a remaining balance, in most cases BHA will work out a court repayment agreement. There may be cases where the balance is just too large and BHA may then require a move-out agreement. But BHA’s goal is to get the rent paid, and not to displace tenants or increase homelessness. BHA has a draft letter on this for families and would love to get RAB feedback on it before it goes out.

It was pointed out that it’s often hard for public housing tenants to get RAFT help—they have to show hardship as to why they fell behind (since rent should be affordable). Metro Housing Boston has shared what situations may qualify. BHA managers have gotten this but we can make sure residents get it too so people know what’s needed. It was noted that many of these cases had built up over time, and BHA wanted to get cases resolved sooner before large, out-of-control balances developed.

Several people noted that there were problems at some Mixed Finance sites not doing the right thing—not offering private conferences, not being respectful to residents or accountable, particularly with staff turnover. There was concern that where Mixed Finance owners in the past followed BHA’s lead on tenancy preservation, they might misread BHA’s change and not follow BHA’s practice. Kenzie noted that she and Raul Leon, BHA director of Mixed Finance, were working on a letter to all Mixed Finance owners and could include this. Her hope would be to have a meeting of residents and owners after that letter has gone out.

A RAB alternate asked if there was training for managers on the changes, and Kelly said yes, and in addition, BHA Legal is involved. She also asked if GBLS could be involved and what rights tenants had in court. Mac McCreight of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) said that GBLS was happy to get intakes from tenants who needed help (would need to verify they were income eligible for free legal services) and GBLS will provide the contact information for intakes. Tenants might have defenses – bad conditions that BHA knew about before the tenant was behind on rent, or staff not adjusting rent properly. At the same time, in many of the cases, it would be wise for people to start paying their ongoing rent and what they could afford toward the back rent, so back rent wasn’t growing. This might help in negotiating with property managers.

2/ Remarks by Kenzie Bok, BHA Administrator - Kenzie said she was here to address 2 issues. (1) the current federal environment, and (2) the recent letter she had provided about BHA maintenance of public housing.

On the HUD issue, Kenzie noted that over 90% of BHA’s funding comes from HUD. So far, BHA hadn’t lost any money. However, Congress is voting this week on whether to continue funding for this year. They never passed funding for the full year (Oct. 2024-Sept. 2025) and current funding will run out mid-March. A Continuing Resolution was passed by the House and is now in the Senate—while there is mixed feeling on that, if it passes, it will level fund things. That’s not great, since costs increase each year, but it’s better that no funding or cuts. If there is a government shut-down, BHA has reserves for a limited period. The bigger issue would be Section 8, since BHA doesn’t have reserve funds to pay landlords April 1 if there is no funding. However, Kenzie doesn’t think it will come to that given that many landlords have pushed to keep Section 8 funds flowing.

 The bigger issue is what Congress will do for next year’s funding. There is a Reconciliation proposal which could implement deep cuts in many domestic programs, including housing, in order to fund tax cuts. Details aren’t yet out on that. BHA is concerned about that not only for housing programs-- other cuts could harm BHA residents (for example, Medicaid reductions). It will be important to showcase the positive and important work done with BHA funding. BHA is talking with other housing authorities, but it would want the RAB’s help in mobilizing and getting resident stories out. Kenzie noted that the Mayor had testified recently in DC about the City’s values of being a welcoming City & BHA shares those values. The City and the State have been supportive of the BHA’s programs and this is helpful—different than the picture in some other parts of the country.

A RAB member asked if St. Botolph was still on course to being converted to Section 8, and Kenzie said yes. Another RAB member asked about whether the conversion from public housing to Section 8 may be risky. Kenzie noted that public housing was more politically vulnerable. In addition, the level of Section 8 funding allows both for ongoing operations and also to get needed rehab/repairs done. In addition, the Section 8 Project-Based Vouchers have a lot of resident protections built in.

A resident asked about delays in BHA repairs. Kenzie switched to her 2nd topic. She noted that during the pandemic, BHA wasn’t going to apartments except for emergencies—but this meant that there was a LOT of deferred work that built up. At the same time, staff left & wages went up & it was a challenge to staff back up. HUD did its review in 2023, right before Kenzie started. BHA implemented new systems, including a digital work-order system, since the old paper system meant there were a lot of gaps. From Oct. 2024 to now, the outstanding work-orders dropped from 17,000 to 2,500, and it’s dropping by 400/week. New Living Unit Inspections (LUIs) will begin in April.

A RAB member asked a question about getting laundry funds in Old Colony’s MOA, since the new buildings have common laundry facilities, and whether this could go back to cover all phases. Kenzie said she’d look into this. Another RAB member asked whether the fact that Faneuil is to b redeveloped meant that work orders won’t get addressed—Kenzie said no, Winn Mgt should address outstanding repair needs, and let BHA know if this is an issue. Another RAB member asked if the tenant-based Section 8’s were more at risk than PBV, and what about the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program. Kenzie agreed that PBV and homeownership units (often linked to FSS) had more protections if there were cuts. On the other hand, Congress has traditionally focused on renewing existing Section 8 contracts. Another RAB member asked about the impact of HUD staff cuts. Kenzie agreed this is an issue—so far, 10 people have been let go at the HUD Boston office. Concern will be that there’s no one at HUD to pick up the phone to respond to calls.

3/ Furthering Resident Engagement-Word about what the RAB is and what it’s doing gets out by word of mouth & through the RAB brochures. There’s apparently an outdated City Hall website that refers to it. The RAB wants to get this out to people as they engage—social media for young people, use of QR codes, training residents how to use their devices effectively for advocacy. The chair and an acting chair asked what would be most effective for their buildings/communities. A RAB member asked if completing the existing survey that would help—yes, it would. *It was moved, seconded, and approved to set up an Ad Hoc Resident Engagement Committee*.

4/ Committee Reports

A. *Budget Committee* – In the Acting Treasurer’s absence, a Committee member reported on this, and noted that the February bank statement was approved and there were some limited expenditures, mostly for food. There will likely be additional outlays this month for NLIHC conference. The Committee had recommended to both urge RAB members/alternates that had outstanding expenses for which they were seeking reimbursement to get those in. *The Board agreed to extend the period to get reimbursements (usually due by the end of each quarter) to 3/31* in case switchover in Acting Officer positions meant that necessary paperwork hadn’t gone through. There were some issues about Uber related expenses but it was noted that the Acting Treasurer had agreed to investigate & report back to Committee on that. BHA will work with Chairs & Acting Treasurer to get the NLIHC travelers their packets before they travel to DC for the conference on March 24-27. Bylaw

B. *Policy & Procedures* –Due to limited time left in meeting, the Committee chair just presented on the bylaw amendments that had been preliminarily approved at the last meeting. *It was moved, seconded, and voted unanimously to approve those bylaw amendments*. The Committee will be meeting again on Zoom on the first Monday evening in April (April 7). Board was otherwise referred to Committee’s notes.

5/ Announcements

* Next Month’s Meeting (April 10) – Elizabeth Aguilar of BHA noted that members of the Youth Council will be coming to the next RAB meeting in April, but given transportation difficulties for them, the chairs agreed that for April only, the meeting would shift to Ruth Barkley (Cathedral) development in the South End .

Evaluation - Went well, good participation, thanks to Kelly & Kenzie for their presentations and answering questions.