Boston Housing Authority Resident Advisory Board (BHA RAB) External Minutes 4-10-25

The Family Public Housing Vice-Chair Kimrah facilitated the meeting, went through the Ground Rules. Minutes from last RAB meeting were approved & agenda for this meeting reviewed.

1/ Boston Youth Council – Lydia Agro, BHA’s Chief of Media & Engagement, welcomed the members of the BHA Youth Council, who work with & get staff support from SPOKE. The Youth Council members wanted to know more from the RAB about its resident leadership experience and to share what they have been doing. Youth Council members from BHA-related housing (Gallivan Boulevard, Hailey, Barkley, West Broadway, in & near Mary Ellen McCormack, and the Section 8 program) introduced themselves. There was a slide presentation, showing tote bags Youth Council members had made from recycle cloth, T-shirts showing their fashion activism, with themes like The Internal Struggle Is Real and universal love. Individual rugs were made & then combined (Better Together). Mosaics and birdhouses were constructed at Archdale. Visual arts focused on telling the stories of members of the Youth Council & others (such as on the AIDS epidemic), as well as with new ways to perceive heroes (solving social issues). At Franklin Field, they made a rain garden mosaic. They assisted in doing 259 surveys of residents in 2023-2024. For the future, they want to focus on money & helping to navigate finances, while continuing to express feelings honestly.

The Leased Housing Chair thanked the Youth Council for their creativity, due diligence & bravery with public speaking Not easy). She noted, you are the future, and your input is important. The RAB welcomes you to be part of the process. The Acting Treasurer also welcomed them and mentioned he had been involved in youth programming when he was younger, and he then did a major in communication. You are paying it forward, and it is refreshing.

Youth Council members were asked questions—have you accomplished what you wanted, what things do you want to do? They said they wanted to beautify, and as the residents said with the mosaics, it made them happy in their community. They want to expand to have more youth, feel more open & open-minded. Another RAB member asked if there were ways the RAB could help? Youth Council members noted that they wanted to do a workshop at an elderly/disabled site, Hand-in-Hand, making people more comfortable to reach out. The Elderly/Disabled Public Housing Chair said they would be welcome at her site. The Family Public Housing Vice Chair said the RAB hoped to partner with their great work. The RAB is starting a community engagement process and we’d invite the Youth Council to participate. Seniors & youth sharing stories is important, as they can otherwise get lost. Question came up of how youth can join (youngest age is 15 and it goes to early 20’s). In the past, people were part of SPOKE program and after some involvement there could move up—this summer, there will be auditions to add 6 new members. It was noted that there may be other programs that can also engage youth (YouthBuild for those with interest in the trades or property maintenance/management, Design Corps for those interested in architecture), and it would be good to share that, since different youth may have different interests. SPOKE staff are in touch with YouthBuild, and BHA said it would be good to know of any BHA-wide opportunities for Design Corps (beyond Charlestown).

2/ Committee Reports

* *Budget Committee (including May 7th Mass. Union State House Event)* – The Acting Treasurer noted that the RAB Budget Committee had met right before the RAB meeting, but the bank statement for the period ending March 31, 2025 was not yet approved and was tabled as there questions on a number of items (no notes from that meeting given timing). In addition, with people just back from the NLIHC event, wanted to give people some time to get in their expense reports and return any unused per diems for which there were no expense reports. In addition, since 1st Thursday in May is on the 1st, that’s too early to get the bank statement, and proposal was to put Budget Committee on again for 2nd Thursday (5/8) at say 3 or 330, prior to the regular RAB meeting that evening. Elizabeth from BHA also confirmed that Kenzie Bok approved the RAB’s proposed budget for the current fiscal year (April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026).

One thing that needed to be discussed/approved was Mass. Union State House Day, which will be on Wednesday, May 7th, 2025, right before next RAB meeting. RAB needed to decide who would be attending and what funds to authorize for this event. Mass. Union said that the charge was $100 per person, covering things like T-shirts, lunch, and interpreter costs. However, if the RAB were willing to contribute $900, it could send 9 or more people (no cap), and it could be considered a co-sponsor of the event, and would also be included on the T-shirt. A poll was taken and eleven people indicated interest in attending. The Budget Committee had recommended, and the Board approved, expending $900 to be a co-sponsor for the May 7th State House Day event. The Board also said that if Youth Council members wished to attend, they could join. Material about the State House day will be sent out again.

* *Policy & Procedures Committee* – The Committee Chair summarized recommendations of the Policy & Procedures Committee meeting on April 7th.
  + *BHA Letter about Changes in Rent Collection for Public Housing* – David Gleich from BHA had shared a draft letter that BHA was thinking of sending to its public housing residents about its changed approach on rent collection. Mac McCreight from GBLS had done edits to BHA’s letter, and the Committee members proposed some additional tweaks. The Board OK’d this (BHA wanted to hear from the RAB on this by this week’s meeting).
  + *RAB Code of Conduct* – RAB had approved this back in February, but it hadn’t been circulated to get signatures. In the meantime, the Committee recommended adding a piece so that if information got to the wrong persons on the Board (for example, a former officer was contacted about a time critical item on an upcoming conference), this would be passed on to the right person. The Board authorized this change and getting the Code of Conduct around for individual signatures (one copy kept by each RAB member/alternate, and one copy in RAB office records).
  + *Further Bylaw Changes* – No formal bylaw changes can be voted on this month (any change needs to get out in writing a week in advance of RAB meeting). However, two ideas for votes at the May meeting came up, and te Committee thought it was worth getting Board feedback. One would be to change the RAB officer annual election date to the anniversary of when people first were elected offices. People favored this. The other proposal was to permit alternates to run for full officer positions, not just for assistant positions. A number of other suggestions came up and the Committee will work on draft bylaw revisions for its May 5 meeting and to be voted on at the May RAB meeting.
  + *ICE Raids in the Community and Knowing BHA Policy & Educating Tenants on Their Rights* – The Committee had also made a two-pronged recommendation here, both wanting to know more from BHA about its position about whether ICE entry into BHA properties would be permitted and under what circumstances (as well as privacy rights), and educating tenants on their rights (inviting a group like ACLU or similar to speak). There was some feeling that this wasn’t just limited to persons who were not U.S. citizens, but that there could be vulnerability due to racial/ethnic profiling, complications that persons with disabilities may have, etc. The RAB Board endorsed the committee recommendation.

3/ Reports Back From National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) - Six RAB members attended the NLIHC conference on the RAB’s behalf. One member noted that they found out a lot about pending litigation about challenged Executive Orders (34 pending), relevant to the prior discussion we had about ACLU. It was very informative on housing & other issues—a lot to take in. A second RAB member said he liked the visits to Capitol Hill to meet with members of Congress and their staff. A third RAB member shared a number of photographs from the event and a highlight for her was getting to know a prior BHA RAB Section 8 chair who was on the NLIHC board, still feisty in her 90’s (one of the awards is named for her and she accepted an invite to join us in the summer.) An author from the 1619 Project was there, and a lot of activist organizations. There were 8 meetings on Capitol Hill and 66 organizations participated in Capitol Hill Day. A fourth RAB member said she met a lot of activists (and even someone else that she could engage in sign language with) and felt very empowered. A fifth RAB member noted that we met people from all over, fighting for something in common. Ayanna Pressley made us feel special, recognizing each of us and asking our stories. A sixth RAB member said she did a lot of networking with her digital business card, and gave a shout-out to the Advocates Guide distributed at the workshop. It was noted that a lot of people are fighting for us, and we also need to be fighting for ourselves in our communities.

4/ Other Business, Announcements, New Business – Mac noted that the Treasurer, who is currently on a leave of absence from both her Board & Officer position, had submitted a request to extend her leave another 3 months (the current leave expires at the end of April, and the extension would bring the leave to the end of July). People asked if any reason or back-up paperwork was provided as a reason for the extension, such as medical or family circumstances. The request did not have any information. In discussion, some felt that more information should be obtained and the matter tabled. There was also some confusion about whether this was a removal from the Board. Mac clarified that no, this was a request to extend a leave of absence, and the bylaws gives this decision whether to grant a leave, and whether to extend a leave, up to the Board. (The bylaws do say that in no event will a leave go beyond six months.) Some said that leaves should only be granted for family or medical reasons (and perhaps the bylaws should be revised to say that). Some felt it was very important that there not be uncertainty with how officer duties were being carried out, and it was unfair to assistant officers who had to assume acting roles but their own position couldn’t be filled in during a leave. There was a vote, and there were 8 ayes (to deny the extension of the leave), 3 nos, and 1 abstention.

The meeting ended up without an evaluation.