

**MINUTES . . . REGULAR MEETING . . . SEPTEMBER 14, 2020**

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session Monday, September 14, 2020 at 4:30 P.M., Teleconference (Virtual Meeting). Those present and absent were as follows:

**PRESENT**

Mr. Joseph E. Long, Chairperson  
Mrs. Valerie McLendon  
Mr. Rogelio Ortiz

**ABSENT**

Mrs. Iris Linares, Vice Chairperson  
Mr. Greg Solderitch

Also present were: William W. Matz, Jr., Esq., Solicitor; Jay D. Schuster, Executive Director; Diana Moreno, Assistant Secretary; Housing Authority Staff Members; members of the general public.

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 10, 2020 were presented. Mr. Ortiz made a motion to accept the minutes of August 10, 2020. Mrs. McLendon seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes -McLendon/ Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

Mrs. McLendon made a motion to approve the monthly bills for August 2020. Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes -McLendon/ Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

No Old Business.

Under the Executive Director's Report, Jay had a two items. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, the CDC ordered a moratorium to continue on eviction action for non-payment of rent through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, HUD will be having a teleconference meeting regarding that matter. Secondly, the Resident Advisory Board met on August 13<sup>th</sup> at which time the Five Year Plan goals were reviewed with the staff and RAB members.

Mr. Ortiz reported a few items. First, they got a couple of truckloads of food from Blessings of Hope. They brought two truckloads to the Lynfield Community Center with over 30,000 pounds of refrigerated food. They support other non-profit organizations throughout the city of Bethlehem. It has been very successful. They served over 500 individuals with refrigerated foods, milk, juice and meats. The organization operates out of donations and Roy asked if we could support them with a contribution. They want to continue a relationship with us. Some of you have heard of them, they are at New Bethany Church and they've been at Lynfield Community Center. Roy asked if we could donate \$1000 because they're going to continue giving out truckloads of food throughout the pandemic. Mr. Ortiz said it would just be a one-time donation showing that we're supporting them as they continue to support the needy in our community. They're outstanding organization from Leona Pennsylvania and work from Harrisburg.

Second, Mr. Ortiz reported that Mr. Robinson is attending the board meeting with a gentleman named Lemuel Indio-Rodriguez associated with a boxing club. Mr. Ortiz said he is very happy that he's not only going to be working with our youth. Mr. Ortiz supports the idea, saying we need a boxing program, especially in BHA to keep kids off the street and to make sure they're going to be

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successful in society. Last, they're going to start a STEM after school care starting in the first week of October.

Chairman Long asked if we had something in writing from Blessing of Hope. Mr. Ortiz said the name of the gentlemen is Rafael Mañana, he's from the Mañana Foundation. He's an 18-year veteran from the Marine Corp. He was a federal agent for ten years. He had his calling from God and that is to help those who are in need in the community. Mr. Ortiz has been in close contact with Rafael and they've been helping the community out. Chairman Long asked that Mr. Ortiz forward information on the organization to Mr. Schuster. Mr. Ortiz said absolutely.

Mrs. McLendon stated that she met him and their organization has often reached out to help Parkridge. Chairman Long said okay. But there are quite a few organizations right now that are very active in light of the pandemic. Local organizations that are doing this too. If we're going to do something like that, I think we should look locally first. Just a precautionary thing, not saying that there's anything wrong with it but he would just like to take a look at it before we move forward. Mr. Ortiz said no problem. He will obtain paperwork and pass it on to the Executive Director, Mr. Schuster.

Mr. Schuster said we'll put it on the agenda for next month if Mr. Long would like that. Chairman Long said that would be a good idea.

Under the Deputy Executive Director's report Mr. Ritter had one item. The monthly meeting with the BHA Community police officers will be held on Wednesday September 16<sup>th</sup>. At that time we'll discuss any drug and criminal activity occurring on our properties. It will be a teleconference. Chairman Long asked John, how are the meeting going. Mr. Ritter replied he was just involved in his first meeting last month, and it was very educational.

Chairman Long asked Attorney Matz is he attending the meetings? Attorney Matz replied he has not been requested to attend. Chairman Long was just curious to know about the cooperation we're getting. Attorney Matz thinks it's still much better than it was, but there's still strains that occur here, or partial information issues. But all in all it's been much better. There's always room for improvement though.

Chairman Long stated that in light of the situation with our new Police Chief, he hopes that nothing adversely effects what we're doing right now with our program. Attorney Matz stated that we'll find out whether there's some sort of change in approach with the Deputy, although the Deputy is the one who brought this whole issue before us a year and a half ago.

Chairman Long agreed. That's the reason he raised that question.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2516 OF 2020 - APPROVING OF THE HVAC MAINTENANCE CONTRACT.**

**NOTE: (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)**

Mr. Ortiz made a motion, seconded by Mrs. McLendon, of the HVAC Maintenance Contract.

Roll Call: Ayes -McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2517 OF 2020 - APPROVING OF THE WRITE-OFF VACATED TENANTS ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE TO COLLECTION LOSS. NOTE: (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)**

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Mrs. McLendon made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ortiz, to the Write-off Vacated Tenants Accounts Receivable to Collection Loss.

Roll Call: Ayes -McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2518 OF 2020 - APPROVING OF THE ADDENDUM TO ACOP AND ADMINISTRATIVE PLAN, NON-IN-PERSON ANNUAL RE-EXAMS.** NOTE: (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mrs. McLendon made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ortiz, to the Addendum to ACOP and Administrative Plan, Non-in-Person Annual Re-exams.

Roll Call: Ayes -McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2519 OF 2020 - APPROVING OF THE REPLACEMENT OF LIGHT FIXTURES AND SMOKE DETECTORS IN FAMILY DEVELOPMENTS.** NOTE: (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mr. Ortiz made a motion, seconded by McLendon, to the Replacement of Light fixtures and Smoke Detectors in Family Developments.

Roll Call: Ayes -McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

**Employee Health Insurance Renewal** - Mr. Schuster had done a lot of work as far as negotiating with Blue Cross Blue Shield and the other agencies out there. After going with Capital Blue Cross health insurance quotes, he was able to decrease out negotiated renewal cost down by 13.9%. Capital Blue Cross is the only company offering us a refund on premium portions for \$94,675 this year, thus reducing the net increase of our current policy to a manageable 5% increase on our costs for the following year. In addition, we received proposals from other providers, however their rates were a 40% increase, well in excess of our budgeted amount. The recommendation is to accept the Capital Blue Cross renewal rate, which increases the Housing Authority's cost by 13.9%, the net increase of 5%, based on the projected refunds. This amount is well within our 2020-2021 budget projection that was approved earlier this year. (Attachment)

Mrs. McLendon made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ortiz, for the Employee Health Insurance Renewal.

Roll Call: Ayes - McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

Under New Business, we had a proposal to occupy the First Tee Center at Marvine. Chairman Long, said he received a letter addressed to the Board of Directors from the First Tee Association, which we still have an agreement with through the end of the year. They expressed that they would like to continue our agreement as we've had in the past. They have defined their interest and the program as to how they're going to pursue with Embrace a Dream and First Tee situation.

In addition Mr. Long read a proposal from Mr. Robinson, to make use of the First Tee Center in Marvine. Mr. Lemuel Indio Rodriguez, a former housing tenant, has expressed interest in starting a boxing program within the Housing Authority. He had once played basketball and softball for Robbie when he lived in Pembroke and has remained an acquaintance of his. Moving out of the housing area, Lemuel has started his own boxing gym with himself being the main trainer at the facility, having 30 years of being involved with boxing himself. Mr. Indio has had his boxing club for

the past 18 years now and his gym which is located on Semiole and Broadway on the Southside of Bethlehem. He and his trainers work with 60-65 kids. Four of his boxers are currently professional. Mr. Indio has worked with the youth for the past 25 years and is in the boxing hall of fame. He also received the blessing of Mayor Bob Donchez in his efforts to give lower income youth a chance to do something meaningful in life.

Mr. Robinson requested that the Board consider allowing Mr. Indio to open his training center back in his roots. He would oversee Mr. Indio and his gym, since it does fall under the recreation spectrum. Mr. Indio's boxing club will take care of heating and air conditioning in the building, as well as has insurance for his facility through USA Boxing. The idea would be that he would put a full gym in the space, however he would like to leave two of the golf driving ranges so that we can still operate the golf program that I run.

The other idea Mr. Indio has is to start a dance studio as well. It should be noted that Allentown's gym just recently did this, and they had 28 youth show interest already. Mr. Robinson said he appreciates their time and ask that they give the proposal thought and consideration and allow them to do something positive that is inspiring to the youth of the Housing Authority as well as the Lehigh Valley.

Chairman Long said he appreciates the proposal. He also read a letter he received from the First Tee Organization indicating their lease expires the end of this year. They have undergone many recent changes, including new Board Members and since this agreement was initiated in 2005, there is virtually no one with any legacy knowledge or the background and context of any conversation that may have taken place. The issue is there isn't anybody in there that knows what went on before they did organize and put together the First Tee." He remembers when we first started, we met with Peter Fuller, who was the owner of the Golf Course in Catasauqua. After discussing with him, I had seen the program and operation up there and we had decided to start in town with Marvine. What they're looking at now, they plan to come back to use the building with an after school program in the spring and the fall for kids from Marvine primarily two days per week for 8 weeks. They've had success in getting kids from both the schools before COVID, and feel it's crucial to get them initially exposed to First Tee. What they're asking for is a renewal of the agreement they had, to continue with the First Tee Program. Chairman Long added with a new Board and new people at the helm of First Tee, he would like to look at both of the proposals that are on the table.

Chairman Long also asked Mr. Robinson did they have a boxing program before with the Boys Club. Mr. Robinson said yes. Chairman Long asked if they still have it with the Boys Club. Mr. Robinson replied no. They've moved out of the Boys' Club. Chairman Long asked if there was a problem with the Boys and Girls Club.

Mr. Indio stated there was no problem, the only issue was the hours. The problem was that the Boys Club closed at five in the afternoon and he needed access to the facility. He talked to Bob Donchez, and who helped him out with the place he currently uses. The problem with the place on Broadway is that the kids from Pembroke have to come all the way to Broadway and he doesn't have any parking at Broadway either. He never had an issue with Gary, and was glad to work with the Boys Club.

Chairman Long suggest that we table the request right now. Right now, the building would not be available to anybody else but them, contractually. He recommended that we put both options on the table and discuss it between now and the next meeting with the Board.

Mrs. McLendon asked is the building not available to anyone until the lease is up? Chairman Long replied yes, and the lease expires at the end of the year. First Tee still has the lease to the building. He said after talking to some of the people over there now, what happened was because of the change of the Board of Directors and the leadership in First Tee, they kind of got out of sync with the program at Marvine. They started working more in Berks County and Allentown with the First Tee program. Now, that they are more aware of what's going on and what we have in Marvine, they definitely want to come back and put the program together full strength again. We can't just shut them out. He suggested that we sit down and look at what we have in front of us with the boxing program and the First Tee program. Chairman Long would like to talk to the Boys Club of Bethlehem and get a little background as to why we don't have a boxing program.

Chairman Long also added that we had a situation with a gas leak within the last month or two, and many of our residents had to be evacuated from their homes until it was safe for them to get back in, and the First Tee was used as a facility for that. We've never had a problem before, but we did with the gas leak and we used the First Tee as a backup. With what's going on over there now, Chairman Long would like to further discuss the matter with the board.

Mr. Ortiz stated that he doesn't know Mr. Indio Rodriguez personally but he knows when he was at the Boys & Girls Club, he was dealing with the heat issue. He had his kids from Lynfield attending the club and he brought this problem up to the housing authority back then. He went into the boxing room and it was freezing, and he questioned Mr. Indio as to what was going on with the heat, and he claimed that it's always been that way. Second, if there was a change of leadership with the First Tee, if they changed leadership that doesn't excuse them for pretty much abandoning our kids in our community. He believes golfing is a good program but there's going to be more youths involved in boxing than in golf. It's a good way for them to release their stress and learn discipline, especially the situations that they're in at home and school, and it'll keep them off the streets. We need to support Mr. Indio when it comes to this boxing club that he wants to open up.

Mrs. McLendon stated that if there's a problem, he would still be willing to let them use the center for evacuation because that would be more important at the time. Chairman Long agreed.

Mrs. Rodriguez, FDO property manager suggest to Chairman Long, that maybe a survey can be done to see the interest from the tenants for boxing. Within the Hispanic community here, I know that there is a lot of interest in boxing, football, and basketball more than golf.

Mr. Robinson mentioned that he did do a survey this year on the First Tee program, they sent flyers out to all our residents asking about the golf program, and out of all of the surveys that were sent out, his number was on there for them to call me, and he got one phone call. That was it.

Mrs. McLendon commented that we don't have the same kind of kids that we used to have years ago. Right now, they're very aggressive. Her personal opinion, she thinks you would get more kids off of the streets with the boxing program versus the golf program.

Chairman Long said they appreciate it. He would like to sit down and look at both sides of the story presented. We still have an agreement with First Tee until the end of the year, and he wants to look closer into what's being presented.

Mr. Schuster reported that the Boys and Girls Club requested that we continue to pay for the two summer part-time people, Genesis Velasquez and Henry Velasquez throughout the school year to assist with the kids being in hybrid learning. Many of the children are there during the day at the club and they need supervision.

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Mr. Ortiz made a motion, seconded by Mrs. McLendon to continue to pay for the part time help at the Boys and Girls Club throughout the school year.

Roll Call: Ayes - McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays - None.

Mr. Schuster introduced Ms. Christine Fairtag who is the Executive Director at the Lehigh County Housing Authority and her assistant Ellen and their solicitor, Mr. Herman.

Ms. Fairtag was present with Mr. Herman, they presented the Bethlehem Housing Authority's solicitor, Attorney Matz, with a Cooperation Agreement between Lehigh County Housing Authority and Bethlehem Housing Authority. Lehigh County Housing Authority's field of operation consists of Lehigh County outside of Allentown and Bethlehem. They have a building that is owned by Valley Housing Development Corporation, and Lehigh County Housing Authority is negotiating a sale to purchase a 40-unit senior housing building that is located at 1547 Shoenersville Road in Bethlehem, which is the Lehigh County part of Bethlehem. Since Bethlehem is in Bethlehem Housing Authority's jurisdiction, they wanted to enter into an agreement to purchase that to preserve affordable housing in the Lehigh Valley. The same transaction was done with a property on Goepp Street in the City of Bethlehem and the same type of cooperation agreement was done at that time. "Our Housing Authority's missions are the same, to preserve affordable housing in the Lehigh Valley."

Chairman Long indicated that we have an agreement with Lehigh County, another building on Eaton Avenue.

Mr. Schuster stated he needs the Commissioners' approval to proceed. It presents no liability to the Housing Authority, and they've done this in the past.

Chairman Long commented, he would like to look at the agreement and consider the proposal.

Ms. Fairtag said they have intentions of closing by the end of this month.

Mr. Schuster provided a copy of the agreement to Attorney Matz who has reviewed it, and it's identical to the previous agreement.

Attorney Matz commented that it's not inconsistent with the last two transactions that the Authority has seen since he's been the solicitor. In each case the terms are identical and the position the Housing Authority has had until now at least with those first two, it didn't have an appetite to enter into assisting in the same form that is being offered by Lehigh County or Northampton County. He had no legal objection to it, it's just whether Housing Authority has the desire to do what's being done by another housing authority, which is entering into our field of operation.

Mrs. McLendon asked if we've done this before.

Chairman Long replied yes. We've done it with Northampton County also. Mr. Ortiz commented we need more affordable housing in our area.

Chairman Long agreed. But the fact that they're coming into the City of Bethlehem and we as the Housing Authority has control over what goes on in here. But in the past, we've made similar agreements and he doesn't see a problem with it. And the language is similar as to what we've done in the past. His recommendation is to move forward.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion, seconded by Mrs. McLendon to accept the corporate agreement as presented by the Lehigh County Authority.

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**Roll Call: Ayes – McLendon/Ortiz/Long; Nays – None.**

**Under Miscellaneous Reports & Other Business, once again, Mr. Ortiz thanked Mr. Ritter and his wife for volunteering their time to help out with the Grow a Row program,” giving out produce to the community.”**

**Chairperson Long noted that the next regular board meeting is scheduled for Monday, October 12, 2020 at 4:30 P.M. (Virtual Meeting)**

**There being no further business to transact, Chairman Long declared the meeting adjourned.**

***J. D. Schuster***  
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**Jay D. Schuster**  
**Executive Director**