

MINUTES... REGULAR MEETING... OCTOBER 17, 2022

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session Monday, October 17, 2022 at 4:00 P.M. (HYBRID Meeting). Those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT

Mrs. Iris Linares, Chairperson
Mrs. Susan Acevedo
Mr. Rogelio Ortiz
Mr. J. Marc Rittle

ABSENT

Mrs. Valerie McLendon, Vice Chairperson

Also present were: William W. Matz, Jr., Esq., Solicitor; Jay D. Schuster, Secretary-Treasurer; Diana Moreno, Assistant Secretary; Staff Members and members of the general public.

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of September 12, 2022 were presented. Mr. Ortiz made a motion to accept the minutes of September 12, 2022. Mrs. Acevedo seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Acevedo/Ortiz/Linares; Nays - None

Mrs. Acevedo made a motion to approve the monthly bills for September 2022.
Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Acevedo/Ortiz/Linares; Nays - None

Under Courtesy of the floor, Mr. Richard Snyder mention, he would like to address the board before the second resolution. Chairperson Linares responded, sure. Mr. Snyder thanked Chairperson Linares.

Nothing reported under Old Business and nothing under Chairperson's report.

Under the Executive Director's report Mr. Jay Schuster reported three items. First, he reported that on September 21st, an informal meeting took place with the City of Bethlehem and the BHA administration regarding community and economic development within the city. The Mayor expressed his interest in the future to partner with the Authority to development any BHA vacant properties we may have. Chairperson Linares responded that's wonderful. Mr. Schuster said it was a meeting with good dialog and communication, it's a step in the right direction in helping affordable housing in the City of Bethlehem. Chairperson Linares said it needs to be done.

Secondly, Mr. Schuster reported that on September 29th, President Biden declared a Federal Disaster on the state of Florida in view of damages from Hurricane Ian, as we heard so much about it in the news. As the Authority has a preference for housing availability to Federal Disaster victims, so if they're in need of housing we would accommodate them as first preference, but we have not heard anything as of yet.

Lastly, RCN, one of our local cable companies would like to conduct a survey of our High Rise and Family Developments to access the possibility of providing WIFI access to all our residents. The proposal would then leverage city funds to provide the infrastructure funding to make this possible. It was a very big meeting that we had with RCN representative, the Mayor and Ms. Santoro. It was a very productive meeting, the city has infrastructure funding to help with getting WIFI out to our resident. An initial survey has to be done by RCN to see if it's feasible.

Chairperson Linares asked how long before we hear from RCN. Mrs. Schuster replied they should get back to us within a month. They'll be making site visits to our buildings to see what needs to be done because the City requested specific dollar figures on what it would take to provide the infrastructure to make it possible. It's a very good thing for our residents and the School District is on board with it too. He'll keep the board posted on any future developments. Chairperson Linares replied it's a great idea.

Nothing under Committee Reports - Scholarship Committee, Finance Committee or Personnel Committee.

Under the Resident Advisory Committee, Mr. Ortiz reported that the Homework Club has been up and running for about three weeks. They'll be signing up for Christmas gifts from October 17th through the 20th for children under the age of 16 in our community. In addition, they'll be having a Thanksgiving dinner which they did last year from East Hills. It was very successful, they served over a 100 plates and desserts. They're having some problems with the residents especially the seniors, on bringing them back to their units, so Roy will be looking into that.

In addition, he introduced Dominic Albanese from the Elite Tournament Championship Baseball (ETCB) organization. Mr. Ortiz spoke about him in the last board meeting and he was kind enough to come today. He took the podium to speak to the Board about his organization and how he can help our community.

Mr. Dominic Albanese thanked the board for their time. He reported that over the last year and a half, his organization has worked on the Southside baseball fields and have done a bunch of work on three baseball fields down there. They're striving to bring the youth of Southside residents back into playing baseball because it got to a point that there were a total of 14 throughout all the age group kids. They now have been successful enough in getting some kids down at Southside ages 15-18. In addition, Mr. Ortiz and Dominic have been discussing the baseball field at Lynfield, which is smaller baseball field. They truly believe for it to be successful and for them to get kids back into playing baseball is to make it easier demographically and to get the baseball field up and running.

Chairperson Linares asked if there is anything going to be done at Marvine. Mr. Ortiz replied that the field at Marvine belongs to the school district. He had already inquired about it. But, they're trying to bring baseball to the Lynfield community and Mr. Albanese is willing to take care of everything. He is willing to fix the field, and whatever else needs to be done for baseball. They want to prepare the kids to be part of a tournament that is about \$1,200.00 per kid and he's going to waive that fee, because they both want baseball on the Southside. Mr. Albanese will be taking care of all the work, at no cost just as long as we get the field and utilize the field for our kids. He added that this will keep them out of trouble. In addition, they're thinking about starting softball for girls.

Mr. Albanese stated that right now the goal is to get the young kids in the community to play baseball. Startup a little league and have the kids practice, get coaches in the area that will train the kids and then think about tournament games in the future. At this point, they're focusing on redoing the baseball field. Mr. Ortiz stated spring training to groom them and those who are real good could go to the next level, ECBT tournament. Mr. Albanese agreed. He stated that they have leases with the City and they have all our insurances on file.

Right now, the goal is to fix the baseball fields for the youth of the neighborhood. His staff and employees will not be using the field as of yet, if it does get to that then he will address it and bring insurance and bring copies of everything and a presentation on how to do it. As of right now, they just need approval to fix up the field to make it a nice field for the kids in the community.

In addition, Mr. Ortiz said they will be fixing up the Blazers field too, at no costs to the BHA. Chairperson Linares just wants to make it fair for all residents. Mr. Roy Ortiz said it'll be open to all BHA residents. We can keep growing and use other fields within other communities to keep expanding and to keep our kids off the streets. There's going to be no cost for BHA. He has his own insurance, he's been running his organization for years.

Attorney William Matz stated that if the Commissioners are in favor of doing something like this administrative things that have to be addressed. We tabled it from last month to address the concerns of a contract agreement and insurance. Mr. Ortiz mentioned that Mr. Albanese has insurance.

Mrs. Linares made a motion to authorize Elite Tournament Championship Baseball (ETCB) organization to fix the baseball fields at Lynfield. Mr. Acevedo seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Acevedo/Ortiz/Linares; Nays - None

Under the Deputy's Executive Director's Mr. John Ritter reported two items. Our monthly meeting with the BHA Community Police officers will be held on Wednesday, October 19, 2022. At that time they'll review any drug or criminal activity occurring on our properties. Secondly, BHA just wrapped up the COVID Booster Vaccine for all 4 High Rises. We had a total of 69 tenants receive their second booster shots, the Pfizer shots. He thanked the Health Department for taking care of that, as well as the High Rise staff for all their hard work.

RESOLUTION NO. 2554 OF 2022 - APPROVING THE SUBMISSION OF HUD RENTAL ASSISTANCE DEMONSTRATION (RAD) PROGRAM APPLICATION. NOTE: (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mrs. Acevedo made a motion to approve the submission of HUD rental assistance demonstration (RAD) Program Application. Mr. Ortiz seconded.

Roll Call: Ayes - Acevedo/Ortiz/Linares; Nays - None

Commissioners Linares asked if we have blue prints. Mr. Kichline responded that we have a preliminary layout that shows the 12 apartments. Mr. Schuster said those plans are available for anyone to view.

Chairperson Linares read that in August the staff approached the Medicare eligible age and it revealed a serious gap in their medical healthcare coverage. Many employees, although, eligible for BHA pension are working past age 65 and medical expenses rise dramatically thus remaining on our Capitol Blue Cross plan and increase costs.

Mr. Schuster stated on the proposal that he brought to the table to help individuals after they would retire from Bethlehem Housing Authority. The proposal was after someone was to retire, to fund a health reimbursement account for retirees for a period of years. So that it was funding of about \$2,400.00 per year for those who were to have retired. As everyone knows after age 65, you can go on Medicare, but you have other expenses. It is an idea to enhance the benefits. He is bringing this to the table for consideration. He stated that Mr. Snyder has prudent assessment of anything that would financially obligate housing authority budget.

Mr. Snyder, reported that what the commissioners are being asked to vote on is called and falls under GASB-75, which means other post-employment benefits. Mr. Snyder reported that after speaking to our audit firm, in order for this to be active we need to have an actuary cost assessment per employee to determine what this will cost the authority in the future. Once they figure this out, at current values, than will know how to proceed, but it could be very substantial. He stated that if we table this until we get the costs, from the actuary then we can have an executive session to sit down and answer any questions you may so that you understand what it is going to cost the authority now and in the future. There will be budget constraint moving forward today, as well as in the future. In addition, per our audit firm, this needs to be reviewed by an Attorney to make sure that it falls in with GASB-75. A further concern, was on the percentage, which could change dramatically. He mentioned 3% or 5%, but the actual report will tell us what the inflation rate is.

Mr. Snyder recommended that we tabled the motion until we get the actuary report. On the investment end, we don't want to approve something that later on we can't afford. He suggested like Mr. Schuster had recommended, something in October that will correspond with our health insurance, maybe the Board will approve it to start in October of 2023. That will give plenty of time to figure out what it will cost us and there is no rush on this.

The Board of Commissioners agreed to table the resolution to approve the proposed amendment to our Healthcare Plan Benefit until further research. And they thanked Mr. Richard Snyder.

Under New Business. Mr. Jay Schuster had one item. He reported that he received a request from Mr. Robinson, our recreation supervisor. We have a resident that going to be in a play at the Pennsylvania Youth Theatre, and she has the leading role and they're asking for sponsorship from the Board. The costs to sponsor her in this play is \$175.00. BHA has been sponsoring her since she was 7 years old, every single year and now she is 14 years old, she has been active in many programs throughout the years.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the costs to sponsor a resident for a play at The Pennsylvania Youth Theatre. Mrs. Acevedo seconded.

Roll Call: Ayes - Acevedo/Ortiz/Linares; Nays - None

Chairperson Linares acknowledged and welcomed the new board member, Mr. J. Marc Rittle who joined the meeting. Mr. J. Marc Rittle apologizes for being late and introduced himself, saying this is his first commissioner meeting. The Board of Commissioners and Mr. Jay Schuster welcomed our new commissioner.

Nothing reported Under Miscellaneous Reports, Other Business - Board Members, Solicitors, and Staff.

Under Public Comments, Monocacy residents were present to express some concerns and issues. Mr. Jay Schuster addressed the tenants by stating that he's grateful for the tenants who came today to express themselves. That it's vital and we value the feedback from our tenants and we take it very seriously.

Secondly, there's a lot of issues that were raised that we can't answer today, but he suggested that we have a follow up tenant meeting to address some of the concerns. We did have a tenant meeting, but had none during COVID, the community room was closed for about 2 years. Maybe some of the issues are bottled up because of that period of time. We did have a tenant meeting, that Ms. Rodriguez, Property Manager organized about a two ago. And we'll continue to have such meetings where tenants can come and express their feelings.

Lastly, it would help to have a tenant council in our building. If four tenants are willing to unify together and take on that role, we would welcome that with open hearts because that is a way that the tenants can funnel their concerns, we need more participation like that. Right now, we only have only one active tenant council in 11 developments, so he recommended that we talk more about that at an upcoming tenant meeting. Ms. Zulma Rodriguez will be scheduling an upcoming meeting with the Monocacy Tenants.

Ms. Peggy Schneider, Monocacy Tenant, Apt.711, reported that she will be working with Gwendolyn Flores, BHA FSS Coordinator, in regards to starting a new tenant council at Monocacy. Gwendolyn will be reaching out to her, as she's working on other councils at this time. It in the works. Mr. Jay Schuster thanked Ms. Schneider for stepping forward and volunteering.

Chairperson Linares noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, November 14, 2022 at 4:00 P.M. at the Monocacy Tower, community room.

There being no further business to transact, Mrs. Linares declared the meeting adjourned.

J. D. Schuster

Jay D. Schuster
Executive Director