

MINUTES... REGULAR MEETING... AUGUST 14, 2023

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session August 14, 2023, at 4:00 P.M. (IN PERSON MEETING). Those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT

Mrs. Iris Linares, Chairperson
Mrs. Valerie McLendon, Vice Chairperson
Mr. Rogelio Ortiz
Mr. J. Marc Rittle

ABSENT

Mrs. Lindsey A. Clifton

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

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of July 10, 2023, were presented. Mr. Rittle made a motion to accept the minutes of July 10, 2023. Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Rittle/Ortiz/Linares; Nays – None

Under the monthly bills, Mr. Snyder reported that the available units for Section 8 went down a little because we've been spending more. As the rents go up, there's less money available. We want a projection out of a year or two, so we have enough money to cover, and we don't fall short where we actually have to cut people off the program and move around our funding.

Chairperson Linares stated that the BHA Section 8 list opened up this week. Mr. Rittle said Northampton County as well. Mr. Ritter said the list is opened up from August 14th through Sunday, the 20th. We received 425 applicants today. Mr. Rittle asked what mechanism we used to get the word out. Mr. Ritter said an ad was put in the paper. Mrs. Donchez added Facebook, the website, our email address and we also sent out notices to agencies to let them know about the wait list.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the Treasurer's and financial reports for July 2023. Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes – Rittle/Ortiz/McLendon/Linares; Nays – None

Under Courtesy of the Floor, Ms. Donna Taggart, Community Outreach Liaison for Wind Creek Bethlehem, spoke on their behalf in support of Lynfield Community Center's application to open a food pantry at the center for the residents of Lynfield. Wind Creek has been funding food distribution since 2017 and now that that is program of Lynfield, they continue to support them particularly since Lynfield was established as a 501C in 2020 with the fiscal sponsorship of the Humanitarian Innovations. And now they give them annual grant funding to help them with a big part of that going to food distribution. Making this program an official program through Second Harvest Food Bank is only going to strengthen it and today with rising cost and food insecurity they are here to offer the full support of Wind Creek for this application. And she thanked BHA for allowing her. The Board of Commissioners thanked Ms. Taggart.

Secondly, Ms. Anna Smith, Director of Community Action Development Bethlehem in Southside Bethlehem, reported that she is also here to lend their enthusiastic support for the Lynfield Community Centers food pantry. They've worked with Lynfield Community Center for over 8 years now, supporting them from just a small operation doing a few programs for the youth and now into a fully-fledged non-profit.

They've seen their growth, their connection, their action with the community and they've been thrilled to support the youth program, the expansion of their community garden and now the food pantry. And as far as Southside Bethlehem goes, they have two large and active food pantries at New Bethany Ministries and Hispanic Center in the Lehigh Valley. But for the folks who live in the eastern end particularly with limited to transportation there's very few opportunities, that this is the only area of South Bethlehem that is a food desert, which means the closest grocery store is over a mile away. So, they think this is an extremely important addition to the Lynfield neighborhood. They are excited to continue to offer their financial support for programs at Lynfield Community Center over the coming years. She thanked the board. The Board of Commissioners thanked Ms. Smith.

Lastly, Ms. Allison Czapp, Assistant Executive Director of Second Harvest Food bank of the Lehigh Valley and Northeast Pennsylvania reported that they also support the application of the Lynfield Community Center to be a food pantry of Second Harvest Food Bank. They worked with them to complete the application process which was approved. They welcomed any questions on how the food bank works or the resources that might be available. A lot of the food that they receive is from state and federal sources. The food is available at no cost to the Lynfield Community Center and the patrons while utilizing the services there. They're looking at having pantry guys open once per week to serve the community. And at the food bank they will definitely be working closer to make sure that they're not incurring any excess costs without knowing that they're in the financial situation to do so. But they do believe that they'd be able to operate the pantry at no cost to them. They also do have some resources that they can support pantries with cold storage solutions. And they're really looking to build the capacity and infrastructure of some pantries as well to different funding sources that they get. So, they have worked really closely, with Brandon especially, with Lynfield to get this off the ground, and they believe that they had done their due diligence. The Board of Commissioners thanked Ms. Czapp and Brandon.

Mrs. McLendon commented that all this support for Lynfield and for the City of Bethlehem is phenomenal, because we need a plan to better certain things for the City of Bethlehem, and certain communities and food insecurities were one of them. There's not a lot of areas where people can go to get good, healthy food and transportation is an issue to be able to get there. Mr. Ortiz commented that it's not only going to provide food for the Lynfield community but all surrounding communities. They do not deny anybody, whoever needs food they're going to be there to provide food for them, and for their families.

Under Old Business, Executive Director's Contract, Mr. Ritter reported that he contacted the Civil Service about the contract, and he's covered under Civil Service and there's no need for a contract. The only thing that would impact it would be if you wanted to consolidate a package for benefits or salary. Mr. Rittle commented they don't guarantee anything having to do with benefits or salary you would need a contract for that and you're opting not to do that? Mr. Ritter replied yes. All BHA employees get the same benefits. Mr. Matz said civil service is used to regulate anyone who's employed through them by following their guidelines. Mr. Rittle requests that we keep it on the agenda under Old Business as Mrs. Lindsey may have questions.

Nothing to Under Chairman's Report.

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Under the Executive Directors' report, Mr. Ritter reported a few items. First, the monthly meeting with the BHA Community Police Officers will be held on Wednesday August 16th at 9 o'clock and at that time they'll discuss any drug or criminal activities on our properties. Second, the RAB meeting will take place on Thursday, August 17th in the Monocacy Community Room at 1 o'clock. Third, our Annual Field Day will be held at Blazer field by the Northeast Community Center on Saturday the 19th from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM. Last, on October 11th, we have the Bethlehem Health Bureau coming out to all the four high rises, offering Flu shots and COVID shots. Monocacy and Litzenberger are scheduled for the morning and Bartholomew and Bodder in the afternoon. I'll be posted on all the high-rise TV's.

Under the Committee reports, Mrs. Linares reported that the Finance and Personnel Committees won't be added to the agenda every month. Mr. Rittle commented that if Chairperson Linares needs backup support for personnel matters, he's available.

Under Resident Advisory Board, Mr. Ortiz reported that they just finished wrapping up their Summer Program, and the kids went to the Davinci Science Center. And he thanked all those in support of the food pantry. He appreciates all the hard work they do for the community. "Twenty-two years he's been living in the neighborhood, and they've been the pillar in the community, that's been there standing by their side." He also thanked Mrs. Flores, "she's been an awesome help, guiding them in the right direction.

Mr. Ortiz thanked his wife as she had to step down from the resident tenant council. She was dedicated, and there every single day making fresh breakfast and lunch for the kids at the summer camp. Chairperson Linares said thank you. They still got baseball going on, and their team went to the semi-finals two weeks in a row. Mrs. McLendon asked when do they start back up again? Mr. Ortiz said the weekend after Labor Day. The program will run from September into mid -November. And it's free of charge for all our kids in our community and within our surrounding communities.

Under Resident Council, Mrs. Flores reported that they have an official active resident council at Monocacy.

UNDER RESOLUTIONS - RESOLUTION NO. 2576 OF 2023 APPROVING THE ONE-YEAR EXTENSION FOR THE HVAC SERVICES. (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mrs. McLendon made a motion to approve the one-year extension for HVAC services.

Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Rittle/Ortiz/McLendon/Linares; Nays - None

RESOLUTION NO. 2577 OF 2023 - APPROVING THE CHANGES TO THE AUTHORITY'S LEASE AND ACOP. (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the changes to the authority's lease and ACOP.

Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Rittle/Ortiz/McLendon/Linares; Nays - None

Mr. Ritter stated that it's mandated by HUD, under the HOTMA regulation. Mrs. Rodriguez explained that it's basically the requirements that we have on the lease, and it's been a while since we update our lease in accordance with all the addendums going back to 2008. They're incorporating all the addendums now on the lease plus all the HOTMA HUD regulations. Mr. Rittle commended BHA for working on the updates as the last update was in 2006. Mr. Ritter said the lease is completed and they're working on the ACOP which is about 1,000 pages long. The actual ACOP won't be ready until the end of the year. It will have to be approved by the board as well as HUD.

The Admissions Continued Occupancy (ACOP) is different from the lease. The lease is contracted to a housing authority and the tenants and the ACOP consist of all the rules that we must follow as the housing authority. Mr. Rittle asked if we updated both of them. Mr. Ritter replied yes and the Administrative Plan which is for Section 8. Mr. Rittle asked was there anything that he added on his own that wasn't necessarily mandated by HUD that we thought was important to add. Mr. Ritter said about the properties, basically, who's responsible for cleaning up their area. Mrs. Rodriguez added that we needed to clarify the lease procedures for the purposes of filing (L&T's) Lease and terminations with the magistrate, and for the best interest of the resident and the housing authority. Chairperson Linares said thank you. Attorney Matz said it was long overdue.

APPROVING THE LYNFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER AND SECOND HARVEST LOCAL FOOD BANK.
(Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mrs. McLendon made a motion to approve the Lynfield community center and second harvest local food bank.

Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Rittle/Ortiz/McLendon/Linares; Nays - None

Mr. Rittle took the opportunity to thank everyone who spoke on behalf of the local food banks, in that it does say a lot about the importance of having a food pantry and he appreciates that. It was brought up about having other pantries for the other BHA developments such as Parkridge and Pembroke. Mrs. McLendon said the community room is too small, so they use Lynfield food pantry. Mr. Ritter said that Paula Johnson runs the Northeast Community Center in Pembroke, and they have a decent size food bank, and they do a lot of good work over there as well.

Ms. Czapp added that it would be on each pantry to designate its service area. Some pantries go to the school district, some pantries go by zip code so it's not the entire six counties that they're serving but I think the food pantries would know best what their sort of area of service. Mr. Rittle asked is refrigeration a requirement. Is that something you all. Mr. Ortiz said they're going to purchase them a freezer and fridge. Mr. Rittle said excellent. Mr. Ritter said we can dedicate lines for those two units. And we are making changes to the building to better accommodate this project.

Mr. Rittle questioned the capacity. He asked can it be staffed and will this cost unnecessary or surprising dollars down the road. Mr. Ortiz said he will be there to service the community with food as needed. He's going to be very accessible to anybody." He's here to fight the war against hunger. Times are hard for families. Mrs. McLendon asked if he'd been over to Lynfield to see the set-up and the things that they do. Mr. Rittle replied yes that they really do excellent work over there.

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And he's also been to the Hispanic Center and all three pantry's work well together. He has not been to over to Pembroke since the renovations, but his staff was over there. Mrs. McLendon took a tour through there and was really impressed with all of it, and what BHA is doing for their communities. Mr. Rittle suggested if we want to compare there's a few key Allentown food pantries to visit who helped them enhance there's, the Ecumenical Food Bank and the Conference of Church have a good operation.

APPROVING THE CONTRACT FOR EMPLOYEE HEALTH INSURANCE RENEWAL FOR OCTOBER 2023 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2024. (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the contract for the employee health insurance renewal for October 1, 2023 through September 30, 2024.

Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Rittle/Ortiz/McLendon/Linares; Nays - None

Mr. Rittle asked if there was a significant change in the price. Mr. Ritter reported that the price increase was 4% and the coverage remains the same.

Nothing under New Business to report.

Under Miscellaneous Reports and Other Businesses, Board Member, Solicitor or Staff. Mr. Ortiz reported that he would also like to thank housing for supporting them, along with everyone else. In recognition of their hard work and to show his appreciation he gave a plaque to Anna Smith, Martha Ortiz, and thanked the BHA staff as well.

Attorney Matz stated that he was asked in the last meeting to put together copies of the current agenda, organizational docs, organizational matrix for the organization. Mr. Ritter circulated the copies to the board. He said it certainly calls for some review and revision. That essentially, the resolution district dates back to 1937, so there's a lot of room to look at it. Organization matrix I think is current to current setup. Mr. Rittle asked if we do have the bylaws. Attorney Matz replied yes. Mrs. McLendon asked did we get our mission statement out there. Mr. Linares said yes. Mr. Ritter stated we're waiting for approval from HUD. Attorney Matz suggests that we probably want this in place administratively before we move to the bylaws.

Under Public Comments, Mrs. McLendon commended BHA for doing so much and in such a fast pace. She is really proud to be to be part of this team and to work with all the employees and the commissioners. And she knows that things are going to get even better. The best is yet to come. All commissioners agreed.

Chairperson Linares noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, September 11, 2023, at 4:00 P.M. at the Monocacy Tower, community room.

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

John Ritter

John Ritter
Executive Director