

MINUTES... REGULAR MEETING... NOVEMBER 13, 2023

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session November 13, 2023, at 4:00 P.M. (IN PERSON MEETING). Those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT

Mrs. Iris Linares, Chairperson
Mrs. Valerie McLendon
Mrs. Lindsey A. Clifton
Mr. Rogelio Ortiz

ABSENT

Mr. J. Marc Rittle

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 September 11, 2023, were presented. Mr. Ortiz made a motion to accept the minutes of September 11, 2023. Mrs. Clifton seconded the motion.

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

Under the financial report, Mr. Snyder reported that the goal for this year was 390 vouchers, but we'll never be able to sustain that due to the increase in rents. Chairperson Linares asked why we wouldn't? Mr. Snyder stated that there's not enough vouchers on the street, and we wouldn't be able to sustain that financially. HUD gave us funds this year to use for next year. So, as the rents continue to go up, the available units to lease are going to drop down, that is just the nature of the program. Mrs. Clifton asked if the level of optimism is that we will in fact expend all the funds and therefore receive the remaining amount or are we going to fall short? Mr. Snyder responded that we won't spend it. Mr. Snyder said the question becomes, do we have the reserves and how much. HUD likes to recapture reserves and give to those who need them. If they do not recapture our reserves because we're spending more, we'll be in great shape for next year. But if they recapture it, we have a problem. So, we just don't know because right now they're talking about taking 700,000 from us. But because of the way we're spending, and the new rents are going up, they may not touch that money, we'll have to see what happens. What will happen though eventually is they'll take money from us or if we get to the point where we're spending more we can apply for extra funding as it becomes available.

Mrs. Clifton asked in previous years, what amount has HUD recaptured from our housing authority? Mr. Snyder said about \$300,000 was captured last year and several years before they talked about doing it because no one was leasing up. HUD has a big reserve, and he thinks the other part of the problem is as HUD comes and asks for money and Congress looks at it and says, we will why are we asking for 10% increase when you have 20% of your reserves sitting there, therefore use that money up first. It is one of those dynamics you're not sure, it all depends on what gets approved by Congress for funding. The other part of the problem is, it's hard to quantify the rent. A section 8 participant must pay 30% of the rent, but if they lose their job, now suddenly, we may be paying \$1000 a month out. And these are dynamics you do not know; it would be great if at least HUD would fund 100% of what we're leasing. Several months ago, HUD sent us a letter to lease up and on the other hand they're saying we're going to take funds back. And as our staff puts vouchers on the street it may take up to six months to actually lease something. So, he will keep the board updated but he feels comfortable with about 380 to 390 which is where we are right now to sustain that level. We do not run out of money.

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Mrs. Clifton asked about the year to date actual of \$1.24 million. Mr. Snyder said that he expects a seasonal drop, we estimate everything over 12 months, it's hard to do seasonal. He doesn't expect it to stay the same, maybe drop six to seven hundred thousand, all depends on utilities. He thinks PP&L is going to be lowering their rates a little bit.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the Treasurer's and financial reports for Aug/Sept 2023. Mrs. Clifton seconded the motion.

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

Nothing reported under Courtesy of the Floor.

Under Old Business, Resolution No. 2580 Of 2023, one-year extension for snow removal affirmation.

Mrs. Clifton made a motion that we affirm the resolution with the provision to amend the previous proxy vote on the snow removal contract. Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

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

Nothing to report under Chairman's Report.

Under the Executive Directors' report, Mr. Ritter reported a few items. First, our next monthly D&C meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 15th, at that time we will discuss any drug activities on our properties. Also, the Resident Advisory Board meeting will be held on November 15th, at the Monocacy Community room at 1:00 PM. Lastly, we have a virtual site tour scheduled with HUD for the Choice Neighborhood program, scheduled for November 20th at 4:00, he will be sending the link to the commissioners.

Under Committee Reports, Scholarship, Chairperson Linares congratulated Ms. Ebony Gee; she was one of our scholarship recipients for 2023 and she also received a scholarship from PAHRA in the amount of \$3,000. Ms. Gee is attending Cedar Crest College majoring in Nuclear Medicine Technology. In addition, she went on to advance to compete at the National level and was awarded a 2023 Merit College Scholarship selected as one of three nationals, LDG scholars. Scholars receive \$12,000 scholarship distributed over a 4-year period as well as an opportunity to earn up to \$9,000 for summer internships and other approved activities that support the students' academic goals. The LDG scholarship program is a 10-year venture that will provide one million in scholarships and internships opportunities to low-income students from around the country and it is funded by multi-family housing developments LDG development. We wish Ebony continued success in her studies. Ms. Moreno said Ebony has been awarded a total of \$17,500 in scholarship monies.

Under Resident Advisory Board, Mr. Ortiz reported as done in previous years, the students at East Hills school will be serving a prepared Thanksgiving meal tomorrow. On Friday, they'll be distributing turkey's and trimmings at 5:00 P.M. In addition, they launched the food bank with online access, so they will be showing the residents how to order what they need from their phones, and they'll receive the food within a week. He would like BHA to put a notice out to the senior residents in the next month's rent statement informing them of the food bank. Chairperson Linares commended Mr. Ortiz for doing a great job.

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RESOLUTION NO. 2581 OF 2023 - APPROVING THE CONTRACT FOR PAINT SUPPLY.
(Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the contract for paint supply.
Mrs. McLendon seconded the motion.

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

Nothing under New Business.

Under Miscellaneous Reports and Other Businesses, Board Member, Solicitor or Staff, Mrs. Clifton had a couple of things. First, she asked about the timeline for the vacant Deputy Executive Director position. Mr. Ritter answered within the next few months. Ms. Clifton asked Mr. Ritter to let her know that she and Mr. Rittle have some connections to folks in the community who may have some interest. Secondly, on the topic of the BHA eviction process and finding the best practices to avoid it as the most affordable place is the place where they're already living. And the kinds of barriers having an eviction on your record can create to find other housing. She wanted to address issues that she is hearing from community members that the board and staff should discuss for best practices. Mr. Ritter said some of our evictions are drugs and criminal it's not always financial hardships. Mrs. Clifton said it would be helpful to get a report of the evictions with a breakdown of nonpayment, and other related reasons.

Mrs. Maldonado, Property Manager, Family Development Office commented that eviction is the last option, that all residents go through a process of letters, counseling, and offered help from other agencies before the eviction process. Mrs. Clifton said there may potentially be some property management discretion around support and connections, and she felt they should look more on the process to see if we are missing opportunities to support tenants. She wants to understand the system more fully.

Attorney Matz added "that you have discretionary rights sitting with the managers, you have informal rights that are set under regulation once there's a decision made to proceed in some form as a second level and the level, you're talking about is a formal level where there may be an actual use of the court system. So, there's a variety and the HUD regulations have a lot of discretionary elements within all those processes and that's probably what we need to understand. Where does discretion start and end? There needs to be standards because tenants need, and the system needs so we must understand this. Because typically a pattern worked for all, at least in his view with housing has been there's a lease, and we start with a lease. Now, there's discretion behind each element of that lease which is set in the regulations to restrain the housing authority from, without discretion. And there's always debate over what that is. But what you're saying to profile it, that's probably a helpful tool to look at it, and that practice is a good way to describe it, so that there is a standard that maybe is understood and maybe it's to criticize and maybe it's not. It's not a simple answer though."

Mrs. Clifton is trying to learn from sources related to how the housing authority works in our region and in our state. She attended a meeting with the Lehigh Conference of Churches with a number of other non-profit partners and social support agencies discussing prevention. And as they were talking about that related to sort of housing authority models, from her connection she was able to say, "oh I may have a contact in Pittsburgh connected to housing authority work doing some interesting things around eviction prevention and mediation."

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It's about accessing the networks and resources, by taking a look at what we're doing and how we're doing it to make sure that we really are being the best possible supportive landlords that we can be as a housing authority. Eviction prevention is under discussion in other housing authorities, so she wanted to raise this as a topic for their continued learning conversation.

Under Public Comments, a few tenants mentioned some concerns and issues. All issues were addressed. Ms. Satullo from the City of Bethlehem reported that she will be the Choice Neighborhood Plan Project Coordinator for the city, and she extended an invitation to all the staff and residents to their first community meeting on Wednesday November 29th at the Boys and Girls Club from 6:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. to introduce the Choice Neighborhood process to the community. In addition, all board members were included in an e-mail regarding the first steering committee meeting, the following Thursday at 9:00 A.M. at the Boys and Girls Club. And all are welcome to join the committee and attend.

Chairperson Linares noted that the next re-organizational board meeting will be held on Monday, December 1, 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