

**MINUTES . . . REGULAR MEETING . . . APRIL 8, 2024**

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session April 8, at 4:00 P.M. (IN PERSON MEETING). Those present and absent were as follows:

**PRESENT**

Mrs. Lindsey A. Clifton, Chairperson  
Mr. Rogelio Ortiz, Vice Chairman  
Mrs. Iris Linares  
Mr. J. Marc Rittle

**ABSENT**

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 March 11, 2024 were presented and approved with the amended notations. Mrs. Linares made a motion to accept the minutes of March 11, 2024. Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

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

Mr. Rittle noted two clarifications on the April 8, 2024, minutes. For the record on page 5, Mr. Rittle seconded the motion, not Mr. Ritter. Additionally, on the grass cutting resolution, "ayes" should be attributed to Mr. Rittle as well.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the Treasurer's report for March 2024.  
Mrs. Linares seconded the motion.

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

Under the financial report, Mr. Snyder addressed the Section 8 report and projected shortfall. By the end of April, it had risen to \$154,000 from \$80,000 in March. Currently, there has been no communication from HUD regarding the shortfall. Chairperson Clifton inquired about the overlay between our BHA fiscal year and HUD's annual fiscal distributions in this context. Mr. Snyder responded that it wouldn't affect him, as he is continually accruing, and he will provide the end-of-year financial report at the June meeting.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the Financial Report for February 2024.  
Mrs. Linares seconded the motion.

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

Nothing reported under Courtesy of the Floor.

Under Old Business, Mr. Ritter provided an update on the deputy executive directors' position, stating that the matter is still in progress. Further finalization has been completed, and we are presently awaiting feedback from Civil Service on the finalized version. Chairperson Clifton inquired about the typical turnaround time. Mr. Ritter explained that since this is a newly created position, the process takes longer compared to positions already listed. Chairperson Clifton expressed perplexity regarding the duration of the process. Mrs. Moreno clarified that creating a new job description typically requires more time, and they have other agencies to work with as well.

04/8/2024

(2)

Under Old Business, Chairperson Clifton provided an update on the Conflict-of-Interest Policy, noting that it was tabled during the previous meeting. This decision was made partly because of its implications for the existing staff conflict of interest policy. Therefore, the decision to table it was to gather staff feedback. Mr. Ritter clarified that the policy was not distributed to the staff for feedback because there is already a conflict-of-interest policy in place for staff through Civil Service, which is separate from the board's policy. Attorney Matz added that there is an existing policy for staff, and while it may not necessarily override it, it does parallel it. He emphasized that this is a policy of both administration and the board. Additionally, Mr. Rittle raised concerns last month about voting and not having a quorum due to potential conflicts of interest regarding future endeavors with the Project-Based Vouchers. However, he expressed that he no longer holds these concerns and feels comfortable voting on it today.

Chairperson Clifton sought clarification from Attorney Matz regarding the Conflict-of-Interest policy, specifically its application to staff members. Attorney Matz explained that the policy applies to directors, officers, and key personnel, with considerations for the public sector. He stressed the importance of internal disclosure and transparency before external actions, supplementing existing staff policies without conflict. Chairperson Clifton confirmed her understanding and asked about potential conflicts, to which Attorney Matz assured there were none, with flexibility for future modifications by the board. Chairperson Clifton then discussed the need for drafting a resolution for approval, which Matz confirmed could be addressed subsequently.

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the Conflict-of-Interest Policy.  
Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

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

Secondly, under old business, Mr. Ritter reported that on March 28th, he, along with the Section 8 and accounting department, met with Debra Briddell from HUD regarding First PIC Incorporated Consulting. The meeting lasted about thirty minutes, but the issues with Section 8 were not addressed. They plan to gather a team to collaborate with them. They will receive eight hours of training and support through this initiative. Chairperson Clifton inquired about any associated costs. Mr. Ritter clarified that there is no cost; it's a service provided by HUD. He mentioned that they received a notification and promptly signed up for it.

Thirdly, under old business, regarding the Lease Renewal for Northeast Community Center, Chairperson Clifton clarified that the decision to table it during our last meeting stemmed from the need for additional time to review documentation and address concerns regarding the overlap between the lease format and grant implications. These adjustments aimed to ensure transparency and effectiveness in the lease arrangement. Attorney Matz then provided an overview of the review process, focusing on funding aspects and structural adjustments to accommodate program expansions. The structural setup of the agreement was designed to facilitate an exchange involving the grant process and associated programming, particularly focused on services like the food pantry. While the financial numbers remained unchanged, there were additional programs and activities incorporated into the agreement, contributing to the justification for the funding amount specified. The lease addresses allowing for termination with 180 days' notice before the end of the term, which aligns with previous discussions, and refining the termination provision's confirmation process.

04/8/2024

(3)

Chairperson Clifton raised a concern about the static funding amount of \$25,000 for a five-year period, suggesting that it could result in decreased support over time due to inflation. Mr. Snyder added that we do indeed have additional funds available. Attorney Matz acknowledged the issue and mentioned ongoing discussions with NECC, emphasizing the importance of consistency and resident-focused programming. He also noted the potential for further discussions and adjustments to the lease agreement in the future. Mr. Ritter confirmed NECC's acceptance of the current terms, which prompted a broader conversation about funding allocation among various community organizations. Mr. Rittle expanded the discussion to include other community centers and emphasized the need for a comprehensive evaluation of funding distribution. Attorney Matz highlighted to explore the unique roles of different organizations and the balance between supporting existing partnerships and exploring new opportunities.

Chairperson Clifton emphasized the importance of prioritizing the establishment of partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club and other community centers. She referenced Mr. Winston's remarks from the last meeting regarding their work and noted that there is additional funding available that could be allocated to support these partnerships. Mr. Rittle suggested that after gaining a better understanding of Lynfield's services and organization in comparison to the other two, the board might decide to maintain the current arrangements with both Parkridge and Lynfield. He raised the question of how to support these two historic nonprofit organizations that provide services within the board's boundaries. Additionally, he expressed a desire to further discuss the possibility of increasing funding for these organizations.

Attorney Matz clarified that the expansion extends into grant funding, beyond just the relationship to a piece of property. Mr. Rittle replied, he's positive there are other organizations not located within the BHA boundaries that serve people within the BHA, and they might be wondering if there are grant funds available. Attorney Matz stated that HUD established that kind of formula years ago because it was a building built for those residents and for the programs of those residents, so you're relating the two together to meet federal regulations as well as community support.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the Lease Renewal for the Northeast Community Center. Mrs. Linares seconded the motion.

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

Under the Chairperson Report, Chairperson Clifton provided an update on the Lynfield Community Center lease. Attorney Matz provided a packet with additional information. She had contacted Mr. Ritter, Mrs. Flores, and Attorney Matz to arrange a meeting, but they didn't have all the details yet. Now that they do, they can schedule a meeting to review the packet and work on revisions and documentation for the lease.

Secondly, on the 14th of March, she participated in the HUD site visit for our Choice Neighborhoods Program. On March 15th, she attended the Choice Neighborhoods Steering Committee Meeting. The HUD visit was enlightening, offering insights into their Choice Neighborhoods process. They received valuable feedback from the HUD officials on the early stages of the organizing and planning work that's underway. It sparked a robust conversation about strategies for community engagement, transparency, and resident involvement.

04/8/2024

(4)

It was emphasized that we need to engage Marvine residents as intentionally as Pembroke residents due to their proximity. They also learned about other successful Choice Neighborhood projects, like the one in Lewiston, Maine, which provides potential research opportunities. She looks forward to a potential field trip to Philadelphia later this spring or early summer for the Choice Steering Committee to view examples of Choice Neighborhood projects there. Also on April 13th, the Pembroke community festival will be held from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM, providing an opportunity to engage more with the Choice Neighborhood's project. Also, they still need to schedule the Executive Session for the bylaw revisions, aiming to do so within the next couple of months. She has contacted other housing authorities to obtain their bylaws for comparison.

Furthermore, the HUD board training is now scheduled for Monday, May 13th from 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM via Teams. She's hopeful that we might have a new board member by then. Mrs. Linares mentioned she'll be away during the upcoming board meeting and HUD board training but will try her best to join online. Attorney Matz asked, have we heard from the city yet. Laura Collins, the City of Bethlehem representative, stated that there isn't much of an update regarding the new commissioner. They had identified someone, but due to family emergencies, that person has asked not to be considered at this time. As a result, they're back to the drawing board. Mr. Ritter expressed his gratitude.

Finally, the March deadline for Mr. Ritter's annual evaluation as Executive Director was missed. Staff evaluations typically occur in March, but we weren't ready in time. Consulting the housing authority's personnel manual could provide clarity. Ms. Moreno provided the Civil Service rubric used for other staff, but the Personnel handbook might offer more insights. She's hopeful that Mr. Rittle and Mrs. Linares, the board's personnel committee, can manage it. Insights from Northampton and Berks County Housing Authorities suggest their evaluation process involves the Executive Director completing a self-evaluation, board members completing evaluations, and then reviewing them together. We may need to update our bylaws or policy to reflect this process. In the meantime, we need to review the Personnel policy and Civil Service rubrics and schedule a meeting with Mr. Ritter. They'll aim to have everything ready for the next evaluation cycle. She has all the necessary documents from Ms. Moreno that she can share.

Under the Executive Director's report, Mr. Ritter provided an update on the HUD visit, describing it as an enjoyable day where they spent the entire day together. They visited various schools and toured the city, enjoying a nice lunch and turnout. The Drug and Criminal monthly meeting is scheduled for April 10th at 10:00 AM. Our first Resident Advisory Board (RAB) meeting was held on March 14th at 1:00 PM, but no resident advisory board members attended. However, four tenants expressed interest in joining the board, and letters were sent out to them after the meeting to solicit feedback. Additionally, efforts to follow up with Governor Casey's office regarding complaints on rent calculations were made on March 20th, but no response was received after three attempts, leading to the matter being considered concluded.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that the City of Bethlehem and the Bethlehem Housing Authority were named as host agencies for the PAHRA, the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies conference, focusing on NSPIRE inspections, HOTMA, property management challenges, and Davis-Bacon and Related Acts Regulations HUD Final Rule. The conference will take place from May 5th through the 8th at the Wind Creek event center. The conference is sponsored by Harie Insurance and co-sponsored by Chrislynn Energy Service, Inc. Various BHA staff will be attending the conference sessions.

Mr. Ritter informed the board that the Bethlehem Housing Authority (BHA) had received a complaint regarding a potential conflict of interest involving one of the commissioners, dated April 4th. He assured the board that BHA would investigate the matter further and provide updates, as necessary. Attorney Matz proposed following the recently adopted internal policy. However, Chairperson Clifton expressed concern that the policy might not be followed correctly, noting that a complaint had been received prior to the adoption of the policy. Attorney Matz acknowledged this discrepancy, and Chairperson Clifton suggested that the solicitor conduct an internal review and issue an opinion at our next meeting.

Additionally, Mr. Ritter shared news of Mrs. Patricia Donchez's upcoming retirement at the end of May. With 40 years of dedicated service to BHA, her professionalism and commitment have been invaluable to the organization's success. He expressed gratitude for her contributions and wished her well in her retirement. Chairperson Clifton and other board members extended their congratulations and thanked Mrs. Donchez for her years of service. Mrs. Linares highlighted the longevity of staff members, attributing it to their satisfaction with their work and benefits. The board collectively expressed appreciation for her dedication and wished her a happy retirement.

Under Committee Reports, Scholarship committee, Ms. Moreno provided updates on scholarship opportunities for residents. She mentioned that applications for high school seniors are due back by April 19th. Currently, efforts are underway to work on applications for eighth graders, with a deadline of May 20th. She also mentioned the PAHRA Scholarship, which offers scholarships specifically for residents. Two scholarship applications have been submitted, with hopes of winning one of them, as they can be awarded up to \$3,000. Chairperson Clifton noted that the previous year's recipient, Ebony Gee, had received a substantial \$12,000 scholarship, emphasizing the potential benefits of these opportunities for residents.

Under Committee Reports, Resident Advisory committee, Mr. Ortiz provided an update on the community outreach efforts, noting that the food bank continues to serve the community twice a month, assisting over three hundred people. Looking ahead to the summer, plans are in place to initiate summer camps, with baseball activities already underway for several weeks. He expressed anticipation regarding the outcome of the lease situation.

Secondly, Mrs. Flores suggested considering assistance from various agencies within the Parkridge area and expressed her desire to request for approval of a community food distribution event for Parkridge residents, inclusive of all Bethlehem Housing Authority residents. She outlined a plan involving several agencies willing to provide a sixteen-wheeler full of food for \$750, with the tentative date set for June 8th. Mr. Rittle inquired if this would be a one-time event, to which she responded affirmatively but expressed interest in making it a Bi-annual occurrence. She clarified that although she hadn't organized such an event before, one of the partnering agencies had previous experience.

Mr. Ortiz shared his past involvement in a similar event at Lynfield and mentioned an organization called Blessings of Hope. Mrs. Flores emphasized the affordability of the proposed event and explained that the funds would cover the transportation of the food. She requested timely approval to proceed with organizing the event and suggested making a motion to approve the allocation, pending verification of compliance with BHA rules. Chairperson Clifton highlighted the importance of adhering to BHA rules and emphasized the need for communication between involved parties.

04/8/2024

(6)

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the "BHA in the Community" - All-inclusive food distribution for all BHA residents, amounting to \$750, contingent upon verification of BHA compliance.

Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

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

**RESOLUTION NO. 2588 - APPROVING THE CONTRACT FOR MODERNIZING ELEVATORS. (Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.) THE RESOLUTION WAS TABLED.**

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the contract for modernizing the elevators.

Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Ayes - Rittle/McLendon/Clifton; Nays - None

Under New Business, agenda item "BHA in the Community" - All-inclusive Food distribution for all BHA Residents- Mrs. Flores', report took place under "Resident Advisory Committee reports."

Under Miscellaneous Reports and Other Businesses, Board Member, Solicitor and Staff, nothing to report.

Under Public Comments, nothing to report.

Chairperson Clifton noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, May 13, 2024, at 4:00 P.M. at the Monocacy Tower, community room. There being no further business to transact, Chairperson Clifton declared the meeting adjourned.

John Ritter  
Executive Director