

MINUTES... REGULAR MEETING... APRIL 14, 2025

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session on March 10, 2025 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 Chairperson
Mr. J. Marc Rittle
Mrs. Rachel Leon
Mrs. Iris Linares

ABSENT

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

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 10, 2025, were presented and approved. Mrs. Linares made a motion to accept the minutes of March 10, 2025. Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

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

Chairperson Clifton presented the Treasurer's report.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the treasurer's report for the March listing 2025.
Mrs. Linares seconded the motion.

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

Under the Financial report Mr. Snyder provided an update on the Income and Expense Report, stating that the financials are holding steady. He noted that there are several end-of-year accruals coming up, which could potentially affect the final numbers, but he does not anticipate major issues. He highlighted that the new financial system has significantly improved reporting efficiency, allowing February expenses to be processed and reflected more quickly, which has helped maintain up-to-date financial information.

Regarding Section 8 utilization, Mr. Snyder reported that the March expenses totaled \$366 with 394 units, while April saw a slight decrease to 388 units. He explained that many vouchers have been distributed and that the process is being handled systematically. After issuing vouchers, they wait to see who responds before releasing more, aiming to avoid overloading the system. He mentioned one specific unit that recently leased in Massachusetts under a port-out arrangement, which carries a cost of \$2,900 per month, a particularly high expense. Additionally, he noted that the agency's cash flow remains stable, and there have been no financial issues despite broader governmental challenges. Chairperson Clifton's questioned the number of vouchers currently issued. Ms. Snow confirmed that currently nine vouchers are out.

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the Financial Report for March 2025.
Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

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

Under Courtesy of the Floor, Mr. Adam Rosa, Principal and Founder of Collabo, provided an update on the Choice Neighborhood planning effort for the Pembroke neighborhood. He began by introducing himself and explaining that Collabo is serving as the planning coordinator in partnership with the Bethlehem Housing Authority (BHA) and the City of Bethlehem. The project is a two-year planning grant, currently about nineteen months in. The team has completed a substantial portion of the work, including community listening sessions, visioning, strategy development, and submission of a draft plan to HUD. While awaiting full feedback from HUD, they continue refining the plan in preparation for final submission in September.

Mr. Rosa noted that BHA is working to procure a development partner as required by the Choice Neighborhoods initiative. They are currently in discussions with Gorman & Company, a national firm specializing in affordable and mixed-income housing. Initial coordination has begun, with Gorman expected to support future planning and implementation. He then presented the draft housing plan, which includes the redevelopment of the Pembroke Village property. The site currently includes 196 very low-income units; the draft plan proposes replacing those with a total of approximately 425 units, including market-rate, workforce, and affordable housing options. Around 375 of these would be on the Pembroke Village site itself, with additional units on nearby vacant parcels. The plan features a variety of housing types—elevator apartments, walk-up apartments, and townhomes—and incorporates community-informed design based on extensive outreach. Amenities include green spaces, a reimagined central park, new street connections, parking spaces located in interior lots, a walking trail along the site edge, and improved pedestrian access to surrounding areas.

The plan also envisions a larger Northeast Community Center, expanded youth programming through the Boys and Girls Club, enhanced health and wellness services, and initiatives to strengthen neighborhood identity and cleanliness. Strategies are organized around three core themes: Belonging, Opportunity, and Connection. Under "Opportunity," key goals include establishing an on-site childcare facility, promoting financial self-sufficiency, expanding Wi-Fi access, and increasing awareness of educational resources. "Connection" strategies emphasize infrastructure improvements, such as traffic calming measures, expanded bike-share access, and the development of nature trails and walking groups. Additionally, an early Action Project has been submitted to HUD for approval. This first-phase initiative focuses on improvements to Dutko Park, including the installation of new bus shelters, seating, sidewalks, walkways, and public art. The project aims to deliver visible, physical upgrades in response to community feedback while broader planning efforts continue.

Chairperson Clifton thanked Mr. Adam Rosa for his presentation. She noted that she had not realized the full draft plan was available on the Bethlehem Choice website, mentioning that while members of the Steering Committee had received the document, it is quite lengthy—but well worth the read. And added that the visual elements presented during the meeting effectively conveyed the project's potential and encouraged board members to visit bethlehemchoice.com for a more in-depth review.

Mr. Rittle thanked Mr. Rosa for clarifying his understanding of the roles of Collabo and Gorman & Company. He noted that both are planners, but he understood that Gorman & Company was more focused on infrastructure and housing, while Collabo was managing the community and people-oriented elements.

Mr. Rosa responded by explaining that Gorman & Company's role is to further refine the housing element of the plan. Their focus includes detailed design work—such as floor plans and unit layouts, developing a phasing strategy for the project, and assessing financial feasibility through predevelopment budgeting. Gorman & Company will also assist in exploring off-site acquisition possibilities and will create renderings to visually communicate the plan. Over the next five months, Collabo will work closely with Gorman & Company, with the intent of eventually handing off implementation responsibilities. If the partnership proves successful, Gorman & Company could continue working with the Bethlehem Housing Authority through future phases of the plan.

Mr. Rittle acknowledged that it made sense for Gorman & Company to manage the implementation, given their role in assessing feasibility. Mr. Rosa noted that Gorman & Company's current contract covers only the planning phase, and a separate master developer agreement would be required for implementation.

Chairperson Clifton added that the board would discuss Gorman & Company and their background further down the agenda. She emphasized that Mr. Rosa's presentation helped illustrate why a development partner is essential. Additionally, Gorman & Company brings the architectural, engineering, and construction expertise necessary to turn Collabo's conceptual vision into a financially and physically viable reality. She thanked Mr. Rosa.

Chairperson Rachel Leon joined the meeting.

Under Old Business, Nothing reported.

Under the Chairman's Report, Chairperson Clifton reported that on March 31st and April 1st, she participated alongside staff and city partners in the preparation and interview process for Gorman & Company. She noted that it was a particularly interesting and engaging experience and expressed confidence in the level of collaboration demonstrated during that phase. Additionally, she shared that on April 3rd, Mr. Rittle and Mrs. Linares Iris—serving as the board's personnel subcommittee—met with John to conduct his annual evaluation. While the specific contents of that discussion are confidential, Chairperson Clifton stated that the conversation was productive and mutually beneficial. And she acknowledged that there is still room to refine the process for future evaluations but expressed appreciation to both the board and Mr. Ritter for successfully completing this year's review. Lastly, she informed the board that she would be absent from the May board meeting due to an out-of-state commitment and expressed hope that Mr. Rogelio Ortiz would be available to Chair in her absence.

Under the Executive Director's Report, Mr. Ritter reported he will be attending The PHADA training on May 13–17 in Seattle, Washington, with coursework focusing on Organizational Leadership and Ethics. Second, he shared that the Inspector and Planning and Construction Director positions were posted for 21 days. We did not receive any qualified candidates for the planning construction director position. It has been re-posted and will remain open for an additional 14 days. If the position remains unfilled, alternative approaches will be considered. Mr. Ritter also noted plans to fill a Clerk Typist II role in Tenant Selection.

Mr. Ritter explained that internal interest is being explored, though the current criteria for the position may be too restrictive. He elaborated on the Civil Service constraints, including degree requirements and supervisory structure limitations, which impact hiring flexibility and timeline.

Chairperson Clifton inquired whether the requirements could be adjusted to attract more qualified applicants. Mr. Ritter explained that even slight changes to the job's qualifications could be a lengthy review and approval process through multiple Civil Service levels.

Chairperson Clifton asked if temporary hiring outside Civil Service could be a short-term solution. Mr. Ritter said that option is under consideration, noting that Mr. Kichline plans to depart in June. Chairperson Clifton raised the broader issue of whether remaining under the state Civil Service system continues to serve the agency's best interests, especially given the hiring challenges and the knowledge that some PHAs in Pennsylvania operate outside of Civil Service. She suggested conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the current system compared to more flexible models used elsewhere.

Additionally, the Drug and Criminal meeting scheduled for April 16th has been cancelled due to police training. Yardi's Rent Café platform is partially operational, currently allowing re-certifications, tenant contact updates, and messaging with property managers. Online payment functionality is expected by the end of June. The Choice Neighborhood Festival held on April 5th was well-attended, with 75-80 participants. The event featured vendors, the police and fire departments, CAT with bicycle activities, food, music, and giveaways including a bicycle raffle. He noted that attendees stayed for an extended time, making it a successful event. Mrs. Leon briefly commented on the Choice Neighborhood event, noting it was well attended and included Councilman Samuelson. She remarked on the positive atmosphere and strong community presence.

Chairperson Clifton followed up on a previously discussed item related to Field Day. Specifically, a local faith community, which has historically provided donations and volunteers, had requested to hold a worship service at the conclusion of the event. She emphasized the need for clarity around this issue to avoid recurring confusion regarding the appropriate boundaries between public events and religious activities, especially given federal funding implications. Mr. Ritter shared that he had reached out to HUD Representative, and subsequently, Mr. Matz advised against allowing the worship service due to concerns about separation of church and state. HUD concurred that it would be best not to allow the service. As a result, the worship component will not be included in Field Day activities.

Chairperson Clifton acknowledged the importance of drawing clear lines between acceptable forms of faith-based community support (e.g., donating and volunteering) and explicit religious expressions (e.g., worship services), particularly on BHA property during BHA-sponsored events. She reiterated the need to protect resident religious freedoms and comply with federal funding regulations, despite the nuanced and sometimes contradictory nature of such situations.

Mr. Matz affirmed the importance of avoiding "the shadows" — legally ambiguous areas — by clearly separating faith-based actions from federally funded operations. He noted that while leasing space to religious organizations might be permissible, offering it at no cost complicates matters due to potential subsidization concerns.

Chairperson Clifton and Mr. Ritter agreed that requests for religious services on BHA property have historically been denied, including those for outdoor areas like playgrounds, and that this approach would continue as the de facto policy unless formalized differently.

04/14/2025

(5)

Mr. Rittle noted that his own organization adheres to funders' guidelines as a matter of internal practice, even when no formal policy exists, and that such practices effectively serve as policy in action. The Board agreed to reaffirm its stance on the issue consistently moving forward and revisited a prior discussion regarding a potential lease agreement for worship use at the Parkridge Community Center. Although initial conversations had taken place, no lease agreement has been finalized.

Under the Deputy Executive Director's report, Ms. Rivera reported that staff participated in Fair Housing and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) training in response to recent HUD updates to the VAWA policy. The two-day training took place on March 26th and 27th and was highly informative. Additionally, staff attended a Yardi Rent Café training session held from April 1st to April 3rd.

Under Committee Reports, Mrs. Linares reported on behalf of the Scholarship Committee that all scholarship applications have been mailed. Eighth-grade applications are due by May 16th, and high school senior applications are due by May 9th.

Under Resident Council, Mr. Ortiz reported that the baseball program has begun; however, it was postponed for two weeks due to rain. He announced the launch of a new initiative, *Kultured Kitchen*, funded through grant support, which will operate at the community center. The program will employ two individuals to teach families how to cook together. Additionally, two staff members will be hired for the summer youth program, which includes a planned mountain trip with lunch provided. The food bank continues to operate steadily. Mr. Ortiz emphasized the importance of keeping youth engaged over the summer through activities such as field trips and museum visits.

Chairperson Clifton inquired about the start date of the summer program. Mr. Ortiz responded that it is expected to begin approximately one week after the end of the school year, around June 7. Chairperson Clifton reminded Mr. Ortiz to submit a formal funding request by the May 12 board meeting for the approval of student employee wages. Mr. Ortiz stated that their 501(c)(3) organization would cover some of the program's expenses but confirmed he would request funding from the Housing Authority for two student workers to be employed for eight weeks over the summer. He committed to bringing the necessary documentation to the May 12 board meeting. Chairperson Clifton added that, if necessary, the board could alternatively approve the request at the June 9 board meeting.

Mrs. Flores announced that in May, two councils, Litzenberger and Bartholomew, will have newly elected boards in place for the next two years. Additionally, Monocacy, which recently closed for a period, will be holding nominations and will also have a new board soon. The board of commissioners expressed appreciation and excitement about the leadership transitions.

RESOLUTION NO. 2612 - APPROVING THE PARTNERSHIP WITH GORMAN & COMPANY FOR THE PEMBROKE CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PHASE.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the partnership with Gorman & Company for the Pembroke Choice Neighborhood planning phase. Mr. Rittle seconded.

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

Attorney Matz raised concerns regarding the language of the resolution, particularly the lack of clarity surrounding the agreement's specifics. He noted that while he had received a draft of the agreement, he had not yet reviewed it in full and was hesitant to approve a resolution without more detail. He referenced a five-month contract and questioned the scope of authority being granted.

Chairperson Clifton explained that the resolution was written with more flexibility than usual because negotiations on the final contract terms were still in progress. She clarified that Gorman & Company's proposed fee was \$100,000, of which \$30,000 could be covered by the Choice Neighborhoods city planning grant. BHA would fund the remaining balance.

Mrs. Satullo added that part of the negotiation involved reducing the fee, since Collabo had already completed portions of the initial scope of work. She clarified that the city had committed funding toward the planning grant, which contributed to their scoring, but this agreement would be paid entirely by BHA.

Mr. Kichline confirmed that BHA has the necessary funds in its annual Capital Fund allocation, which includes engineering-related expenses. He explained that the agreement from Gorman & Company had been reviewed by Ann from Urban Ventures, who provided initial redlines. He then forwarded the draft to Mr. Matz for legal review.

Mr. Rittle asked for clarification on whether the board's approval of this resolution would authorize the Executive Director to finalize and sign the contract, or if further board action would be needed. Attorney Matz recommended updating the resolution to explicitly authorize the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Gorman & Company, not to exceed \$100,000, allowing the executive staff to finalize terms with legal oversight.

Mrs. Satullo agreed with this approach, emphasizing the tight deadline to submit the required documentation to HUD by September 13. She also clarified that although the City of Bethlehem is a partner in the Choice Neighborhoods grant, it should not be listed as a party to this agreement with Gorman and Company.

Chairperson Clifton confirmed that she and Mr. Rittle had been serving as board liaisons throughout the Choice Neighborhoods planning and RFQ process. She reiterated the importance of board involvement and transparency.

Mr. Clifton then proposed amending the resolution that the Board authorizes the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Gorman & Company, in an amount not to exceed \$100,000, in support of the planning phase of the Pembroke Choice Neighborhood Initiative. The Board understands that the specific terms of the agreement are still being finalized and directs that the Executive Director, in coordination with legal counsel, complete the negotiation and legal review prior to execution. The Board affirms its trust in the leadership team to conduct these actions consistently with the intent and responsibilities outlined.

Under New Business, nothing was reported.

04/14/2025

(7)

Under Miscellaneous Reports and other business, and Public Comments, Mrs. McLendon, former BHA Board Commissioner, greeted the Board and attendees, noting that she had presented several acknowledgments at the February board meeting. However, one additional recognition came in the day after that meeting. She presented Mr. Shawn Horn with an appreciation award. And expressed sincere thanks to Mr. Horn for his exceptional support in resolving IT issues, particularly at the Parkridge Community Center. She highlighted his passion, skills, and expertise, noting that his efforts had not only addressed technical difficulties but also significantly improved communication and the overall community experience. The award, presented on behalf of the Parkridge Community Center, recognized Mr. Horn as a valued and reliable resource. Mr. Horn thanked everyone. Chairperson Clifton and other attendees expressed their appreciation.

Chairperson Clifton noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, May 12, 2025, at 4:00 P.M., in the community room at Monocacy Tower. There being no further business to transact, Chairperson Clifton declared the meeting adjourned.

John Ritter
Executive Director