

MINUTES . . . REGULAR MEETING . . . JANUARY 8, 2024

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session January 8, 2024, 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
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.

Reorganization of the Board

The election of officers was turned over to Attorney Matz.

Solicitor Matz first reiterated the format for the election of board officers for the year 2024. On January 5th, a letter was sent to the commissioners explaining the election process to be consistent with the bylaws and Robert's rules. A revised copy was distributed today, January 8th, with attachments to reflect the current state of bylaws of terms of officers and committee structure. He stated that all nominations would be from the floor; each nomination shall be processed separately beginning with the chairperson followed by the vice chairperson; no second would be required although one may be made as a form of endorsement; nominations are closed when no further nominations are made.

Nominations for Chairperson and Vice Chairperson for the BHA Board of Commissioners for the ensuing year January 8, 2024 to December 31, 2024 were opened.

Attorney Matz called for nominations for Chairperson of the Board.

Mrs. Linares made a motion to nominate Commissioner Valerie McLendon for Chairperson.
Mr. Rittle made a motion to nominate Commissioner Lindsey A. Clifton for Chairperson.

There being no further nominations for Chairperson, Commissioner Lindsey A. Clifton by majority ballot now holds the position of Chairperson.

Attorney Matz opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chairperson of the Board.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to nominate Commissioner Valerie McLendon for Vice Chairperson.
Mr. Rittle made a motion to nominate Commissioner Rogelio Ortiz for Vice Chairperson.

There being no further nominations for Vice Chairperson, Commissioner Rogelio Ortiz by majority ballot now holds the position of Vice Chairperson.

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Atty. Matz stated that the election of new officers for year 2024 is now closed and approved.

Mr. Rittle thanked Commissioner Linares for all the work that she has done. It is a pleasure to continue serving with her. Commissioner Linares thanked Mr. Rittle.

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 11, 2023, were presented and approved with the amended paragraph on page 3. Mrs. Linares made a motion to accept the minutes of December 11, 2023. Mrs. McLendon seconded the motion.

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

Chairperson Clifton noted a clarification on December 11, 2023, minutes on the bottom of page 3. The comment made was that the Lynfield community center does in fact have a 501C3, and she is recommending we should have a lease between BHA and Mr. Ortiz' existing 501C3. Mr. Ritter replied, Attorney Matz is working on that.

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the Treasurer's report for December 2023. Mr. Ortiz seconded the motion.

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

Under the check register, Mr. Rittle asked about the Pembroke renovations phase one item. Mr. Ritter stated that even though we are in the process with the choice neighborhood project, we still have to make upgrades because Pembroke is our oldest development. Mr. Kichline added that because of the time of the Choice Neighborhood project people could still be living in Pembroke seven to eight years from now, so these units, 24 apartments are on the outskirts so that they can remain occupied as other units, hopefully get demolished and new units are built. The total project is 2.8 million. The \$340,000 item is the monthly draw, and it is based on how much work they have done, and we'll start to see this expense every month.

Under the financial report, Mr. Snyder reported that in the last meeting audit discussion on CDs not being covered, that we are covered under Act 72. The banks must segregate, per current Pennsylvania law, they must segregate funds aside to protect public money. But that money is invested in credit card companies, student loans and stuff our audits don't recognize that as much, they feel it's not safe. We have been in discussion with TD bank, they do have the treasury that we can buy T-bills and that is our plan, and we would convert all the CDs over to T-bills and buy T-bills in the future. A T-bill is a treasury bill, and it would be under our name, so the government backs it. We're buying into the U.S government, so you don't have to worry about insurance. Mrs. Clifton asked what the timeline for our current CDs finishing and moving the funds into treasury bills.

Mr. Snyder said we must set up the account first. We just renewed two CDs today, one for \$1 million, another for \$2 million so we're talking about 2 months. And we just renewed one last week for one month. So, as they become due from now on, we are going to convert them over to treasury bills. So, in the next couple of months as soon as we get the account set up.

There are two ways we can approach it, we can buy the treasury bills ourselves, which becomes very complicated, there's a bidding process or we can go directly with TD Bank, and there is a percentage fee. So, we are going to go directly with TD Bank as we have money available, and we can say we want to buy 30- or 60-day treasury bills.

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Unfortunately, we can't protect all our money because it's \$250,000 per bank and that includes all our accounts so most of our accounts, 2-3 of our accounts we're up to 250,000 but we're going to try to keep it, we have operating funds for like a month or two and the rest will be invested into T-bills. My goal is to try to get it, we just use a million dollars as an example. We always have a million dollars coming every month just in case we need it, we can constantly roll it over.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the Financial Report for November 2023.
Mrs. McLendon seconded the motion.

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

Nothing reported under Courtesy of the Floor.

Under Old Business, Mr. Ritter reported on the PHA Option for Over-income Families, that we did not adopt that into our ACOP for the simple reason that we are getting into affordable housing but right now we serve low to very low-income tenants. We have eleven tenants that are over income, ranging from \$99,000 to \$141,000 per year. The tenants would take two years to find a place to live as our goal is to fulfill the needs of lower-income families. With Section 8 they have two and half years to move. Mrs. Clifton asked do we aid with the housing search. Mr. Ritter said we have the FSS program who can help with resources.

Mr. Ritter said that if we adopt this policy, the units occupied will no longer be public housing units. They will become Section 8 units which we cannot maintain with subsidized money. Mr. Rittle replied but if they move out, they revert to public housing units. Mr. Ritter explained how reverting from public housing to section 8 units can affect us as the subsidy process is complex. Mr. Snyder added that it's not the Section 8 process, but that the tenant has to pay the greater of the fair market rent or whatever the subsidy is, and HUD has a weighted average for their subsidy based on the age of the building and the number of bedrooms it is, so we have no idea what the subsidy is. And then that would include public housing and capital funds, so it would affect both accounts. Mr. Ritter said once we get further on with the Choice Neighborhood program, there will be avenues to go that way. We are going to have public housing, Section 8, and affordable housing. That we can re-visit at that point but at this point we really do not want to get into housing over income people.

Mrs. Clifton felt all options were not presented back in August and stated that before a decision is made, she would prefer all options on the table to make the best choice moving forward. Mr. Ritter said the ACOP is seven hundred pages long and there are a lot of variables in there. Mr. Rittle also agreed because he does not think that we should be doing this. An eviction in the spirit of a housing authority is to bring people in, move people out and move people on to self-sufficiency and this is looked as a negative thing as opposed to an accomplishment because now you make more money. It is the goal, that these are the success stories that we should be championing. We should post on the front page of the website and recognize their accomplishments on how they succeeded. How we helped them find housing, so if we were to look at this later this year, when we revisit the ACOP we would suggest actually do #2, but not using it. Have it that you can live here with alternative rent but, make it the mission of the authority to get people out in those two years, so this just stays here as a safety, but you never get to that point.

Mr. Rittle thinks it's a really poor policy, he just didn't understand it before. Mr. Ritter said there are two sides to it, but he thinks with the amount of income that they are bringing in right now, this is the right move. Mr. Rittle stated staff should be spending time with these families to make sure that they can get somewhere in the two years because to be a success and then get an eviction notice you are just going to go right back down to being low income. Mr. Linares said her parents lived in housing years ago and over-income tenants were given 30 days to move out, so it is much better now. Mrs. Clifton asked for clarification asking in the two-year window where they are over income and hopefully looking for another place, we've notified them of being over income and they're paying flat rate rent as opposed to subsidized rent anyway. Mr. Ritter replied yes. Mrs. Clifton stated it would be helpful if the policy and procedure by which the over income flag gets raised or waived in some capacity and what the subsequent steps are to either corroborate the subsequent steps in that two-year window to move in the direction to find other housing, so we could review that back at some point.

Nothing to report under Chairman's Report.

Under the Executive Directors' report, Mr. Ritter reported that January 10th, is our next monthly D&C meeting, and at that time we'll discuss any drug and criminal activities on the properties. Second, Ms. Diana Moreno reached out to Dr. Silva, the Superintendent of the Bethlehem Area School District, he has agreed to participate with the Scholarship Committee, he is very happy to do so. Third, we did get permission from HUD to utilize sixty of our Housing Choice Vouchers as Project-Based Vouchers. We're currently working on an RFP to put out there for applicants. The Choice Neighborhoods' next Steering Committee Meeting is on Thursday the 18th from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM at the Boys and Girls Club. The agenda's going to be voting on a logo and opportunities and challenges. A representative of HUD will be visiting us for two weeks in March to do a site tour in conjunction with the Choice Neighborhood program. Our next bi-weekly meeting is on January 18th at 10:00 with Collabo.

Fourth, he completed the job description for the Deputy's Directors position, and a copy of the job description will be available for the board members later this week for any questions and comments. And all candidates are subject to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania rule of Civil Service. Mr. Rittle asked if a person is interested, and they know the field, but they haven't passed the Civil Service exam can they apply. Mr. Ritter said you can go on the website and apply at the posting and take the exam listed for that position. Finally, he received a letter from Senators Casey's office regarding complaints about the authority's administration of the Housing Choice Voucher program and the authority's management practices. As BHA takes all matters seriously, the authority is eager to find a resolution to these concerns. He will be sending a letter to his staff and we're going to schedule a meeting one day this month. At this point, we don't know what the complaints are, but I will let you know as soon as we find out.

Mrs. Clifton asked now that the position description is going to be available to the Board of Commissioners for comments and feedback, what does the timeline look like in conjunction with the personnel committee to get interviews scheduled and going? Mr. Ritter replied that he will do the interviews, that anything within the Deputy's position or any other staff underneath him is done in-house. Mr. Clifton replied that in our last meeting she raised this question and indicated that we had some conversation about the essential nature of this position and the importance of utilizing the Personnel Committee in support of Mr. Ritter. Then she asked if we needed to move forward with a resolution to ensure that that process happened, and we were told not needed.

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She presented a resolution and indicated that we need to in fact move forward with a resolution to ensure that the Personnel Committee is integral to that process. That her understanding from the last meeting is that Mr. Ritter agreed to that, but what she's hearing now is some pushback. Mr. Ritter stated he looked further into it after the meeting because he didn't know all the ins and outs of the rules but that does fall under the Directors' position.

Chairperson Clifton mentioned that she understands that it can be exclusively his, but at the last meeting she understood that they were asking him to consider involving the standing Personnel Committee to which he was in agreement at that time, and that if he's no longer in agreement she has a motion for the resolution and will happily bring it up if need be. Mr. Ritter asked Attorney Matz if he could elaborate on that. Mr. Rittle added that he knows that the board has no authority over the hiring of anyone except the position of Executive Director. But at the last meeting, knowing that information, Mr. Ritter responded, maybe it is a good idea, but now you're not choosing to. Mr. Ritter responded no.

Chairperson Clifton said we need to schedule a meeting with Senator Casey's office in response to the concerns, and she would definitely like to see board representation and staff at that meeting. Mr. Ritter replied he would like Chairperson Clifton and Vice Chairperson Ortiz to attend. Attorney Matz stated that as long as the representation doesn't exceed two. Chairperson Clifton said she wasn't surprised. She mentioned that she heard from some community members about the potential of some concerns having been expressed. She feels potentially the office had reached out maybe one on one even before this letter was issued. Mr. Ritter replied he had one dealing with Senator's Casey's office and he responded with all the documentation, and this is the first he's hearing back from him. Chairperson Clifton asked for clarification so in asking for some data and then in receiving that data now this is the response to that. Mr. Ritter replied to it maybe, but he had no idea since there were no particulars in the letter.

Mr. Rittle suggested that he report on the percentage leased vouchers, and if the information is public to ask other neighboring authorities in the Lehigh Valley to see what their percentage is to compare if we're behind or not as it could be a point of improvement. Mr. Ritter replied that right now we have 413 vouchers occupied, we have 52 vouchers issued that are not occupied. The current situation has been the same way for the past 3-4 years, where there is a 2% vacancy and if a landlord can rent a unit for \$2500 instead of \$1700 that's what's happening. Mr. Rittle replied that it would be interesting to see if Easton, Allentown, Northampton County or Lehigh County authorities are doing something different that we're not doing that has a higher success rate. This is what he can report to Senate Casey's office, to say well our percentage is the same as all five in the entire Lehigh Valley so actually there's not much of an issue, or we might find something different and see room for improvement.

Chairperson Clifton added that another sort of issue of note in addition to the voucher utilization part is around tenant voucher payments, overpayments and calculation issues. She thinks it's partly about that, but it sounds like there's some other issue too, so we as the board have been presented with this memo. She asked if these documents are going to be added to the meeting packet that's public as well. Attorney Matz added that transparency is the critical issue here. Chairperson Clifton agreed. Attorney Matz added that he doesn't know where these complaints came from, whether it's within the board, or whether it's constituents. But it's certainly a call for constructive approach to a concern that the senator's office is looking into to, and we need to be transparent.

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Mr. Rittle added there's going to be a lot of opportunity when we put in for Housing Choice Voucher in the new HUD plan, which is a strategy to help reduce the waiting list.

Under Committee Reports, Scholarship, nothing to report.

Under Resident Advisory Board, Mr. Ortiz reported that they launched the food bank back on November 3rd and it's been very successful. They're averaging about 55 families which is about 147 individuals, coming in every two weeks. Mr. Ortiz acknowledge and commended a few people in attendance who have been there helping out and making this program successful. The the next RAB meeting will be held Thursday March 14th right here at Monocacy Tower community center.

Mr. Flores, FSS coordinator, reported councils continue to have their appointments every month and normal activities.

RESOLUTION NO. 2583 - APPROVING THE PROPOSAL FOR THE YARDI SOFTWARE CONVERSION AND WISE COSULTING SERVICES.

(Resolution is entered separately as a part of these minutes.)

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the proposal for the Yardi Software conversion.

Mrs. McLendon seconded the motion.

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

Mr. Ritter explained that we're switching to Yardi. The cost for five years would be \$435,280 to get this started, and then we'll have an annual fee after that. Wise Consulting Services is the hiring consultant who will be transferring all the information from one system to another. And for their consulting contract is up to 1,000 hours at \$185.00 an hour, which is very reasonable.

Under New Business, Mrs. Linares asked for a motion to silence all electronic devices.

Mrs. Lendon seconded the motion.

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

Everyone will be reminded of the policy to silence all cellular and electronic devices during the board meetings.

Chairperson Clifton distributed and read the resolution draft ensuring that the board's personnel committee is an active contributing participant in the Deputy Directors' search process. The resolution stated that, "We as the Bethlehem Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners have a standing Personnel Committee and whereas the Executive Director continues to seek out support in performing a Deputy Director position description, and whereas time is of the essence in conducting a successful Deputy Director search and whereas the Deputy Director position, integral in meeting the goals established jointly by the board and staff at the June 2023 planning retreat. Be it resolved that the BHA Board of Commissioner Personnel Committee will be active participants in forming the Deputy Director position description, conducting the search including resume review and interviews and selecting a final candidate all by the side of the Executive Director". She requested the motion. Attorney Matz said she's not allowed or the Vice Chairperson to make the motion.

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Attorney Matz indicated you have to excuse yourself as the chairperson. Attorney Matz said she can recommend the motion. Mrs. Clifton recommended the motion.

Mr. Ortiz made a motion to approve the resolution to ensure the board's personnel committee is an active contributing participant in the deputy director's search process.

Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

Mr. Rittle explained that if we pass the resolution, it's just saying that they want to be involved in the hiring process. That it's really important to the future of the organization, to the mission and that there is expertise on the board to help with these types of strategic decisions. And he felt at the last meeting Mr. Ritter was comfortable with it. Mr. Ritter stated that if you look in the Commissioners Handbook, it states that the hiring of the deputy directors' position is at the discretion of the Executive Director, and this is where he is basing his decision on. Attorney Matz said there's an unchartered territory as to where the board goes and its management of administration, it has responsibility for its decision making so that becomes a little difficult, if someone else is making it for them. There are unanswered questions on how to approach it. He had brief conversations with Mr. Ritter about that and certainly typically administration is left with administrators, but the board can intercede because it has authority to do so. And the other question arises regarding the process of what the committees are, who are the committees, how are they composed. He said another area is where we could have stakeholders and other people involved as in a committee basis and that may create other questions, but between the board and administration is how to handle it.

Chairperson Clifton stated that we as a board were called into an executive session around the bylaws being outdated and where the bylaws need to be updated to reflect the current set of functions and needs within the housing authority between the board and the staff. Attorney Matz suggests that needs to be done and the bylaws don't have a specific standing committee component to it, so it's left to the discretion of the commissioners if they want to form committees to deal with task force issues. How it interfaces with administration is uncharted legally, but it's certainly part of what's going on. He has said openly in the meetings that finance and personnel committees typically are a big community-based sort of thing, as a resource for administration or for the board itself. It may require a little bit more definition to avoid crossing different lines, which may be a problem for some people.

Mr. Rittle commented that he understands Mr. Ritter as their only responsibility as a Board is his position and that he should have full operational control, but he just thinks it's an important role in the organization. As such, he supports the resolution because it has been ten months, and that the reason they had the emergency appointment of Mr. Ritter into the position from Interim a year ago was because he needed more support and the barrier was that he was playing both roles and one of the big reasons that we didn't go through an interview process to bring him on was to speed up the process. It's an important role that you should have help to do your job, you are still doing two jobs and it's a big concern to me.

Mr. Ritter replied that he has been the director for seven months. And he understands what he's saying and appreciates it but that he believes the hiring of the Deputy should fall his under jurisdiction. Mr. Rittle said he supports that but he's supporting the resolution because it's a critical position and he wants to support him in finding someone, if he's going to be on the committee which they probably still have to decide.

Mrs. Clifton said the personnel committee members are Commissioners' Iris Linares and Marc Rittle. And again, they had an agreement at the last meeting that Mr. Ritter was going to utilize that support for the process and as a result left the resolution on the table. That if he is now changing his position saying he is no longer willing to involve the committee in the process that's why she's presenting the resolution. She would be willing to clarify the language of the resolution to indicate that yes, in fine view you do have the final decision but that the expectation is that the Personnel Committee be an integral and involved part of the process leading up to the decision making and again if the language of the resolution needs to be tweaked.

Mr. Rittle asked if we can amend it. Chairperson Clifton responded sure we can. Mr. Rittle added that he brings in board members to do the interviews for key leadership positions, he gets their input, and he makes the decision. So, he apologizes if it seemed more like it was more aggressive than that. Mr. Ritter replied it's passively aggressive, but it's aggressive.

Mr. Clifton said to clarify the amendment would be to change that final sentence to read and in recommending a final candidate, the Executive Director has final and sole discretion over the decision.

Mrs. McLendon commented that the problem is we're kind of forced into making decisions and we have been for months, without us fully getting all of the information. Like Mr. Ritter said he looked in the handbook, but when this came about, he probably didn't know that. So, we just need to give each other more time, be a little bit more patient with one another until we get more information. Can't make an informed decision without the right information. Mr. Rittle explained that his point was that if an associate had been announced and hired within three months of being appointed, I wouldn't have an issue at all. One, that it's actually okay for board members to help in the hiring of leadership positions other organizations as he does this. And that in this case we rushed to appoint the position, we did that, we rushed the position, we didn't interview, we didn't have a job description okay. After the fact, we went back and we pulled back Civil Service documents and handed them out, but it was after the fact. We didn't have enough information to make that decision. So, I am saying that this is a good resolution, because Mr. Ritter will have the support.

Chairperson Clifton said to Mr. Rittle the amendments that we have discussed are congruent with the intentions of the motion "can you read it again. Mr. Clifton, the last part will be amended to say if this is your intention "Be it resolved that the BHA Board of Commissioners Personnel Committee will be active participants informing the Deputy Director position description conducting a search including resume review and interviews and recommending a final candidate, the Executive Director has final and sole discretion over the decision".

Attorney Matz stated that there is a term called Standing, Standing is referring to something which is Constitutional. So, it is a personnel Committee but it's not necessarily a Standing Personnel Committee, that's not the case.

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

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Under Miscellaneous Reports and Other Businesses, Board Member, Solicitor and Staff, Ms. Mirella Snow, Section 8 Coordinator, responded to Mr. Rittle's comments in reference to meeting with other housing authorities on the Section 8 program. Every month, they do have a monthly meeting with all the local housing authorities, they meet with Easton, Allentown, Lehigh County, Montgomery County, and they network, to help each other. An honored to say that Bethlehem Housing Section 8 program is doing very well, in fact we also had meetings last month in December, with Mr. Horn, Mr. Ritter and the Section 8 staff with HUD and they were really happy to see the outcome of the Section 8 program.

Mr. Rittle replied he was glad to know they do have meetings. He asked if she gets data from the other authorities to be able to compare data as this would be helpful to give Senator Casey's office. Ms. Snow said it's an informal meeting. Mr. Ritter suggests she could request the data. Mrs. Snow said that overall Bethlehem Housing is doing very well compared to other housing, so I'm proud to say that. Mr. Rittle asked if we have a meeting date yet with the Senator. Mr. Ritter replied he will be responding to Senator Casey.

Under Public Comments, Mrs. Linares commended the BHA staff, Mr. Ritter, and Attorney Matz, for all their help while she served as the Chairperson. "They do an excellent job." She mentioned that last January they attended a conference in Florida, and at one of the sessions, they were told that the mayor appoints the commissioners. But once you become a commissioner, politics goes out the door, and in her many years as a commissioner, she's never seen so much politics as now. It is still our mission to provide safe and affordable housing for our residents and BHA has provided that, and I want to thank them again for that. Mr. Rittle thanked Mrs. Linares.

Ms. Ana Smith, Director of Community Action Development of Bethlehem spoke on behalf of the Lynfield Community Center, as one of the long-standing primary funders, it serves approximately 35 youths in the Southside community throughout the years after school programming and daily summer programs. Lynfield Community Center is the only remaining youth center in Southside Bethlehem, and it's sustained through significant volunteer labor, as well as the support of community partners who are represented here today. It is our understanding there have been some changes made to the centers ability to serve the youth of our community including restrictions on serving hot food, reduced spaced for activities and limitations placed on equipment available for use by children. While we absolutely understand that the housing authority must abide by local and federal regulation, I'm hopeful that BHA and Lynfield Community Center, which is as we know now is a 501C3 non-profit corporation can find a path forward to allow the center to continue to meet the needs of youth in the community.

In particular, the ability to serve meals to children allows for equipment that encourages physical activity indoors at the center. The services the center provides to children in the community are essential and additional restrictions can limit the ability of the center to meet the needs of the community. If changes in policy, equipment, or certifications are required to comply with HUD regulations, they hope that the BHA will work with the organizations board of directors to identify those measures that must be taken to ensure compliance and they're happy to provide support as one of the funders if there is additional funding or support necessary to ensure that those changes can be made. In addition, to clearly establish the rights and responsibilities of each party, she highly encourages BHA to provide a written lease to Lynfield Community Center that establishes guidelines and expectations for the management of the facility moving forward. As we move forward, I have no doubt that everyone in this room shares a commitment to serving the youth of the Lynfield community as best as we can, and please count on Community Action to continue supporting Lynfield's programing to assist in any way that we can with any conversations about to resolve any challenges that my emerge. Thanks so much for the opportunity to speak.

Ms. Donna Taggart, Community Outreach Liaison for Wind Creek Bethlehem. She was also there to support the Lynfield Community center because Wind Creek is a funder as well. Ms. Taggart is not sure what the situation is, but she would like to request a meeting to sit down and talk through the issues and come to some sort of solution. These hot meals are sometimes the only hot meals the kids get per day, and she would hate to see that go away.

Chairperson Clifton added that we've all been really impressed and grateful for the work that Mr. Ortiz and the Lynfield Community Center do and she expressed at our last meeting some concern around his 501C3 having an agreement in place, and follow up meeting to start working towards next steps, not only in the direction of a lease but in the direction of better understanding some of the parameters for the changes that are happening and what's possible would be really useful.

Mrs. Martha Ortiz, Lynfield resident, stated that she has been in Lynfield for 25 years and she has been serving the community for 12 years with her husband Mr. Ortiz. And she is seeing a whole lot of changes. That she and Mr. Ortiz are the support of the neighborhood. She is disappointed at the fact that they're getting disrespected. She is here to represent her community because she's been serving for a long time, and they count on her. She gets calls from the school when there are children that do not have any food, when their children need somewhere to go and this is why we have the community center.

They have someone slandering and disrespecting them, and they are not supposed to be living there in the first place. But she came back and she's doing her own crooked stuff, but no one wants to do anything. And it is very disrespectful that as many times that I've seen texts and people send it to me about the disrespect the slandering the injustice and it gets reported to housing and nothing gets done. They have gone through a lot. And when you have a resident who is being disrespectful and slandering them then she feels that housing should get involved and support them. She thanked all their supporters there for they're the ones who made it possible for them to obtain the 501C3 because when they asked housing for assistance they got rejected, so they had to go out and work on getting it, so we could make some money to bring it in to the center. But she thanked Mr. Ritter as well for his support. Also, on the changes in the Lynfield community room regarding following HUD regulations. The employees do not realize what goes on, as they work very closely with the residents. They are dissatisfied with the changes because they have been in the community for a long time and know what the community needs. She thanked Mr. Ritter and Grace church for the Christmas Tree gift for the community center kids, it was very much appreciated.

Linda Rentschler manages Humanitarian Social Innovations, thanked Ms. Taggart and Ms. Smith for their support of the Lynfield Community Center and thanked the board for all their support as well. They are the 501C3 sponsors for the Lynfield Community Center, however they are incorporated and have their own board of directors. And one of their main roles in addition to receiving tax exempt gifts for them is to help them and coach them along and mentor them as a growing organization, to that end we are committed to ensuring that transparency and excellence is part of the growth trajectory. They have a greater vision of multiplying throughout the housing authority effective, meaningful community centers that address the concerns of the people in the housing development in the same way that Lynfield does for their people. Chairperson Clifton and Mr. Ortiz thanked Mrs. Rentschler.

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(11)

Mr. Rittle said that he is concerned about what was stated and he does not know the details and he wants to ensure that the process is happening and to the extent that the board can be instrumental in making sure that it does. Mr. Ortiz stated that if the HUD guidelines were in place twelve years ago, we would not be having this conversation today and that Mrs. Flores is just doing her job. Mr. Rittle thanked all the people that were present today to support the Lynfield Community, that this is new information to him and perhaps the board and they want to make sure they make the process right for the people of Lynfield

Chairperson Clifton would like to set up a follow up meeting with Donna Taggart to get additional information about HSI interest in possibility supporting the development of community centers across housing authority properties it is an incredible opportunity for growth. And she thinks as a board and a staff we should also have a separate set of discussions about that and how we can partner with them as an interested partner and to broaden the services and activities and support available to residents. In addition, a critical discussion would be with some of our 501C3 folks, some of those leaders and some BHA staff first to understand the request that have been made and what the parameters are, and to understand what level of sort of flexibility there may or may not be going forward. And some of those things can also help till the ground in the direction of working towards a lease with that 501C3 so I do think sort of a concerted series of separate meetings and follow up conversations are really important to getting us back on track in a way that's fully serving the needs of that community.

Chairperson Linares noted that the next re-organizational board meeting will be held on Monday, February 12, 2024, 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