

MINUTES . . . REGULAR MEETING . . . JULY 14, 2025

The members of the Bethlehem Housing Authority met in a regular session on July 14, 2025 at 4:00 P.M. (IN PERSON MEETING). Those present and absent were as follows

PRESENT

Mrs. Lindsey A. Clifton, Chairperson
Mrs. Iris Linares
Mr. J. Marc Rittle
Mrs. Rachel Leon

ABSENT

Mr. Rogelio Ortiz, Vice Chairperson

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

The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 12, 2025, were presented and approve. Mrs. Linares made a motion to accept the minutes of May 12, 2025. Mr. Rittle seconded the motion.

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

Chairperson Clifton presented the Treasurer's report.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the treasure's report for the May and June listing 2025. Mrs. Linares seconded the motion.

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

Under the Financial report Mr. Snyder provided two Income and Expense Reports. The first aligns with the FDS and reflects an updated March report previously shared in April. Additional Capital Fund revenue for soft costs was included, increasing revenue by \$500,000 and shifting the favorable variance from \$138,000 to \$679,000. This income is not usually included in the operating budget but is required for the FDS. As of April/May, the Authority is favorable by approximately \$481,000 compared to budget, though it is still early in the fiscal year.

Under the Section 8 report, Mr. Snyder reported that as of July, 76.64% of vouchers are leased. Approximately \$135,000 in HAP funds are currently available. Vouchers have been issued and are pending lease-up. The staff is monitoring utilization to avoid oversaturating the market and to maintain a balanced leasing rate, preventing prior issues with over-leasing.

Chairperson Clifton inquired whether the annual audit visit coincides with the year-end financial presentation. Mr. Snyder stated the audit is underway, with a target completion date of October. The report is due to HUD by December. Depending on finalization, the year-end financial presentation by the auditors will occur in either November or December. Chairperson Clifton also asked if a fiscal year-end summary would be provided, as in the prior year. Mr. Snyder confirmed that while financials are currently up to date, a summary will be provided after receiving the final audit report. The auditors are expected to focus particularly on the Capital Fund this year, in addition to standard review areas.

Mr. Rittle inquired about the status of Litzenberger, (AMP 4). Mr. Snyder explained that AMP 4 operates at a significant deficit due to HUD's funding formula, which is based on building age and square footage.

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This formula does not account for additional costs associated with high-rise maintenance, such as 24-hour fire watch and elevator systems. As a result, funds are regularly transferred between AMPs to offset AMP 4's shortfalls. Establishing reserves is a key strategy to help sustain and eventually make AMP 4 financially viable. By comparison, AMP 4 receives approximately \$60,000 per month in subsidy, while other AMPs, like Marvine, receive over \$100,000.

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

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

Under Courtesy of the Floor, Agenda Items Only. Nothing reported.

Under Old Business, Chairperson Clifton asked for an update on the Parkridge lease. Mr. Ritter stated that the lease documents were re-sent to Valerie for review. She indicated she would finalize and return the documents as soon as possible. Chairperson Clifton clarified that Mrs. McLendon is currently completing the application portion. Once submitted and reviewed, the board will move forward with approval and lease execution.

Under the Chairman's Report, nothing was reported.

Under the Executive Director's Report, Mr. Ritter provided several updates related to Choice Neighborhoods and staffing. The Bayard Movie Night is scheduled for July 28 from 6:00 to 9:00 PM at the playground on Bayard Street, just off Stefko Boulevard. The next D&C meeting will be held on July 18 at 9:00 AM. Interviews are beginning for the Assistant Maintenance Superintendent position, which was previously held by Mr. Speshok. David Rossetti was hired as the new Housing Inspector on May 19th and is currently conducting inspections for both Public Housing and Section 8. Mr. Curt Kichline officially retired on June 27 but will remain temporarily as a consultant to assist in training.

The First Tee project is out to bid, with the opening scheduled for July 24. This phase includes the development of 12 new units to bring the agency up to its Faircloth limit. There may be potential to add more units in the future if permitted, including the possibility of acquiring land from the Boys Club. Additionally, the agency recently underwent an NSPIRE inspection for four high-rise buildings and received a score of 90%, which exempts them from reinspection for three years.

Mr. Ritter also shared highlights from a June 25 site visit to the Philadelphia Housing Authority as part of the Choice Neighborhoods planning process. He described their operations as impressive and noted that their programs—ranging from job training in solar panel installation to in-house retail training—offered valuable insight. Locally, BHA continues to work with Gorman & Company and Urban Ventures on finalizing site plans and renderings. The current plan includes 428 units in Pembroke and 56–68 units in Marvine, featuring a mix of elderly and general occupancy housing, with high-rise buildings including parking beneath. Feedback from the City has been incorporated, and final revisions are in progress. The full application is due to HUD by July 28.

Chairperson Clifton requested that board liaisons and the Steering Committee have the opportunity to review and provide input on the final renderings before submission. Mr. Ritter confirmed that review would be made available. In terms of service components, the current plan includes working with the Northeast Community Center, which may be relocated and expanded to accommodate food distribution and community programming. The new facility will be built on slab rather than with a basement to meet the center's operational needs, including the handling of heavy food deliveries.

Under the Deputy Executive Director's report, Ms. Rivera provided an update in response to Mr. Rittle's earlier question regarding the Choice Neighborhood renderings. She reported that discussions are underway about incorporating a fitness room, expanded pantry, and additional office space into the design. The current focus is determining how much square footage will be needed for each function so that the final layout can be adjusted accordingly. This will be a key component of the final rendering. Mr. Ritter added that Paula Johnson will be involved in the process, given the impact on her operations. Chairperson Clifton noted that the submission for the planning phase is intended as a starting point and can be revised further as needs become clearer during implementation. Ms. Rivera agreed. Mr. Ritter also shared that efforts are being made to preserve a large Ash tree on the site by building around it.

Additionally, Ms. Rivera stated that the final draft of the Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP) is nearly complete and is currently under review by herself and Mr. Ritter. The draft, along with the updated lease, will be sent to the board electronically by the end of the month for review. Mr. Ritter added a note of caution, acknowledging that continued HOTMA-related updates may require further adjustments. Chairperson Clifton and Ms. Rivera both commented on the frequent nature of these federal regulatory changes.

Under Committee Reports, Scholarship Committee, Mrs. Linares presented the recipients of the 2025 BHA Scholarships. Kayla Medina, who previously received the eighth-grade scholarship in 2021 while attending Northeast Middle School, has maintained a GPA above 2.5 and is now graduating from Liberty High School with an impressive GPA of 4.1. She has been awarded a \$5,000 scholarship and will attend Kutztown University in the fall to study Social Work.

Second, Raisem Arroyo was awarded a scholarship for his academic achievement, maintaining a 3.2 GPA. He plans to attend Northampton Community College this fall to study Criminal Justice and has a strong interest in politics and history.

Third, Genesis Gomez, who was present, received a \$2,000 scholarship. She holds a GPA of 3.17 and will also be attending Northampton Community College in the fall, majoring in Psychology due to her strong interest in human behavior.

Lastly, the eighth-grade scholarship recipient, Nevaeh Mnichowski, Broughal Middle School. She has maintained a 2.5 GPA and plans to pursue college studies in digital editing with a minor in Art. She has also expressed an interest in joining the military. She received a \$1,000 scholarship award.

The Board of Commissioners congratulated all recipients and wished them the best, acknowledging their outstanding achievements.

Ms. Rivera reported on the Resident Council on behalf of Mrs. Flores. As of June, there are 40 participants in the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program for Public Housing and 13 participants for Section 8. Recently, two participants graduated from the FSS program—one has purchased a home, and another is scheduled to close on her home on July 25. Additionally, a third participant is currently in the process of securing a home and is expected to close within the next one to two months. Resident Advisory Board meetings continue to be held at various properties. Chairperson Clifton expressed appreciation for the positive and encouraging update.

UNDER RESOLUTIONS - RESOLUTION NO. 2615 OF 2025 - APPROVING OF THE NEW POLICE SERVICE AGREEMENT WITH THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM FOR THE PERIOD OF APRIL 1, 2025-MARCH 31, 2021.

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

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the new police service agreement with the City of Bethlehem. Mrs. Leon seconded the motion.

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

The resolution was approved contingent upon revising the contract to replace the previous Chairperson's name with that of the current Chairperson, Chairperson Clifton.

RESOLUTION NO. 2616 - APPROVING THE KITCHEN REPLACEMENTS IN THE FOUR HIGH-RISE COMMUNITY KITCHENS.

Mr. Rittle made a motion to approve the kitchen replacements in the four high-rise building. Mrs. Linares seconded.

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

RESOLUTION NO. 2617 - APPROVING THE CONTRACT FOR THE PURCHASE OF A NEW COMPACT SUV VEHICLE FOR THE INSPECTOR.

Mrs. Linares made a motion to approve the contract for the purchase of a new compact SUV vehicle (Chevy Trax) for the inspector. Mrs. Leon seconded.

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

Under New Business, Chairperson Clifton introduced Mr. Kevin Easterling, who was present to address the Board. Mr. Easterling began by thanking the Board for the opportunity to speak. He explained that he is a Section 3 (S3) advocate and consultant currently working with Lehigh County, and he has also worked with the Allentown and Easton Housing Authorities. He shared that he is personally connected to the Bethlehem Housing Authority (BHA), having grown up in South Terrace and with family ties to Pembroke Village.

Mr. Easterling expressed interest in the Choice Neighborhood Initiative currently underway and specifically referenced the developer proposal's inclusion of Section 3 and Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) compliance.

He noted that he had reviewed information on BHA's website and observed outdated references to the HUD Section 3 portal, which was discontinued in 2020. Despite the portal's removal, housing authorities are still required to track and engage Section 3-certified contractors and targeted workers, particularly those residing in public housing.

He inquired whether the selected developer, Gorman & Company, had submitted a Section 3 plan and expressed his interest in reviewing it. He clarified that his work includes helping low-income contractors become certified and connecting them with projects, including recent bids for cleaning and painting contracts at BHA. Mr. Easterling offered to collaborate with the Authority and support their efforts in meeting Section 3 compliance requirements.

In response, Mr. Ritter noted that the Choice Neighborhood planning application would be submitted on July 28th and that the Authority was currently in the planning phase. Chairperson Clifton added that Gorman & Company was the designated partner for the planning process only, and while a continued partnership for implementation may be considered in the future, no decisions have been made at this stage.

Mr. Easterling also mentioned his team's access to historical Section 3 reports for BHA from 2013–2019 and inquired whether the Authority had maintained a Section 3 program under the revised 2020 guidelines. Ms. Rivera responded that she had recently assumed responsibility for the Section 3 program and welcomed a follow-up meeting with Mr. Easterling to explore how his services could support BHA's compliance efforts moving forward.

The Board thanked Mr. Easterling for attending and for offering his support.

Under Miscellaneous Reports and Other Business Board Member Mrs. Leon took the opportunity to thank Mr. Ritter for his prompt response regarding a concern raised by a city council member about malfunctioning air conditioning units in one of the BHA developments. Mrs. Leon noted that Mr. Ritter addressed the issue quickly and effectively and expressed appreciation for his consistent dedication and diligence.

Mrs. Leon then inquired about a letter recently sent to residents regarding the prohibition of sprinklers and inflatable pools, asking whether those rules stem from HUD regulations or are they set by the Bethlehem Housing Authority itself. She expressed concern for families facing extreme heat, particularly considering AC issues, and asked whether one-time exceptions could be made during heat advisories or whether there might be partnerships available—such as with the City—to offer free pool access or cooling centers.

Mr. Ritter explained that BHA issues an annual summer letter regarding water usage due to the high cost of water, which is paid by the Authority. He cited examples such as large inflatable pools, sliding boards, and misuse of water via hoses connected to washing machines. These activities pose both safety concerns and financial burdens. He added that there is currently no funding available to provide swim passes, but he was open to exploring the possibility of setting up designated cooling areas, such as at the Northeast Community Center where Field Day is held.

Mr. Rittle suggested that as part of the planned renovations to the community center, the Authority might consider incorporating a year-round gathering space that could serve as a cooling center in the summer and a warming center in the winter.

He noted that the Southside has a designated cooling site at New Bethany, which is open during weekday hours, but a facility closer to residents would be more accessible. Staffing such a space would be essential, as unmonitored areas are not permitted.

Chairperson Clifton asked Mrs. Leon if the concerns about AC and cooling were isolated to a specific community or more widespread. Mrs. Leon shared that the AC issue was reported in one specific community, although she did not yet have the name; the information had come through a council member who spoke to a resident. She expected to receive more details at the upcoming council meeting. Her broader concern stemmed from the intersection of high heat, AC malfunctions, and the restrictions on water usage, and she emphasized the need to explore creative solutions, possibly with city funding or partnerships.

Mr. Ritter speculated that the affected area may be Pembroke Village, as it lacks shade compared to other communities like Marvine. Mrs. Leon agreed, noting the expansive and exposed layout of the property.

Additionally, Mrs. Leon inquired regarding housing unit assignments. She asked how the Authority ensures that larger family units are made available when, for example, children move out and a single adult remains in the unit.

Ms. Rivera responded, explaining that during the annual re-examination process, the Authority evaluates family composition. If a resident is deemed over- or under-housed, they are placed on an internal waiting list to be moved into a “right-sized” unit. However, these internal waitlists are often lengthy and impacted by priority groups such as those with reasonable accommodation requests and victims of domestic violence under VAWA guidelines. Despite these complexities, the right-sizing process is an active part of the Authority’s operations.

Mrs. Leon thanked Ms. Rivera for the clarification.

Under Public Comments, Ms. Rodriguez addressed the Board briefly, emphasizing the importance of ensuring equity across all BHA communities. She expressed concern that while resources and improvements often focus on the Northeast area—such as discussions around a new sprinkler system or cooling spaces—similar attention should be given to other communities including Lynfield, the Southside, and Parkridge. She noted that HUD consistently emphasizes the principle of equitable treatment across all properties under a housing authority’s care. Ms. Rodriguez shared that residents have voiced concerns regarding perceived disparities, such as why some buildings have assigned parking while others do not. She encouraged the Board and Executive Director to continue prioritizing fairness and equitable resource distribution, adding that Mr. Ritter has shown awareness and responsiveness to this issue.

Chairperson Clifton acknowledged the importance of equitable consideration and explained that her earlier follow-up with Board Member Mrs. Leon about community-specific needs was intended to help staff explore solutions tailored to different housing environments. For example, potential cooling strategies may differ significantly between high-rise buildings and neighborhood-style properties.

Ms. Rodriguez expressed her appreciation for that approach.

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Mr. Ritter added that of the Authority's properties, only the four high-rise buildings have hallway air conditioning systems; all other units rely on individual window units.

Chairperson Clifton noted that the next regular board meeting will be held on Monday, August 11, 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