

**Burlington Housing Authority**  
**Minutes from the Regular Board of Commissioner Meeting**  
**October 29, 2024**

**Call to Order of Regular Meeting**

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 9:02 a.m. on October 29, 2024, via Zoom and in person at 245 Pine Street, Burlington, Vermont by Board Chair Jane Knodell. The following commissioners were present: Bill Schrecker, Brian Lowe, and Tony Lewis. Also in attendance were Executive Director Steve Murray, Director of Human Resources Melissa Farnham, Director of Asset Management Jeff Metcalf, Director of Housing Retention Crystal Jones, Director of Property Management Susan Carp, Director of Rental Assistance Stephanie Bixby, Director of Building Operations Lisa McGonagle, Controller Eric DeBlasio, Chief Financial Officer Nicholas Hibbard, and Supportive Programs and Services Manager Marissa Darling.

**1. Changes to the Agenda**

Jane Knodell removes the Strategic Planning Discussion for Gathering Feedback from Stakeholders. This will be added to the November meeting to have Kirby Dunn present as well.

**2. Forum: Resident of BHA Properties/General Public**

Catherine Foley, Bob Collins, Abbie Wolff, and Chris Barrett were in attendance and did not have any comments.

**3. Resident Council**

Catherine Foley presented on behalf of the Decker Resident Council. The Resident Council submitted their version of a security plan to BHA, commissioners, and the mayor's office. Steve Murray and Catherine Foley met about the final version. She stated they agreed with most of the ideas. The Resident Council is starting to see an uptick of homeless people and drug users in the building, but not at the levels of last January. When Censor is not there, the Resident Council is doing their own sweeps. She stated that the homeless people and drug users are there earlier in the evening, but did not see any during their midnight sweep. There is also a meeting for BSHI at 5 tonight.

Steve Murray asked if we had any information on Sheriff sweeps. Jeff Metcalf said that we would need to give a specific timeline for them to do their sweeps.

**4. Board Actions**

**a. September 24 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes**

Bill Schrecker made a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Brian Lowe seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

**b. Modifications to the Tenant Selection Plan**

Brian Lowe made a motion to approve the Modifications to the Tenant Selection Plan, as presented. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

**c. Modifications to the Section 8 HCV Administrative Plan**

Stephanie Bixby explained that these are not discretionary changes, but required, but still need a public hearing. These are positive changes for the applicants. The only discretionary item is to align the vouchers as best as possible.

Jane Knodell asked Stephanie Bixby to explain Mainstream and non-Mainstream. Stephanie Bixby stated that the Mainstream voucher program is for families with an adult over the age of 18 and under the age of 65 with a disability. They also have their own funding stream that is different from HCV's funding stream.

Bill Schrecker made a motion to approve the Modifications to the Section 8 HCV Administrative Plan, as presented. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

**5. Executive Director Report**

Steve Murray stated that Lisa McGonagle gave her notice, and her last day would be November 8. He thanks her for her 29 years of service to BHA. There will be an executive session with a plan after Lisa McGonagle's departure.

Steve Murray also stated that BHA is continuing to try to receive money from the Mayor's office for 6 months, as they have not paid BHA for the last 3 months. BHA will likely not ask for more money, but this will depend on how things go in the next 6 months.

He also added that health insurance increased significantly. The costs have almost doubled in the last four years. UVM has a \$10 million deficit due to their health care. BHA's intent is to provide employees with the best health insurance possible and will explore more health plans next year. BHA will use only MVP next year.

Steve Murray brought up 76 Cherry Street and its appraisal. It has been difficult to receive, but BHA expects this to be at the end of November.

Steve Murray added that he and Melissa talked with an HR DEI consultant for updating our job postings. This would include wording and reaching out to various communities in the Burlington area to start addressing the lack of diversity at BHA. BHA is hoping to stand out a little better to help bring in more applications as well.

He also stated that Whit Smith's practice is closing December 31 but will stay on as an independent counsel through May. Whit Smith has been BHA's general counsel for over 15 years. BHA had an interview with Paul, Frank, and Collins, but Whit Smith did not have any recommendations. BHA will call local nonprofits to see who they use as recommendations. He did not charge BHA much per hour, but we will be paying more for new lawyers.

Steve Murray also thanks Catherine Foley for how professional the Resident Council's letter was about security and for positive meetings.

Steve Murray thanks Stephanie Bixby for Rental Assistance achieving high performer status from HUD. He stated that compliance is their priority, and they scored 100% on SEMAP.

Jane Knodell thanks Lisa McGonagle for her many years of service for BHA and wishes her all the best going forward. Lisa McGonagle stated it was a pleasure working for BHA.

## **6. Consent Agenda**

- a. Asset Management**
- b. Housing Retention**
- c. Property Management**
- d. Rental Assistance**
- e. Human Resources**

Crystal Jones asked if the Board could give feedback on what would be helpful to update in her Board report.

Brian Lowe asked about the Housing Opportunity Program. Crystal Jones stated that this used to be for applicants with 0-50% AMI. Since the change of funds, the applicant needs to be less than 30% AMI and only 2 months or less of back rent due. These funds can only pay for back rent now. Brian Lowe asked how this would impact BHA. Crystal Jones stated it can show up as making sure people getting behind in rent needs to happen earlier on. Nick stated that it also does not cover damages or old rent.

Steve Murray stated the notification for nonpayment has sped up. Susan Carp stated that we did not send notices until the second month, but now we are sending the 35-day notices in the first month, which will benefit the tenant.

Tenants need the notice to get the money from CVOEO. Steve Murray said this might seem aggressive, but BHA is doing it to help tenants.

Jane Knodell also gave feedback by asking about the number of cases and providing an update on outcomes of those cases. She asked about the active cases and referrals. Crystal Jones said that cases can run longer and does not always have inflow equaling the outflow. Cases could take more time to stabilize households for mental illness, whereas having second language or recertification paperwork would take much less time. Cases could last multiple years if they need constant help. Every referral has something to do with losing their housing. Bill Schrecker would like to see where the referrals are coming from and seeing the partners that are bringing them forward as well as the specific cause or challenge of the referrals.

Brian Lowe made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, as presented. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

## **7. Financial Report – September 2024**

Nick Hibbard stated that there is nothing significant. The property insurance renewal should fall within budget. Maintenance and utilities are seeing some cost increases. Usage patterns will vary depending on when we receive bills. With all the moveouts, maintenance costs will go up. BHA is focused on leasing to reduce vacancy losses.

Eric DeBlasio mentioned that bad debt write-offs have been added and totaled \$55K, which is in line with the budget. The quarterly write-offs will help give better numbers throughout the year.

Nick Hibbard said that insurance would have a big increase for properties, depending on the carrier and/or building valuations. BHA is also having issues with the managed properties insurance due to utilization of premiums to claims. BHA will likely be changing deductibles and coverage for those managed properties. That insurance will likely be bound at the end of December. Jeff Metcalf is very cognizant of only doing larger claims to try to not use it when not needed. Firestops above stoves have been helpful.

Steve Murray said he reached out to Senator Kesha Ram Hinsdale to look at making discriminating against low-income housing providers illegal. This is long-term help, not short-term. HAIG Group will now work with our broker. Steve Murray also spoke with Mike Monte and BHA is not big enough for captive insurance.

Nick Hibbard stated that admin subsidies have not really had any changes. BHA will not get the final number until March or April of next year. Stephanie Bixby has \$2.5 million of UNP that BHA cannot use for buildings, can only use it for Section

8. Nick Hibbard stated that the other thing Stephanie Bixby is focusing on is a landlord incentive program to pay for back rent and damage.

Nick Hibbard also brought up that employee compensation is low because of the few open positions and will likely continue to grow. The newly added Painter and Preventative Maintenance tech will be discussed now. BHA has not hired these positions because of looking at the best use for these positions and because of internal reasons.

Bill Schrecker made a motion to accept the Financial Report – September 2024, as presented. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

## **8. Security Update – Decker Towers & Other BHA Properties**

Jane Knodell stated that the Board got the annotated copy of Resident Council's security plan for Decker and is happy there is a lot of agreement.

Jane Knodell asked Brian Lowe to discuss what happened during their meeting with the City. Jeff Metcalf, Steve Murray, and Brian Lowe met with the City, CHT, and BPD about identifying problem apartments. Steve Murray stated that BHA has pushed as far as we can get and the whole city is struggling. Some of the smaller raids are going to make a huge difference. Mike Monte has also asked for some raids and CHT is asking the legislature to change the laws for evictions for criminal behavior. The SA is starting to add bail and terms of release if BHA sends advanced notice before the arraignment. Police presence is going better now.

Catherine Foley stated that there was another situation with another resident that BHA is aware of. That resident is in court to be evicted, and the resident submitted documents from doctors on why this tenant should not be evicted. Courts cannot use new information for someone being evicted for nonpayment. The Resident Council is asking for permission to show the direct threats and possibly conflict of interest with Censor or intimidating Censor to use against this resident. This resident is in direct association with Sarah Terry. The threat to resident safety from Sarah Terry has increased significantly.

Brian Lowe stated that the warming shelter needs funding from HHS and would like an update. It looks like it is going forward with a wet, low barrier shelter, with an awake staff at night. After the winter, they are closing the lower Church Street shelter and renovating it to try to turn it into apartments. Jane Knodell asked how many people showed up. Jeff Metcalf stated 15. Jane asked if there were any concerns. Jeff Metcalf stated that it would start in January and end in April. The day station would move up there. They would like to add cameras on the exterior and see how things go. Jane Knodell asked what the main risk was, and Jeff Metcalf stated people going on the property and trash. He did add that once they

are in the shelter, they cannot leave. If they leave, they are gone for the night. BHA is adding some lighting, security, and dumpsters.

Brian Lowe said BHA has made a huge effort to consolidate the cameras and the BPD is very appreciative of that. If there are ever any firearms, BPD and the US Attorney would want to know.

Brian Lowe would like to walk through the annotated notes from the Decker Resident Council's security plan. Steve Murray stated that BHA is not happy with Censor and that has not changed. The other security company is having some trouble as well. Everyone in town wants security guards, so BHA is sticking with Censor for now. BHA has the Sheriff as a backup for Censor, if needed. Everything is more expensive than Censor. The current level is guard at front door when available, logging all the sweeps, and supposed to be doing sweeps every hour or half hour. There is one guard that does a solid job with this. They note some situations, but not many. If there is someone walking the stairs every half hour, the homeless and drug users do not have time to set up. Availability at Censor is a problem. Manning the front door and 3 sweeps is the ideal situation, but this hardly ever happens. The City would pay for about half. Catherine Foley says residents agree with BHA that the one guard does a good job. That guard is there for the weekends. During the week, it is hit or miss, and usually does a bad job. It is hard to find what we are looking for at the price point. The shorter BHA can make the shift, the better chance Censor can find someone that can be effective. Jane Knodell said BHA should keep trying new things to see if we can find someone or something that is better.

There is disagreement on visitation between BHA and the Resident Council. There are legal and illegal things that can be done at the front door. BHA cannot say you cannot enter because you don't have an ID as this could be discrimination and lead to lawsuits. Nick Hibbard stated that lease violations can be the next step where if people let someone in, they are responsible for that person. If they are in the stairwell, BHA should trespass them immediately. If a non-resident opens the door for someone, the person who let that first non-resident in would be responsible. Brian Lowe said it is important to use the lease violation as a tool.

A new key card machine has been authorized. There is a plan to change out key cards. If the tenant moves out or is evicted, they will still have that ID card, possibly. BHA does not agree that there are many key cards out there that are being used by non-residents but agrees that we can issue new ones.

Abbie Wolff states that she appreciates the movement on security issues and having discussions on the issue.

## **9. Strategic Planning Discussion for Gathering Feedback from Stakeholders**

Removed from Agenda

## **10. Executive Session – Personnel Discussion**

Jeff Metcalf, Melissa Farnham, Nick Hibbard, and Steve Murray were invited into the Executive Session to have a Personnel Discussion.

Brian Lowe made a motion to enter into the Executive Session at 10:20am. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

Bill Schrecker made a motion to exit the Executive Session at 10:48am. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

## **11. Other Business**

There being no other business, Brian Lowe made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:50am. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

DocuSigned by:

  
Steven Murray  
Secretary

11/26/2024 | 10:31 AM PST

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