

Burlington Housing Authority
Minutes from the Regular Board of Commissioner Meeting
April 29, 2025

Call to Order of Regular Meeting

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 9:02 a.m. on April 29, 2025, via Zoom and in person at 245 Pine Street, Burlington, Vermont by Board Chair Jane Knodell. The following commissioners were present: Bill Schrecker, Kirby Dunn, Brian Lowe, and Tony Lewis (Zoom). Also in attendance were Executive Director Steve Murray, Director of Rental Assistance Stephanie Bixby, Director of Housing Retention Crystal Jones, Director of Operations Jeff Metcalf, Director of Property Management Susan Carp, Director of Human Resources Melissa Farnham, Chief Financial Officer Nicholas Hibbard, and Controller Eric DeBlasio.

Catherine Foley and an iPhone user were also in attendance.

1. Changes to the Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

2. Forum: Resident of BHA Properties/General Public

Catherine Foley (Decker Towers) was in attendance. Melissa Levy from Community Roots was in attendance to facilitate the Strategic Planning item. An additional person joined as iPhone.

3. Resident Council

There were no resident councils present.

4. Board Actions

a. March 25 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes

Kirby Dunn made a motion to approve the minutes with corrections to typos for CVOEO. Bill Schrecker seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

5. Executive Director Report

Steven Murray updated the Board on recent events including a meeting with CVOEO leadership and discussions with HUD about their current staffing.

6. Consent Agenda

- a. Housing Retention**
- b. Rental Assistance**

- c. Property Management**
- d. Building Operations**
- e. Asset Management**
- f. Human Resources**

Brian Lowe appreciated the preventative maintenance update at Franklin Square and would like an update regarding referrals to Crystal Jones' team.

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

7. Financial Reports – March 2025

Nick Hibbard reviewed some of the current items for budget and HUD financials.

8. Security Update – Decker Towers & Other BHA Properties

Jeff Metcalf gave an update on the security contractors. There was discussion about laundry doors and cameras. Catherine Foley asked when the FSC contract was ending, and Jeff Metcalf noted it would be May 15th. Catherine Foley had noted Censor and FSC may be having issues between the companies. There was discussion on working with the City on additional funding.

9. CY2025 Housing Choice Voucher Funding Update

Stephanie Bixby gave an update on programmatic changes. She is working on program updates for the Board to review that will have wording on how insufficient funding would be handled. She explained how AHAPs will be processed and how participant deadlines will be handled. There was discussion about how the Continuing Resolution affected funding. Staff are still waiting for the annual HUD funding notice, but that likely won't come until late May/June. Stephanie Bixby also updated how potential shortfall notices may occur and the work that has been done to update HUD on shortfall status. There was discussion on potential funding.

10. Strategic Plan Work Session

Jane Knodell introduced how the work session will go. The power went out around 9:25am and the meeting recording and associated meeting technology went offline. Melissa Levy introduced herself and her consulting practice. There were introductions from staff and the Board. The power came back on around 9:30am. There was discussion of the work that staff feel has been important. Jane Knodell noted that the goal is to determine 3 possible goals for the next 3-5 years. Melissa Levy wants to find out the impact of the world and what it will take to make it happen.

Steve Murray said there was a lot of soul searching when trying to decide where to see ourselves in the next 5 years. He spoke about buying the potential of buying the Bright Street properties to develop, which we would have to do ourselves if we wanted to grow. Recently, many new policies and procedures have been added, but there is still more work to be done. If we do not look at cost savings, we will not have these profits that we have been making the past few years. Focused on the operations side.

Kirby Dunn is appreciative of the work and wants come up with something that is concrete and is not going to sit on a shelf. Everyone has a lot of big plans which shows enthusiasm. She does not want us to settle for what we have been doing.

Melissa Levy prepared a PowerPoint presentation. We are here to talk about why we do things as a company. She discussed SWOT analysis. She asked everyone to do 3 breakout groups to discuss SWOT analysis.

Tony Lewis left the meeting at 9:54am.

Results from SWOT analysis from breakout groups:

Strengths: Staff, physical assets, retained leadership, compensation and benefits, resiliency, financial management, mission driven, foundation from the past, overall atmosphere and satisfaction, diversity of rental assistance that helps many different people, and expansion of services.

Weaknesses: Retirement, people leaving, turnover, internal communications with residents and staff and external communications with partners, funding, software, clients having greater needs, the population has changed and is more challenging to work with, operational efficiency, community partnerships strong in some areas weak in others, properties, mismatch with residents and needs, challenging property portfolio where some buildings are more high cost than others, and development is a challenge.

Opportunities: Reviewing processes regularly, grants, accountability for staff and residents, tenant activities and education, culture with BHA residents, resident councils, technology for tracking people, sharing files, reporting, digital technological improvement, AI, training, engagement with staff and residents, reporting, communication, creating more community partners for more resources, communicating with other similar agencies with resource sharing, coordinated efforts with knowledge sharing, accept modern ideas, not always saying yes to something at the table but being open, create own best practices, term limits on board members, and does the company having the right structure.

Threats: Community partners that are adversaries, political atmosphere, resources matching obligations and no funding to provide necessary services, loss of funding, rising costs, service availability, familial services for clients,

wasteful spending with the need to be more frugal and understanding where the money is going, tracking costs, unit development, margin compression that rent does not cover expenses, vacancies, and collection.

Stop doing: stop the attitude of residents being second class citizens and making decisions because BHA knows better than they do, lack of accountability, giving extended timelines, multiple chances, spending too much time helping one person from our resources, setting expectations, stop Band-Aids, do not work for free for the city and other organizations, not billing properly, and evaluating referrals.

Do better: succession planning, train staff, consistency versus ad hoc, building level accountability is very diffused right now and not well defined, do not own things that are not in their wheel house, communication, funding diversity, staff retention, technology education for staff, take ownership of issues and problems and fix them, client problems, long term tracking process, improve efficiency, wasteful spending, portfolio management, and cultural building with staff to find out where we want to be as an organization, not just leadership.

After the SWOT discussion, there was a break for lunch at 11:41 am. The meeting resumed at 12:15pm.

Themes: Engagement – communication, community partners, tenants, staff, and government. Funding and resources – opportunities, revenue, increasing costs, and efficiencies. Ownership – staff and residents, training, knowledge, properties, and accountability. Efficiency. Physical properties – physical assets, challenges with tenants, comprehensive review of how they are, right sizing properties, should someone else manage or own the property, and understanding the cost of running a property. Staff – training, culture, and structure of staffing. Communication – do people understand what we do, what is our niche, public relations, messaging, positive publicity, good staffing, and limited English proficiency which relates to engagement.

Goals: Melissa Levy will take all of these themes and put it in summary to draft initial goals. Steve Murray and the Board will meet to go over these. The Board still wants to do the community outreach part with interviews. Melissa Levy stated that the strategic planning after goals is to talk to people about what needs to change to get to that goal.

*June will be a touch point on the strategic plan.

11. Other Business

There being no other business, Bill Schrecker made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:44pm. Kirby Dunn seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

DocuSigned by:

 Steven Murray
Secretary

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