

DRAFT – 10/28/2025 – SUBJECT TO BOARD REVIEW, AMENDMENT AND APPROVAL

**Burlington Housing Authority
Minutes from the Regular Board of Commissioner Meeting
October 28, 2025**

Call to Order of Regular Meeting

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 9:01 a.m. on October 28, 2025, via Zoom and in person at 65 Main Street, Burlington, Vermont by Board Chair Jane Knodell. The following commissioners were present: Bill Schrecker, Kirby Dunn, and Debra Davis (Zoom). Also in attendance were Executive Director Steve Murray, Director of Rental Assistance Stephanie Bixby, Director of Operations Jeff Metcalf, Director of Housing Retention Crystal Jones (Zoom), Director of Property Management Susan Carp (Zoom), Director of Human Resources Melissa Farnham (Zoom), Chief Financial Officer Nicholas Hibbard, and Controller Eric DeBlasio.

Catherine Foley was 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 was in attendance and is saving comments for the security update.

3. Resident Council

There were no resident councils in attendance.

4. Board Actions

a. September 30 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes

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

5. Executive Director Report

Steve Murray thanked the staff and leadership team for a 10-day vacation where everything went smoothly and did not need to be called.

He reported that we received authorization for the December HAP payments. BHA is a little concerned that January is a new fiscal year and during the government shutdown, no money would be authorized to be paid to landlords. Stephanie Bixby has a plan should it become clear that landlords would not be paid. Steve Murray, Nick Hibbard, and Stephanie Bixby were in a meeting with all the EDs from the state

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of Vermont and no one will pay money in January if HUD does not authorize it. It would be a poor financial decision to pay out without a promise of being repaid.

He also stated that he would like to move forward with 174 Maple donation, but there have been some hiccups. BHA is asking for the vote today and is looking to close at the end of November.

Steve Murray thanked Joe McGee who was instrumental with meeting with the police and the mayor's office. He was a great liaison for us.

He reported on the concern that with the government shutdown, people will not have food stamps and BHA cannot accommodate people who are not paying rent. Food stamps are not included as income for Section 8, so it does not affect rent. BHA is cognizant that people may not be able to eat and will send them to food shelves appropriately. There is a preliminary plan to donate money to food shelves that we send people to.

BHA will transition from Google to Microsoft Office in February. The Board will have the choice to use the web-based portal or outlook for email. There is a list of software that we will be able to remove with upfront conversion costs totaling between \$22K and \$27K, with savings coming in the first year. Jane Knodell was concerned about the Board meetings being on Teams, which would be a barrier to people joining, but this will be figured out.

Two drug dealers vacated Decker Towers in the last month. One abandoned their unit, and the other took a buyout. Catherine Foley reported that the person who abandoned their unit came back into the building yesterday and has been present downtown. Also, police raided unit 911 about 30 minutes after the prior Board meeting at Decker Towers. The person admitted in a police report that they were buying and selling drugs and renting the apartment to someone.

Steve Murray will follow up in a couple days with Chief Burke on getting an exception for patrols for police overtime since BHA is a government agency.

BHA is facing a shortfall of \$348K in Mainstream program. This means we will not have money to pay rent for most of the Mainstream program. This will be discussed further later in the funding update.

Steve Murray also thanked the state attorney for not allowing a person to be released to one of our apartments.

Debra Davis asked about how getting rid of two drug dealers affected tenants and staff. Catherine Foley said it has a huge effect. The one who moved out willingly was the biggest drug dealer for the last three years. The arrest was also huge out of unit 911. There are some new problems that are popping up though. Steve Murray responded by saying BHA is using everything in our power to get drug dealers out.

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16 people were evicted for drug dealing in the building. Catherine Foley is very satisfied with BHA staff and what they are doing. It takes 8-12 months to evict a drug dealer. Debra Davis also asked if there was something in place if they are seen at the building. It was reported that every morning we receive a report from Charles Bishop who looks at the cameras and tells us who is coming in the building. Residents also tell us what is happening, and we act on it too. Residents have a right to have visitors even if they are drugs dealers, which is an issue.

Jane Knodell notes that some of these are home grown drug dealers too, not just from big cities.

6. Consent Agenda

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

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

7. Financial Reports – September 2025

Nick Hibbard states nothing of significance has really happened and things are moving along well at this point. Eric DeBlasio mentioned there was \$134K of additional administrative fee proration sent to BHA in September. We will not know our actual funding for the calendar year until around June of the following year. We also will not know about our funding until June of next year but are hoping there will be some guidance for projections in December. One other line of note is maintenance, which is higher than anticipated but will likely continue through the remainder of the fiscal year. Turnover costs have become staggeringly high.

There will be a Finance Committee meeting in November with Jane Knodell and Bill Schrecker. Minutes will be taken to be sent to the other Board members, so they have a better understanding of what is happening with the budget once it is presented. The November meeting will include health insurance, but we won't have property insurance.

Kirby Dunn made a motion to accept the Financial Reports, as presented. Bill Schrecker seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

8. Security Update – Decker Towers & Other BHA Properties

Catherine Foley since the two drug dealers have left, it has disrupted the flow of things in the building, but there is evidence of organization of drug distribution

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network. She reported that 6 new people have come to the building that are regulars in the city, but not the building. One of those people has been arrested in Burlington and is coming every night and is violent and belligerent. They are seeing more than what was seen last fall. Mayank has been helpful as the resident manager. Jane Knodell hopes the new initiative from the governor will help with violent repeat offenders.

Steve Murray said the security companies are not being able to help BHA because of insurance. Susan Carp said a new deputy was hired and Sheriff Dan will offer us some time. Jeff Metcalf will reach out to Dan for sweeps. This is also what we will be looking for with BPD. Law enforcement is very effective especially if they are at random times.

Censor Security has assured BHA the insurance will cover Section 8, but the others are unsure or definitively cannot.

Catherine Foley adds the residents do a nightly sweep and sit in lobby for an hour or hour and a half. If there is no security, they are talking about doing one more sweep a night. The problem is when they leave from sitting in the lobby. Residents would rather have no security than have Censor Security.

9. CY2025 Housing Choice Voucher Funding Update

Jane Knodell noted BHA is ok except for shortfall in the Mainstream program. Stephanie Bixby stated that when Paul Dettman was working with another authority in Massachusetts, he said the shortfall money just showed up in the bank account one day. If we get it, we probably will not get notice. She also sent an email to the shortfall team to get it on record. BHA plans on using UNP (Unrestricted Net Position) for December and look to more attrition next calendar year starting in January. Steve Murray mentioned that there is only a small amount of UNP in Mainstream. We would use shortfall money first, then UNP from Mainstream, then UNP from HCV, then the worst case would be using money from the Central Office (Strategic). BHA is hoping that we can use UNP because that would count for our budget authority next year. There are only two housing authorities that are planning on paying out of UNP if needed and those two are BHA and VSHA.

Jane Knodell asked for a reminder of who was under the Mainstream Program. Stephanie Bixby reported that it is for a family with non-elderly disabled household member over the age of 18. There are 2 PBVs that are under the program which include CHT and Summit. Jane Knodell also asked about the HCV program and clarified our process for EOPs. BHA is not being any more aggressive than normal and only lost a net of 97 vouchers during the year.

Kirby Dunn requested the packet that was sent out to the residents.

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Jane Knodell asked about other housing authorities and if they are ending participation for tenants in good standing. They have not. Kathleen Burke will be asking the state for money.

10. Strategic Plan – Ownership & Accountability

Jane Knodell requested to have the Property Management Strategic Plan discussed in November and add packet materials. Steve Murray will get a copy to Nick Hibbard for the packet.

Kirby Dunn gave the background for the Strategic Plan to Debra Davis.

Jane Knodell asked the leadership team for their thoughts and takeaways and the Board members.

Steve Murray began by saying he believed BHA did better communicating funding than anyone else but understands that our communication has not been the best, but we are making huge strides. He said that every decision that we make, we need to think about who needs to know because the program is much more complicated than what is on the surface. He also noted that for the past 3 years, we have been trying to limit negative press and have not pivoted yet. We might be a little afraid of saying things are going well and they fall back apart.

Stephanie Bixby believes everyone wants more communication, but sometimes, it opens a can of worms that is not necessary. From a Section 8 standpoint, she does not want to scare landlords with notices that they may not receive payment until it is certain. It is best to prepare for the worst-case scenario, and we can be proactive in some instances, but not in others which might even cause anxiety. She was proud of how BHA handled the funding and saved hundreds of families from exiting the program. The goal is to support the current 2200 voucher holders. She believes communication is low hanging fruit that everyone says can be improved.

Nick Hibbard talked about the Limited English Proficiency related topics and how we are doing the best we can right now. It is very expensive to develop forms or videos in other languages and if those change, it would cost even more to update. He believes this should be more at the state and federal level so everyone can access them. Otherwise, we follow state and federal laws and guidelines. Education for tenants is also important, and we have developed videos and posted them to YouTube in multiple languages. We are looking at adding them to video pamphlets.

Crystal Jones stated that retention is helping tenants long before evictions happen. She works well with Stephanie Bixby to get to the people who need the help. There is only one grant which requires a notice to vacate to use.

Jeff Metcalf notices that there are a lot of misunderstandings with staff. He believes that with increasing leadership in Building Operations, it will help with more

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accountability. Working with the population we do is difficult and they are put in many challenging positions. He is hoping this leads to better customer service and better communication about prioritization. He also believes that our community partners and the public often only hear negative publicity. BHA, the Resident Council, and our partners at BPD, CEDO, and the Mayor's Office, among others, have worked hard to turn things around. We now have an opportunity to share some much-needed positive news about the progress made.

Jane Knodell said she was not upset with getting our stance out early about the voucher funding. She is hoping that we can let certain stakeholders know what is going on now and what is happening in the future. It does not have to be public, and we need to find a good middle ground for what to share. Even saying we do not know what is happening is more than saying nothing. If we add someone who knows about the organization to get messaging out, it will allow us to be on the same page with outside stakeholders.

Kirby Dunn stated that communication is something we can all do better. She wanted to state that there are positives in the report as well. BHA should try to put out some of the positive outcomes because staff and residents have worked very hard.

Bill Schrecker appreciates the leadership team focusing on the negative feedback because it shows that we want to grow and be better. He wants to also look at the positives as well. He was considering how the staff messages are updated to the Board monthly and maybe adapting it to a wider audience at a more distilled level. He also stated that it could be a positive opportunity to reduce vacancy in buildings, which would be beneficial to the bottom line if we do positive press.

Catherine Foley mentioned that some things that go missed are the smaller things that BHA is doing. She brought up an example of a resident at Decker Towers with medical issues and BHA staff worked to make sure that resident was taken care of. This person was someone who came from the Pods and was homeless. Working with that one challenging resident has impacted the entire building and everyone there talks about it. Adding more personalized stories could have a great impact.

Jane Knodell says we should think about an affordable way to add communication to leadership and the organization. This could come in the form of someone helping with a monthly newsletter. Kirby Dunn and Jane Knodell have an idea of who could help with this.

11. Executive Session – Property Acquisition – 174 Maple Street

Kirby Dunn made a motion to enter the Executive Session at 10:29 a.m. to discuss the Property Acquisition of 174 Maple Street, inviting Nick Hibbard, Eric DeBlasio, Jeff Metcalf, and Steve Murray. Bill Schrecker seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

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At 10:54 a.m., there was unanimous approval to exit the Executive Session.

Bill Schrecker made a motion to approve the resolution and purchase and sale documents, as presented, with the update to item 1 of the purchase and sale to be exclude the words “up to” before \$200,000.00. Kirby Dunn seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

12. Other Business

The next meeting will be on November 18 at 9 a.m. at 65 Main Street. The following meeting will be on December 16 at noon at 65 Main Street.

The proposal for next year's calendar will be in the November meeting.

The Finance Committee will meet after the November 18 meeting.

There being no other business, Kirby Dunn made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:56 a.m. Bill Schrecker seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval.

DocuSigned by:

Steven Murray
Secretary

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