

**Burlington Housing Authority**  
**Minutes from the Regular Board of Commissioner Meeting**  
**April 30, 2024**

**Call to Order of Regular Meeting**

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 8:32 a.m. on April 30, 2024, via Zoom and in person at 65 Main Street, Burlington, Vermont by Board Chair Jane Knodell. The following commissioners were present: Bill Schrecker, Brian Lowe, Kirby Dunn, and Tony Lewis. Also in attendance were Executive Director Steve Murray, Director of Asset Management Jeffrey Metcalf, Director of Human Resources Melissa Farnham, Director of Building Operations Lisa McGonagle, Director of Property Management Susan Carp, Director of Rental Assistance Stephanie Bixby, Director of Housing Retention Crystal Jones, Property Manager Maya Boucher, Supportive Programs and Services Manager Marissa Darling, SASH Coordinator II Becky Rabin, HRS Community Outreach Evan Barker, and Senior Staff Accountant Eric DeBlasio.

**1. Changes to the Agenda**

No changes were made to the agenda.

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

The City of Burlington Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak and Burlington City Councilor Joe Magee were present from the General Public. President of Decker Towers Resident Council Catherine Foley, Secretary of Decker Towers Resident Council Abbie Wolf, and Resident of Wharf Lane Kirsten Kouwenhoven were present from the BHA Properties.

Catherine Foley stated that the new security guard started last night and was not prepared. The resident council stayed until midnight to help him. Homeless people have started to come back more, but not as bad as winter. Steve Murray stated that Jeff Metcalf made many attempts to meet with Censor before starting to go over policies and procedures, but Censor did not respond in a timely manner. BHA found out Friday that the new security guard was going to start on Monday, so it was not a lot of time to address it but will be as soon as possible. Jeff Metcalf stated that Censor is understaffed as well, so that attributed to the unpreparedness of the new security guard.

**3. Board Action**

a. March 26 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes

Kirby Dunn made a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Bill Schrecker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Volunteer Time Off Policy – Personnel Policy Update

Melissa Farnham stated that the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee discussed and formed the policy together. It will help create a more inclusive environment and would allow employees to volunteer in other areas other than what BHA does already. The policy time allows for 24 hours over the course of the fiscal year which equates to 2 hours a month and can be good for team building across departments.

Kirby Dunn asked more about how it affects DEI. Melissa Farnham stated that it allows for more inclusivity and adds to the benefits package. Steve Murray added that BHA used to have service days at BHA properties, but this was asking employees to volunteer. It is an American tradition to volunteer and there are many community partners, so it is a way to build connections with the partners as well.

Kirby Dunn has concerns about paid time off and the personnel policy in general. Volunteerism is not for everyone. Jane Knodell would also like to see it in relation to the paid time off or added to the paid time off. Bill Schrecker is afraid of how it would increase the liability of BHA if it was just added as paid time off, liked how it was structured to not be paid out, and asked about other community partners policies.

Jane Knodell suggested coming back with the paid time off policy and other personnel policies change. Melissa Farnham has a draft of an updated personnel policy and will send it to the leadership team and ask about any changes or updates.

This will be tabled until June when the whole personnel policy is reviewed.

There was no vote.

#### **4. Executive Director Report**

Steven Murray gave a shoutout to Crystal Jones for submitting a request for congressionally directed funding from Senator Welch's office and a quick turnaround with a request from Becca Balint's office on Friday that was needed by Monday. He also gave a shoutout to Susan Carp and Melissa Farnham for staffing and Susan Carp for reducing vacancies at properties. Finally, Steve

Murray gave a shoutout to Stephanie Bixby for taking on a portion and/or all the compliance side which will free up Susan Carp and the Property Management team to deal more with property management issues.

## **5. Consent Agenda**

- a. Asset Management
- b. Housing Retention
- c. Property Management
- d. Rental Assistance

Bill Schrecker made a motion to accept the consent agenda. Brian Lowe seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval of the motion.

## **6. Financial Report – March 2024**

Eric DeBlasio mentioned the bad debt is very high due to many high-cost turnovers from tenant damages. He also mentioned that the cash position is very high due to receiving admin fees and HAP money early.

Kirby Dunn made a motion to accept the financial report. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval of the motion.

## **7. Resident Council Discussion**

This was discussed during the discussion with Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak.

## **8. Discussion with Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak**

Jane Knodell began that conversation by stating that BHA is working on rebuilding the relationship between the City and BHA, and mainly focusing on Decker to start. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak appreciates being here and getting updates from Steve Murray on what has been happening. She stated that there are similar concerns at smaller properties across other communities in Burlington. She believes that we need to think strategically about partners outside the City. She met with the HUD regional director 2 weeks ago, hopes to have a follow-up with them, and wants to be a more active partner. She is also trying to figure out long-term solutions with limited resources in the City.

Brian Lowe states that he has developed a proposal for the City and BHA.

Steve Murray gave background information about Decker. Decker is not public housing and has PBV in it. Decker switched over in 2014 and BHA is just the landlord. Decker used to be mainly elderly, but nonelderly disabled were added. This worked for a while, but Covid took a toll on people who suffered from mental illness. It was around February of last year when BHA found we were in trouble. BHA promised the residents that we would deal with it, but we had no experience in this. BHA has evicted 14 tenants, mostly for non-payment, but many were drug dealers. Steven Murray also stated that there is very little police reaction and courts are taking a long time for evictions. BHA has partnered with residents and tried over \$100K of security upgrades and partnered with the City.

Jane Knodell continued the conversation by discussing what is currently happening. There is an agreement with the City to have security guards patrolling by doing sweeps, then we added the Sheriff's office who have a little more power. The previous administration at the mayor's office wanted to control entry into the building. Under the agreement, the City used housing trust funding to help pay for physical improvements to help free up resources in BHA's budget to help add roving guards. There are 161 apartments, and everyone is allowed to have visitors. BHA is making progress on carrying out the agreement. BHA is also obtaining outside consulting with Kerry Sleeper who has a background in security.

Brian Lowe wants to build relationships with partners within and outside the City. He wants to create a group with the police and meet at least monthly and see what BHA needs.

Catherine Foley stated that as the weather warmed up and increased efforts with patrol and sheriff, there has been less activity. She stated that there is still a core group where they think they can stay and learned how to avoid the guards. There are also currently 3 significant drug dealers. The Resident Council will work with the guard as a team to help.

Steve Murray stated 10% of the building has been removed and BHA is still dealing with drug dealers. There was one resident who was fencing stolen goods and he left voluntarily a couple days ago.

Kirby Dunn stated BHA has historically had a close relationship with the City and it would be good to work more closely together. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak asked what caused the relationship to go down. Steven Murray said it is mostly

due to high turnover in the Executive Director position. Brian Lowe also said that the Executive Director used to be added to City meetings, which could help strengthen communication in the future as well as more regular meetings. Kirby Dunn also stated that money is a big issue and BHA will undergo a fundraising effort through a nonprofit organization. Stephanie Bixby stated that there was an inherent trust that the community had with Paul Dettman, a prior Executive Director, but that went away after he left. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak says that it is important to learn these things to adapt and modernize relationships.

Steve Murray said there needs to be trust that BHA is doing things correctly. It was assumed that BHA did something wrong and had to explain ourselves in the prior administration. If there are questions and concerns, there needs to be an understanding that we are following HUD policies and procedures.

Jane Knodell stated we manage properties for the residents and still need to run the organization. BHA and the City should get more deeply involved in affordable housing and different providers where we can find what benefits all of us. She stated that the people who leave Decker may not leave the community and might go to other communities within the City.

Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak asked why we switched from public housing. Steve Murray said HUD would give you the building debt free to help pay for repairs, so they are pushing people out of public housing. HUD has not been funding capital projects of public housing to where it needs to be.

Brian Lowe passed out a proposal that is complimentary with the roving security guard. There are opportunities to build new relationships and report to the City regularly. This will help pull together the partners. This would be a temporary working group to see what this can help uncover.

Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak appreciates BHA coming to the table with solutions. She also asked about what information is going back to the City. Jane Knodell stated that BHA owes the City a report to see if it is worth the money, if what BHA is doing is effective, and BHA would get a 3<sup>rd</sup> party security consultant.

Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak asked if there were more details? Jane Knodell said that there were not more details, but more regular check-ins would help.

Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak wants to know measurements on if what BHA is doing is successful or not. She also stated that the lack of police response is

definitely an issue and bringing more people into the room will help. She wanted to know if there will there be openness to adding more housing providers. Brian Lowe stated that we should see if it works with Decker/BHA focus; then we can reevaluate if it is working and can expand or end there. Bill Schrecker and Steve Murray discussed how we have partnered with other communities such as Champlain Housing Trust in terms of security. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak wants to be able to adapt based on real information and what we can track and report back.

Jane Knodell says BHA is key to preserving affordable housing. BHA has not developed in a long time but has acquired smaller properties. These buildings have serious maintenance issues, are older, and are historical. BHA pays for capital improvements from profits. Rents are extremely low at Decker. Stephanie Bixby stated that this is a revenue neutral program so rents will not increase, even if it was to switch to a tax credit property. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak wants to make sure HUD knows the impact of this.

Jane Knodell said BHA had a meeting with Kerry Sleeper to dive into drug dealing and possibly going to state and federal levels. Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak says this is not just a Decker issue and laws are not being enforced. She is looking for a more responsive security team.

Steve Murray said BHA got into this position trying to protect our residents and hit a wall. The working group would go a long way in taking care of the residents. Jane Knodell thinks this is a great idea and is good to focus on Decker and other properties at BHA to start. Jeff Metcalf appreciates that it will focus on Decker and other BHA properties for the first three months and work with partners after the three months if this works.

Kirby Dunn made a motion to approve the City and BHA Working Group. Tony Lewis seconded the motion. There was unanimous approval of the motion.

Brian Lowe and Steve Murray will be setting up times to meet and host if needed.

## **9. Decker Towers Security Discussion**

This was discussed during the discussion with Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak.

**10. Other Business**

Jane Knodell would like to have an event to recognize Michael Knauer who was on the Board for 30 years and had to leave in an abrupt way. She said it would be nice to have an event in the late afternoon after work and have BHA staff, the Board, and other staff he has worked with to be there. It is hopeful to have this event sometime in June after the budget process is complete.

There being no other business, Tony Lewis made a motion to adjourn at 9:54 a.m. The motion was seconded by Kirby Dunn. There was unanimous approval of the motion.

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Secretary