

**BROOKLINE HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021, 4:30 PM
By Telephone Conference Call**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Jacobs at 4:30 PM. Those present included: Ms. Dugan, Ms. Katz, Ms. Sullivan, and Ms. Cohen.

1. Call to Order

2. Board Reports. No votes or reports.

3. Executive Director Report. No votes.

Mr. Alperin said that rent collections are doing well, helped by the support of rent relief programs, particularly RAFT. Residents attending this meeting or anyone in the public at large should know that there is a large amount of federal rent relief funding that the Commonwealth is about to receive.

Mr. Alperin said that the BHA is starting to see vacancy rates drop in both the state and federal public housing programs as a result of the increased staff focus on leasing and occupancy. Occupancy rates dropped last spring and summer because the BHA ceased leasing activity at the onset of the pandemic.

The BHA has had its first lease-up of a remodeled unit at 61 Park LLC. Leasing activity at this development is one of the more critical financial risk factors that the Authority is currently undertaking. The BHA has committed a certain lease up schedule to its tax credit investor, and has set a permanent loan conversion date of July 30th. The BHA has an aggressive target to lease up all units in the next two months.

The BHA is officially on the spring Town Meeting warrant article agenda. Article 27 is a Home Rule for the Colonel Floyd redevelopment project. It's titled "An Act Relative to Bidding Requirements for Certain Affordable Housing Project in Brookline". Support will be necessary from the Select Board and the state legislature. This measure would exempt the Colonel Floyd redevelopment project from Chapter 149 public procurement law in order to allow the BHA to build to a higher energy efficiency standard.

The Town's CDBG Committee held its meeting last night and made recommendations. The BHA had two requests for CDBG funds this year. One request was \$55,000 for resident services, of which the Committee recommended \$35,600. This is an increase from last year's funding for resident services of twenty seven thousand dollars, but it is below what was hoped for and budgeted for. On the capital side, the BHA asked for \$1.49 million, and the Committee recommended \$312,063. The BHA received CDBG capital funding of \$343,563 last year. The ten year funding average is \$279,000. The BHA is very appreciative of the Town's support because these funds are critical to the BHA's mission to keep up with deferred maintenance at our state public housing developments.

The BHA is in the midst of holding its COVID vaccination clinics at all BHA senior developments. Because of people who have already received vaccine doses, the BHA has been able to offer vaccine to all of its residents who are sixty five years of age or older. Connor Clark and Sheila O'Flaherty have been critical to the BHA vaccine clinic effort. The BHA is incredibly appreciative to the Brookline Health Department,

the Brookline Emergency Management Department, and the Brookline Police Department, who have been collaborative partners in making this successful. Five of the six first round vaccine clinics have been completed. Second doses for residents who have received the vaccine should occur four weeks after the initial clinic.

The BHA received a \$40,000 surprise Safety Net grant from the Brookline Community Foundation. BHA Director of Resident Services, Danielle Mendola, should be congratulated for quickly pulling together that application.

The BHA intends to respond to a state Service Coordinator NOFA for family self-sufficiency. The grant will provide housing authorities up to \$40,000 per year for five years. The BHA does not currently have a dedicated social worker at High Street Veterans Apartments. The grant would allow the BHA to continue to expand its social work services provided on site in conjunction with the Brookline Center for Community Mental Health.

Mr. Alperin thanked Brookline Select Board Member, Raul Fernandez, and BHA Board Chair, Mike Jacobs, for their roles in forming a BHA/Town of Brookline Working Group. The Working Group is designed to more formally bring stakeholders together to better understand and meet the needs of the BHA and its residents. The Working Group will meet quarterly.

The BHA will be submitting a new Designated Housing Plan (DHP) proposal to HUD. The BHA was notified on March 4, 2021 that HUD has rejected its request to amend its existing DHP. This Plan authorizes the 80 percent elderly/20 percent disabled set aside at our federal public housing senior developments. The BHA intends to have the new proposal submitted to HUD by the end of the month, if not in April. The BHA does not anticipate changes to the Plan, but is required to submit a new proposal because so much of the BHA's public housing has been converted under RAD.

HUD has notified the BHA of a decrease in capital funding from \$960,000 in FY 2021 to \$818,000 in FY 2022. The BHA knew its capital funding would decrease due to the RAD transactions, which are shrinking the federal public housing portfolio, but this was a more significant decrease than had been budgeted for and anticipated. It will mean one or two less capital projects for the federal portfolio; but the BHA believes that the ongoing redevelopment process is the right methodology to recapitalize its federal public housing.

The BHA's 90 Longwood Avenue offices have been re-occupied by the Finance Department as of last Friday. The rest of the BHA departments will be moving into these office spaces in the next two months, subject to BHA COVID planning and public health guidance. Thanks go to Maria Maffei and Garrett Anderson for coordinating this work.

The December 31, 2021 budget to actual report was included in the Board package. It indicates that the financial footing of the BHA is stable. The BHA has been fortunate to have received federal stimulus dollars. As previously mentioned, the rent relief at the end of December makes these numbers look a lot more palatable.

Mr. Jacobs asked where the Town's CDBG funding went to outside of the BHA. Mr. Alperin gave a breakdown of the CDBG Committee's recommendations.

4. Resident Association Report. No Votes or Reports.

5. Consent agenda. Vote to approve Consent Agenda, Items 5.A. through 5.E.

5A. Vote to approve minutes of the Board Meeting held on February 9, 2021.

5B. Vote to approve a contract for the roof repairs at Col. Floyd Apartments and roof replacements at Walnut Street Apartments low rise apartments to One Way Painting and Roofing of Lynn, Massachusetts in the amount of \$168,888.

5C. Vote to approve a contract for the trash and rodent remediation project at Trustman Apartments and 86 Dummer Street to The Canniff Company, Inc., of Quincy, Massachusetts in the amount of \$108,920.

5D. Vote to approve Substantial Completion of the contract with South Shore Generator for the replacement of the emergency generator at 22 High Street.

5E. Vote to endorse the BHA's FY 2022 application for Resident Service Coordination (RSC) in the amount of \$40,000.

This agenda item was unanimously approved on a motion from Ms. Sullivan and a second by Ms. Katz.

6. Walk and Talk Program. No votes.

Mr. Jacobs began a discussion of reports produced by the Task Force for Reimagining Police and the Select Committee on Policing Reform. There are two well done reports whose committee members have spent numerous hours pulling together, but they have reached very different conclusions regarding the continuation of the Walk and Talk Program. One report starts with the premise that the Brookline Police Department, while not perfect, simply needs to implement a variety of reform measures to build on a good model. The second report, while not an indictment of the Brookline Police Department, starts with the premise that one must acknowledge historical racism between police and people of color and that more fundamental change is required in police engagement with the community and with BHA residents. One recommends a continuation of the Walk and Talk program and the other the disbanding of the program. Mr. Jacobs reached out and talked with Brian Cloonan, the BHA Executive Director at the time of the inception of the Walk and Talk Program. Mr. Cloonan said that when the program was established back in the early 90s, there happened to be a knifing and a murder at BHA developments and a lot of gang activity as well. The community policing model was established to address public safety issues that were plaguing the family developments.

Today, crime within the BHA developments is no worse than the rest of Brookline, and it is unknown whether it can be attributed to the Walk and Talk Program, increased social programming, or to a variety of other changing circumstances. The result is that the Walk and Talk Program has evolved over time as conditions and the developments have changed. They have taken a much broader role with regards to addressing problem solving and quality of life issues, as is mentioned in one of their handouts. This leads to the question as to who should best perform these functions: police, human services agencies, or a third model that combines them?

Mr. Jacobs said that he will proceed by taking public comments first, allowing three minutes each to speak. After public members have spoken, BHA Commissioners will have the opportunity to speak.

Ty Pain said that he is a disabled person of color who lives in Brookline and has recently learned about the Walk and Talk Program. The majority of Brookline Police are white, and they may have a preconceived notion of others with different backgrounds and may not know how to communicate effectively with such people. The police need to learn about different cultures and how people talk, because persons of color can be intimidated by the people who are supposed to be protecting them. Brookline has the potential to be a great town and a model for others if they acknowledge underlying racism and learn how to communicate with persons of diverse backgrounds. Mr. Pain said that he has had two horrible experiences receiving tickets about his dog from police in Brookline because he is from out of town. He feels that police need to walk and talk from the heart.

Bonnie Bastien said that she is on the Task Force to Reimagine Policing in Brookline and also on the subcommittee to examine the Walk and Talk Program. The subcommittee struggled to piece together a whole picture of the program's origins and objectives and measurable benefits because there are no formal contracts relating to the program. The gist is that in the 1980s, there were many residents cycling in and out of the criminal justice system. This was the era of the war on drugs. The Walk and Talk Program was meant to be a way to diffuse the situation and to build a better relationship with the residents. The police state on their website that this is achieved by having a highly visible presence on properties, doing children's programming, cooking holiday dinners, making themselves available to residents at all hours in case of emergency, and other things that are social services in nature. In the subcommittee's interviews and conversations with Black residents, former residents, and organizations that work closely with Black residents, the subcommittee learned that the program is also seen as a detriment. There are fans of the program, but some residents feel that it is a negative when police are placed in one particular neighborhood. The subcommittee had difficulty finding residents willing to speak with them or attend their public meetings. They expressed fear of losing their tenancy for speaking to us about the police.

The subcommittee does not believe that police officers are the best or even the most logical professionals suited to providing social services and building personal relationships in a multiracial housing authority. Police officers doing this work creates a barrier between resources and people who worry about calling police during non-police emergencies. The subcommittee recommends that the program be removed and a more appropriate set of social service providers be put in their place.

Anne Weaver said that she is also on the Task Force to Reimagine Policing and the Walk and Talk subcommittee. It has been reported that her task force and the Select Board's Police Reform Committee looked at the same data. She does not believe that they were looking at the same data. The Police Reform Committee surveyed BHA residents and she expects that they will report that the survey results were overwhelmingly favorable for the Walk and Talk program. It should be noted that the respondents to the survey were overwhelmingly white and over 55 years old, and only seven percent of residents responded.

John Van Scoyoc said that he is a Select Board Member and someone who has spent a lot of time watching both the Reimagining Task Force and the Police Reform study group do their work. He thinks that it is terrific that representatives of both are here and that the BHA is listening in a serious way. Why the two groups came to different conclusions needs to be examined. He hopes that this meeting is the beginning of the conversation about whether to eliminate the Walk and Talk program or perhaps to

find better ways to tailor the program to the needs of residents. Despite all the work that has been done, the one group that hasn't been heard from effectively is the residents themselves.

Deborah Brown said that she lived in New York City at the height of the crack cocaine epidemic, and saw things that were terrible. Very few people were spared and the poor were disproportionately hurt. It may have made sense to have law enforcement walking through low income neighborhoods 20 or 30 years ago, but does it today? Having police walking through their homes projects inferiority and criminality and lessens the ability of youth to aspire or to dream to their greatest potential. She thinks that eliminating the Walk and Talk Program, or putting a moratorium on it is the right thing to do

Emy Takinami said that she is a Town Meeting Member and grew up in public housing in Brookline, and her father still lives in a BHA apartment. The \$15,000 in funding for the Walk and Talk program is a concern of hers. The BHA residents should have a say in where those resources are going. It seems like Walk and Talk is an outdated program. People of color and young people need to be heard. Many are intimidated about speaking up in public because the discussion involves police with guns.

Mr. Alperin clarified that the BHA has supported the Walk and Talk Program with \$15,000 annually, with the remaining amount of the program funded by the Town's police budget. The broader conversation about funding of the program is within the jurisdiction of the Select Board and then the Town with its budget vote.

David Pilgrim said that he is a Walk and Talk Officer. He would like to avail himself to anyone who has questions about the program or what he and his fellow officers do on a daily basis.

Abby Erdmann said that she was thinking of this question in terms of intention versus impact. The intention of the Walk and Talk Program 30 years ago may have been perfectly reasonable. The impact of the program today, however, raises the question of equity in that it focuses on particular low income neighborhoods. Is this the best use of the police time and is it the best use of the \$15,000? Does it make people feel safer?

Raul Fernandez said that he is a Select Board Member and is the Chair of the Task Force to Reimagine Policing. A great deal of effort went into understanding the role of policing more broadly in Brookline, and thinking about returning police to their core mission. The expansion of the role of police over time into the social service field is something that has not been particularly helpful to communities of color and has led to over-policing of communities of color.

This discussion should focus on how best to use limited resources. If there are three positions available to address social service needs, would it be best to hire three officers or to find a different approach? It would be good for the BHA Board to look at the Task Force report that recommends reinvesting these limited resources into a new social service agency that would more deeply engage with BHA residents. If the BHA wants to continue this program, he would like to know that people of color overwhelmingly want police in in public housing at the expense of other social service resources.

Casey Hatchett said that she is a sergeant in the Brookline Police Department and the Community Services Division and she oversees the Walk and Talk Program. She is also a member of the Policing Reform Committee of Select Board Member Bernard Green. They developed and conducted a resident survey as a mechanism to get feedback from BHA residents about the Walk and Talk Program. As it has been stated, they did not hear as much from the BHA's community of color or youth as they would have

liked. They are looking at ways to further engage and to hear from the lived experiences of those residents. But the results of the survey show that nine percent of the residents responded and the overwhelming majority do want to see the Walk and Talk program continue.

BHA families rely on Walk and Talk Officers. On hundreds of occasions each year, they choose to call directly the Walk and Talk Officers who they know personally and trust. Sometimes they choose to ask these officers for assistance when they could have asked a housing manager, a social worker, a teacher or a counselor at the schools. They choose to ask the Walk and Talk officers because the officers have deep rooted relationships with members of the BHA community. BHA Assistant Executive Director, Matt Baronas, spoke with the subcommittee and indicated that in 30 years of this program, he's not heard one complaint from a resident about the program. This is not to say that the Walk and Talk Program is perfect and that there are no residents who are uncomfortable with it, but it should give pause to the push to dismantle this important support system. Removing the Walk and Talk Program at this time would cause harm to those residents who have come to rely on its services.

Ade said that he is a Black male in his mid-30s who lives in Brookline. The people of color who took the survey amount to less than 20, and none of them are black males under 55 years of age. He knows a lot of people like himself who are not comfortable with the Walk and Talk Program. He has had interactions with Brookline police that were not good.

Donnell O'Neal, Sr. said that he is a Town Meeting Member in Brookline and he has had some bad experiences with Walk and Talk Officers. He thinks the program is good for senior citizens. His sister lives in a BHA development and loves some of the Walk and Talk officers and calls them frequently. But for Black males under 55 like himself who grew up in Town, police were to be feared.

Brookline Police Officer Tim Stephenson said that he has been a Walk and Talk Officer for 17 of his 25 years on the force. The Walk and Talk Program helps break down barriers between the police and people of color and youth in Town. He is happy to speak to anyone interested about the good that this program does for the BHA community.

John Van Scoyoc said that he has observed both the Task Force and the Select Board Committee meetings and notes that most people who speak are not BHA residents. Young Black males need to be heard as well as a broad representative sampling of all residents.

Mr. Jacobs said that the Select Board is having a public hearing on police reform on March 16, 2021, and they intend to make recommendations on March 30, 2021. It is up to the BHA Commissioners, if they wish to take a position on this matter at this time.

Ms. Sullivan thanked everyone who worked on the various reports, and for the input from those who have spoken on the subject this evening. She wants all BHA residents to feel safe. The Walk and Talk Program began almost 30 years ago, so this review is timely and reasonable. It seems possible that the Walk and Talk Program can work for all residents, but she wants to hear from everyone.

Ms. Cohen said that she reviewed both reports and the interviews. She has been working in the public housing field since federal drug elimination grants began to fund programs such as Walk and Talk. Many things have changed since then, and it is more than appropriate for the BHA to be reevaluating and looking at this and hearing what people are saying. The people that need to be heard most, and who have not been adequately represented in the reports and discussions are the very people that might be

most impacted, either objectively or subjectively by virtue of the presence of this program. It is the BHA's duty to its residents to find out what they think. It is also important to assess the needs of BHA's Property Management staff and what kind of resources will best serve the BHA in its mission to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing for all residents. For this reason, she does not recommend drawing conclusions from these two reports.

Ms. Cohen is concerned that the BHA and the Brookline Police have never formalized the objectives of the Walk and Talk Program, and as such they are not able to measure its success. She believes that there is a consensus at this point that even if the Walk and Talk Program is determined to be needed, the BHA should not continue to assume a financial burden to support it. She believes that this is a community issue, and she is glad that the BHA is part of the ongoing discussion.

Ms. Katz said that like Ms. Cohen, she was in the affordable housing business during the war on drugs, and she saw how drugs and crime negatively affected vulnerable communities of color. She worked on programs that used drug elimination grant money to protect this vulnerable population from such predatory activity. Times have changed.

More input from residents and staff is critical to the evaluation of the Walk and Talk program. Ascribing motives to people who did not respond to the survey is a dangerous path to go down. The lack of response is not necessarily due to fear and intimidation, or for that matter, satisfaction with the program. The elderly population seem to have a favorable opinion of the program, but it's not clear if the program makes them feel safer, if it provides them with needed social interaction, or other factors. In moving forward, those involved in this discussion need to identify and quantify the needs and priorities of the residents, as well as the staff. Whatever results, there has to be a very clear model of accountability.

Ms. Dugan said that she is not only a BHA Commissioner, but also a BHA resident. She never received the survey to fill out regarding the Walk and Talk Program and is concerned that others may not have received the survey. She would like to see a Walk and Talk job description, as well as ideas for modifications that might improve the program. She would like to see a job description for whatever alternative the Task Force is proposing as a substitute.

Walk and Talk has been a wonderful and meaningful program, even as needs have changed over the years. The program has done a good job adapting to these changes. They are available to BHA residents 24/7, which is important. Youth of all ages have a chance to interact with these officers in a positive way and to share what is going on in their lives. This wouldn't happen if not for this program. It is important for the young generation to see police differently. Elderly residents who have a problem with their neighbor, or are disturbed by a barking dog, know personally a police officer they can call who can help. It is disappointing to hear proposals to replace the program. She would rather consider beneficial social service programs in addition to the Walk and Talk program. She appreciates all of those who have participated in the Task Force, as well the Select Board Committee, but she believes that residents are the ones who need to be heard on the subject.

Mr. Jacobs said that he has read the reports and has either gone to the public meetings or viewed them on television. He read a comment in the written materials that said that the function of the Walk and Talk Program is problem solving and quality of life issues. The question is whether or not this is the right function today. One of the critical tasks is to define not just gaps in services, but who should be

delivering those services. Another important question is why such a program is geographically based within BHA developments if crime within BHA developments is no worse than outside the developments. If a major goal of the program is to break down barriers with teens, can this only happen within BHA developments? There is not enough engagement with BHA residents on the subject at this time to make an informed decision. This issue must be raised to the top of the BHA agenda.

Kimberly Richardson said that she has been a BHA resident since 2013. When she moved in, she saw police all the time. No one else in Brookline has dedicated police. She and her family feel policed, and the sense that poor people are being policed. It feels uncomfortable and racist and it doesn't make sense. This conversation is important.

Mr. Jacobs said that to be clear, the BHA Board will not be voting on this issue this evening. It was agreed that the subject will be put on the agenda at the next Board meeting for further discussion.

7. BHA Logo. Vote to adopt a BHA logo.

Mr. Alperin said that it is important to be professionally represented by a logo, and that the BHA has never had a logo. A local artist was hired to develop logo concepts, and staff and residents were surveyed. The selected logo was the overwhelming favorite.

This agenda item was unanimously approved on a motion from Ms. Dugan and a second from Ms. Sullivan.

8. Change Order. Vote to approve Change Order Item CP027 in the amount of \$80,822.08 to upgrade corridor wall partitions at Morse Apartments and to affirm staff approved change orders.

Garrett Anderson said that this change order would increase the sound rating of drywall partitions separating apartments.

This agenda item was unanimously approved on a motion from Ms. Cohen and a second from Ms. Sullivan.

9. Contract Award. Vote to approve a contract in the amount of \$1,455,000 to BWA Architects ("BWA") for architectural services related to the renovation of Sussman House.

Maria Maffei said that this is the result of an RFP in 2018 related to anticipated RAD projects. The price is less than six percent of the estimated construction costs. The contract will allow flexibility with respect to the timing of the start of the work, to accommodate the uncertain Col. Floyd project funding cycle.

This agenda item was unanimously approved on a motion from Ms. Sullivan and a second from Ms. Cohen.

10. Section 18 Demo/Dispo Application for Col. Floyd Apartments. Vote to authorize the submission of an application to HUD under the Section 18 program for the disposition of the Col. Floyd Apartments to a new tax credit entity for the purpose of redevelopment.

Ms. Maffei said that the Col. Floyd development is old and obsolete and the best option for redevelopment is demolition and new construction. A Board vote is needed to authorize the application.

This agenda item was unanimously approved on a motion from Ms. Cohen and a second from Ms. Dugan.

11. ACOP Amendment. Vote to approve an Amendment to the BHA's Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy ('ACOP') and the Tenant Selection Policies for O'Shea House and Morse Apartments to grant priority to households experiencing dislocation as a result of BHA redevelopment activities.

Ms. Maffei said that the Section 18 Demo/Dispo project at Col. Floyd Apartments will require the temporary relocation of its 60 residents during construction, presenting a big challenge. The recommended policy change would grant priority for transfers within BHA developments for those residents facing displacement due to BHA redevelopment projects.

This agenda item was unanimously approved on a motion from Ms. Cohen and a second from Ms. Sullivan.

12. Other Business. No Issues Raised

13. Upcoming Meetings. April Board Meeting: April 13th at 4:30 PM

14. Adjournment Vote

On a motion from Ms. Sullivan and a second from Ms. Dugan, it was unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 6:26 PM.

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ATTEST



Michael Alperin, Executive Director

