

DATE: August 5, 2022  
TIME: 10:31 AM

**Special Meeting**

**MINUTES**  
**Virtual Zoom Meeting**

**May 19, 2022**

**ATTENDANCE-**

Board of Commissioners in Attendance- Charles Laverty III, Gloria Leipzig, Cassandra Page, Sarah Bilodeau

\*Note- Sarah Bilodeau joined the meeting at 5:24PM

Cambridge Housing Authority Staff in Attendance- Allison MacMartin, Kevin Braga, Michael Johnston

John Filip, Karrie Caravan, Margaret Moran, Joe DeLarauze, Clara Fraden, Karrie Canavan, Sara Vogel

Tenant Association Members in Attendance- Sally Sennott, Lynne Martin

Also in Attendance- housing authority residents and member of the public

\*Meeting was called to order by Chair of the Board, Charles Laverty III at 5:01PM

**NEW BUSINESS**

Sherman Gardens Redevelopment Project Update- Joe DeLarauze

A quick update to the Board on the progression of the design perspectives and anticipated next steps for the Sherman Gardens Redevelopment Project: Sherman Gardens has not been comprehensively renovated since its original construction in 1971 producing poor conditions and significant accessibility issues. We recommend a new construction strategy that would allow us to resolve these issues, design larger units with storage, and add units to add to the Belmont affordability portfolio. New construction is often quicker and less expensive, and one of the key next steps is obtaining CPA funding to continue design work in preparation to competitively pursue other forms of funding.

Currently Sherman Gardens has 80 units with 31 parking spaces. The proposed design precedents feature a 2-5 story, south-facing courtyard building with podium parking offering a total of 145 units (125 new) and 76 parking spots. Certain precedents such as variation in siding material, bay windows, and roof gables are based on tenant feedback and preferences to establish a less-institutional, more welcoming design. The building is largely 5 stories with main access along Thayer Road where the residential density is maximized along the least residential side of the property with 4-story corners in consideration to the neighboring residents. The 3 and 2 story step-down structures provide relief and then blend into abutters along Sycamore with enclosed space to provide privacy for residents and green space that mirrors the characteristics of the surrounding houses such that the building fits comfortably into the existing neighborhood design. The typical unit plan is envisioned at 600sq ft (existing units average 415 sq ft.), offers varied storage space, walk-in shower, and bay windows based on resident feedback.

The next steps include requesting \$400,000 in CPA funding at the Belmont Town Meeting to sufficiently advance designs in preparation for Zoning Approvals. In June 2022, the P&D Team hopes to finalize the Feasibility Report to share with the residents and the Board. By fall 2022, we hope to engage a design firm to finalize these plans and identify the needed Zoning Approvals that will be applied for in the winter of 2022-2023, and in 2023 we will apply for DHCD and other funding with the hope of moving to construction in 2024-5.

Charles Laverty, correction- The next step is a Town Briefing held by the Warrant Committee on May 27<sup>th</sup>  
Cassandra Page, question- How does P&D plan on utilizing the 20 existing units?

Margaret Moran, response- existing structure will be used as a resource to lessen the relocation burden. Those households would remain on site and would be permitted to move to new units when they are available. Following construction, there may be opportunity to renovate the units to family housing.

Gloria Leipzig, comment- I am glad to see that the design addresses the accessibility concerns and adds to the affordability portfolio in Belmont. From Cassandra's comments at the previous meetings, is there a possibility to include two-bedroom accommodations for residents with corresponding medical needs?

June Meeting Location-Charles Laverty

Following previous discussions, we should plan to conduct the June Meeting in person at the Waverley Oaks Community Room, if conditions allow, and resume remote meetings for July and August when Belmont in-person participation is typically low.

Allison MacMartin, Cassandra Page, Sara Bilodeau- no objection, subject to Board Decision

Executive Director's Report- Allison MacMartin

The RCS position has been offered and accepted, with a candidate starting in the next few weeks.

-No Comments

**Clark Lane-Michael Johnston**

Chuck Laverty- Two years ago BHA brought CHA in to oversee the operations of Belmont Housing, but the two organizations remain separate entities. The CHA bought a property on Clark Lane separately from the BHA and the

BHA Board. Any questions regarding the agreement between the BHA and CHA can be directed towards the Board, but any questions regarding this property at Clark Lane should be directed to Mike Johnston from CHA.

Mike Johnston- I have been with CHA for 31 years, and I have been the Executive Director for over 5 years. I am honored to partner with BHA, and we are happy to assist in maintaining the BHA operation, especially given the struggles small housing authorities experience. Regarding Clark Lane, I want to start by expressing my apologies for the incident that occurred. Raising three boys myself, I can say that children sometimes make bad decisions, and that is what happened with the family who moved into the house on Clark Lane. It is a tragedy that this decision will impact the entire family for the rest of their lives, and CHA will be moving forward with the legal process to move the family out of the unit.

The CHA and BHA remain separate entities, and what is done with CHA funds has nothing to do with the BHA. As we were in the process of redeveloping Jefferson Park and working to relocate residents, as is the legal responsibility of the LHA, it has been difficult to locate units of appropriate size for large families. A non-profit affiliate of CHA bought the property at market rate for the express purpose of relocating a household from Jefferson Park who would have had the right to return to Jefferson Park once construction was completed.

Although, legally, details cannot be disclosed, we can say that the family that went into this unit was with CHA for more than 15 years, without incident, with three working adults and youth. The CHA is taking all the legal measures available as quickly as possible, and I apologize to the residents of Belmont, the housing authority, and the folks of the city; this was an unfortunate situation that we never would have predicted would occur with this family.

#### Comments from the Board:

Cassandra Page, question- how did CHA become aware of this property?

Mike Johnston & Margaret Moran, response- the owner's agent reached out to developers, including CHA

Cassandra Page, comment- this is a conflict of interest. Did the developer reach out to BHA?

Mike Johnston, response- the BHA could not purchase the property given the scope and the BHA operating budget. The developer reached out to CHA Staff regarding a private sale at market price. We put out RFP's so that CHA could legally purchase the property.

Cassandra Page, question- Jefferson Park has been in planning stages for approx.. 6 years, holding units for 5 years, and it's an issue that CHA on-site staff are buying Belmont Property and placing potentially dangerous residents without repercussion. CHA utilized BHA as a steppingstone to buy property and mentioned interest in buying privately owned property on Pearson Road, so will this be a recurring concern?

Mike Johnson, response- the CHA has not mentioned buying additional properties on Pearson Road. However, the CHA can go to any community to buy property. The CHA is not looking to develop and expand in Belmont, but CHA was approached with an opportunity to buy a unit of appropriate size for a family the CHA had an obligation to relocate.

Cassandra Page, question- In March of this year, Allison MacMartin mentions she is not the Executive Director, but the management contract allows BHA to access things like RA Staff, Planning and Development Staff, and other things. Why would we need CPA funds from Belmont for the feasibility study?

Mike Johnston, response- Belmont does not have access to P&D Staff. Allison is not the Executive Director but acts in a managerial capacity for the day-to-day operations of the agency. The BHA has a District Manager, Allison MacMartin, two Assistant Housing Managers stationed on property, and the CFO who work out of the Belmont office and dedicates time to BHA planning.

Sarah Bilodeau, comment- the practice of purchasing property outside of the city is condoned and considered beneficial for the managing community as well as the community where the property is located, and I believe that is the case here. I think it is important to hear community questions, but remember, this is a family and a neighbor, in both the Belmont and Cambridge sense, and we should not phrase this incident as an outsider who is dangerous. As an educator, parent, and board member it is important to be respectful to the community and residents.

Gloria Leipzig, comment- the BHA and CHA are separate entities, and it is important that the CHA relocate their residents as best they can, including the purchasing of a house in Belmont, Watertown, Cambridge, etc. as is their obligation. We appreciate you sharing what you could regarding the long-term status of the residents, and, to put it in context, this was an unfortunate situation that is beyond our control and will have lasting repercussions for the family. BHA is not in a position to purchase the property, and it is not our business what CHA does for their residents but appreciates their commitment to residents.

#### Comments from the Tennant Association:

Sally Sennott, question- can you speak to the incident that occurred in more detail?

Mike Johnston, response- sharing only the details provided from the press release, Belmont and State

Police came to Clark Lane and arrested a juvenile from the Clark Lane unit for an incident that occurred elsewhere on February 20<sup>th</sup>. It is alleged that the youth fired several rounds from a pistol into someone's car. Nobody was hurt, but this is a serious issue, and both the youth and another individual were arrested and charged. They came back with a search warrant and found a loaded semi-automatic pistol.

Lynne Martin, question- We held a meeting, and tenants are concerned; this is the first incident of this nature, and it is a scary situation. I appreciate the comments, but we need to know how things will be handled moving forward.

Mike Johnston, response- eviction cases are handled by outside council, and action was already submitted to void the lease such that the family would be required to leave or face eviction. There is due process, and the court system is delayed due to Covid-19, but this process is initiated, and the courts take action to void leases seriously and expeditiously. The case will be left to the discretion of the judge. It is a tragedy, and these are hard-working people, but we have a good case and are sparing no expense to move the family out.

Lynne Martin, comment- I am sympathetic to the family, but it is our children, in this neighborhood who watched SWAT come in, but you answered my question that this is in process.

#### Comments from the Public:

Paul Looney questions directed to Mike Johnston- First question, is this non-profit paying taxes to Belmont?

Mike Johnston, response- yes

Paul Looney, question- So it is not being treated as a non-profit. Second question, you cannot remove tenants until the judge says so, but do you still have a responsibility to relocate the family?

Mike Johnston, response- the CHA has no intention of relocating the family.

Paul Looney question- so it's not a forced responsibility. Third question, did the real estate approach BHA and it went to CHA instead of the board?

Mike Johnston, response- I must refer to staff to answer this, but I will tell you that the BHA has a gross revenue of about 2.2 million per year to run the operation, which is done with a small staff. The CHA has a gross revenue of 180 million with 230 employees. I cannot see a way that Belmont could purchase the building. Every housing authority in the State of Massachusetts is faced with the same issues as Belmont: housing stock that is aged and falling around residents, elderly housing that is not accessible, etc. The State needs to find a way to preserve these units and increase the available affordable portfolio. There are over 21,000 people on the waiting list. I envision that this will remain an affordable unit held by the housing authority, but that is down the road. This was not an underhanded maneuver or an attempt to sneak it away from Belmont, but I truly cannot see how Belmont could have afforded it.

Allison MacMartin, response- I received an email from the real estate agent representing the seller to my Cambridge email and passed it along to my superiors.

Paul Looney, questions directed to Mike Johnston- Belmont makes 1.3 million, and 10% goes towards affordable housing, so Belmont could afford the house. I want to know if it came to Belmont and the board was passed over.

Mike Johnston, response- I apologize that I did not understand it was an ability for the town to purchase the property. If Belmont wants to purchase the building and the work we put into the building, they can. It's not an imperative that I have this building.

Gloria Leipzig, comment- 10% of the money from the preservation committee is supposed to go to affordable housing. The preservation committee is looking to leverage the money to add many units, such as we are doing with the Sherman Garden Redevelopment Project. I can't imagine the committee allowing \$800K to go to the purchase of a single house.

Tom Masin-Olson- I was formerly on the BHA Board for 3 years. I understand why we brought CHA on, even with other options available. I think the kids seeing SWAT go into a house is scary, and those kids deserve the same benefits as any other kid in Belmont. Two issues that are very dear to them, ongoing problem with mold and the safety of their children. CHA has blurred the lines as their job as managers of BHA and their management and building of a development company, which is likely a large source of CHA revenue. Gloria has worked hard to get more housing, but the fact is that the Preservation Act is asking for \$400K and that is only a little larger than the \$340K initially put down on this house. The CHA and CHA Trust was in a conflict of interest which is a direct violation of the original contract signed in 2020. While I was on the board, we went through two hiring cycles to get a great ED. It concerns me that CHA has property, and it is hard to believe that there wasn't knowledge somewhere regarding these 15-year residents or there weren't other families that could have moved there.

Charles Laverty, comment- the BHA Board brought on CHA management during Covid when the Board was struggling to bring someone on to run the day-to-day operation so the residents could have the proper services they normally need. This incident occurred in the last 2 weeks, so a significant amount of time has not lapsed, and we wanted to take the opportunity to discuss this event in a meaningful way.

Gloria Leipzig, comment- I've heard "conflict of interest" mentioned, but there is no conflict of interest

with what the CHA purchases with their money or rehabilitates with their staffing.

Mike Johnston- CHA is in a management agreement with BHA. Unless told otherwise, I think Allison and her team have done a great job, and John has done a phenomenal job getting the financials back in order. It is typical within small housing authorities for ED's to take on the roles of 2-4 different people, and, in that case, the ED is always going to look for the next opportunity. In MassNAHRO, you will see the same housing authorities with the same job postings month after month, and it's the residents who are suffering.

The only conflict of interest would be if someone donated a property like Clark Lane to affordable units, which Belmont should receive, but this is not the case; the CHA bought a market rate unit with a mortgage and carrying costs, and the CHA is able to provide a subsidy for that unit to keep it affordable so a family can rent it. The property is not managed by Allison or her group; it is managed by the North Cambridge Office and all work was completed by CHA staff, maintaining the separate entities and operations. This family never had an issue during their tenancy, and there is no reason we would put a problem family in a newly purchased unit. It was a large group of police officers, and law enforcement response is not something we can control. I can apologize for the incident; this is an embarrassing situation for us, and a scary situation for the neighborhood, residents, and kids. We are taking this incident seriously and taking the necessary action to move the family out.

Lisa Pargoli, question regarding which real estate agent represented the buyer.

Margaret Moran, response-to be confirmed *Response was later confirmed in the chat – Realtor Daniel Sharry, Compass Realty*

Lynne Martin and Cassandra Page, correction- there was a SWAT response along with Somerville K9 .

Charles Laverty, comment- this is an unfortunate situation, and I hope everyone's questions were answered. We will continue to work in partnership with CHA and update the public as we learn more.

#### **OTHER ITEMS UNANTICIPATED BY CHAIR**

-No Comment

#### **TENANT ASSOCIATION**

Sally- I would like to refer to Allison regarding an earlier email if it can be scheduled for later discussion.

Allison MacMartin- we can discuss in further detail offline

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Cassandra Page, comment of the Executive Director report- we are happy to see that the RSC position is filled, but it was brought to my attention that the tenant association was not involved in the process.

Allison MacMartin, response- there is a CHA full-time employee stationed part-time in Belmont. There have been delays in the recruiting and hiring process due to the length of the interview process, so we found a good fit and will make the announcement in an upcoming newsletter.

Tomi Olsen, comment - how is the information from the TA getting transmitted? Correct me if I'm wrong, but the TA may be afraid of retribution. Gloria worked very hard to get accurate maintenance reports. The tenants deserve to have maintenance reports physically written and to sign off on completed work. The second issue is mold, which needs to be addressed because it is a health concern to children and adults with compromised breathing systems. I would like to ask the board to authorize an inspection of all buildings.

Charles Laverty, response- we have worked hard to incorporate tenant association into the discussion. The TA formally organized in the last few years and have had representation in the meetings since their formation.

Allison MacMartin, response- we do recognize that there are a lot of issues and are in the midst of planning a redevelopment project, but that is a long-term solution. Last year we did a special project via DHCD to replace bathroom fans in 3-bedroom apartments with the hope of completing the 2-bedroom units this year. We also conduct annual inspections and bring in contractors to take appropriate action if signs of mold are present.

#### **ITEMS FOR APPROVAL**

##### **1. April Regular Meeting Minutes (4/28/22)**

Gloria Leipzig motioned to approve. Sarah Bilodeau seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Charles Laverty III, "I", Gloria Leipzig, "I", Cassandra Page, "I". Sarah Bilodeau, "I". In Favor (4), Against (0), Abstention (0)- *motion passed*

#### **CONFIRMATION OF NEXT MEETING- Thursday June 16, 2022**

\*Meeting will be held at Waverly Oaks if viable, confirmation will be sent one week in advance

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

No objections

Meeting adjourned 6:44PM