

HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF CHARLESTON
550 MEETING STREET
CHARLESTON, SC 29403
MINUTES OF SPECIAL ANNUAL BOARD MEETING
January 29, 2025

The Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Charleston met for a Special Board Meeting on Wednesday, the 29th of January, 2025. Mr. Herb Partlow, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 5:30pm and the following were in attendance:

PRESENT

Mr. Herb Partlow, Chairman
Ms. Sharon Wigfall, Vice Chair
Ms. Carol Jackson
Ms. Kathy Nelson
Ms. Garcia Williams
Mr. Gregory Voigt

NOT PRESENT

Mr. Nick Schumacher

The following were also present: Mr. Arthur S. Milligan, Jr., President and CEO; Mr. Alex McFarlane, Chief Operating Officer; Ms. Aris Ferguson, General Counsel; Mr. Brad Walbeck, Chief Human Resources Officer; Mr. Pete Sherman (via Zoom), Director of Development and Interim CFO; Mr. Gabriel Bluestein, Chief Information Officer; Mr. Jeremy Erling, Chief Financial Officer; Ms. Priscilla Waring, Procurement and Contracts Manager; Mr. Vernon Graham, Security and Public Information Officer; Ms. Diana Hendrix, Organization Training Director; Mr. Francis Smith, Director of Facilities/RAD Development; Ms. Susan Chambers, Inventory Manager; Ms. Rosemary Jenkins, Housing Services Assistant Manager; Ms. Tammy Davender-Davis, Property Manager, AMP 20; Ms. Khala Simmons, Property Manager, AMP 30; Ms. Gloria Martin, Property Manager AMP 40; Ms. Chantel Stewart, Assistant Property Manager AMP 40; Ms. Tracy Lucas, ROSS Coordinator AMP 40; Ms. Kathy Simmons, Executive Assistant and Recorder; and Anthony Bryant (citizen), President of AG Bryant Group, Inc.

The Chairman moved to Communications and noted that there were none.

The Chair moved to approve the minutes from the Special Board Meeting held on December 16, 2024. There being no corrections or additions, Ms. Carol Jackson made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 16th meeting, which was seconded by Ms. Kathy Nelson. Following no further discussion, the Chairman called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

The Chairman moved to the Annual Election of Officers. Two positions were open for re-election. The floor was opened for nominations for the position of Chairman. Mr. Gregory Voigt made a motion to nominate Mr. Herb Partlow for Board Chairman. Ms. Carol Jackson seconded the motion. There were no further nominations for the office of Chairman. Mr. Partlow was unanimously elected as Board Chairman for another year. The floor was then opened for nominations for the position of Vice Chair. Ms. Garcia Williams made a motion to nominate Ms. Sharon Wigfall for Board Vice Chair. Ms. Kathy Nelson seconded the motion. There were no further nominations for the office of Vice Chair. Ms. Wigfall was unanimously elected as Board Vice Chair for another year. That concludes the election of officers for the calendar year.

The Chairman proposed a modification to a subcommittee. The Public Relations and Outreach Subcommittee was restructured and renamed as the Public Relations Subcommittee to reflect a shift in focus. The members of the newly redefined Public Relations Subcommittee are: Mr. Herb Partlow, Ms. Garcia Williams, and Mr. Gregory Voigt. Additionally, a decision was made to create a separate Community Outreach Subcommittee. The following members were appointed to this subcommittee: Ms. Carol Jackson, who will serve as Chair, along with Ms. Garcia Williams and Ms. Kathy Nelson. The next steps include developing a charter for the Community Outreach Subcommittee, which will define its responsibilities, with an emphasis on resident engagement.

The Chairman proceeded to Internal Reports and invited President and CEO Mr. Arthur Milligan to provide any updates. Mr. Milligan shared that three Board Members and seven CHA staff members attended the MLK Breakfast this year, hosted by the YWCA. He also reported that CHA closed on Kiawah Homes on December 19, 2024, and construction is now underway, with completion expected by the end of the year. Mr. Milligan introduced CHA's new CFO, Mr. Jeremy Erling, to the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Erling was the CEO at the North Charleston Housing Authority. With no further questions regarding Mr. Milligan's report, the Chairman invited Mr. Gabe Bluestein, Chief Information Officer, to provide an update on the transition to YARDI.

Mr. Bluestein began by noting that the absence of reports during YARDI's transitional period is expected to improve in the coming months as processes continue to stabilize. He reported that the transition has been progressing smoothly. The landlord portal was launched on December 6th, and as of today, 202 out of approximately 350 landlords have enrolled. The tenant portal launched on December 12th, and over 3,200 tenants have registered, out of 6,100 notifications sent. Ultimately, YARDI will streamline operations by consolidating all tenant and landlord needs into a single platform, which will include logins for applicants, landlords, residents, and waiting lists. Chairman Herb Partlow expressed concerns about the current website's usability and the visibility of important links for residents and landlords, drawing comparisons to other housing authority websites he analyzed. In response, Mr. Xavier Hampton noted that the CHA team is actively gathering input from different departments to inform the website redesign process, emphasizing a collaborative approach to the project. The target launch for the redesigned website is currently suggested to be by the end of summer, though this timeline has not been firmly set. Chairman Partlow expressed that a summer completion date might be too lengthy, suggesting it could lead to dissatisfaction among clients. With no further questions regarding Mr. Bluestein's update, the Chairman invited Mr. Alex McFarlane to present his report.

Mr. McFarlane noted that due to the transition to YARDI, Housing Services does not have the usual charts or numbers typically provided. He mentioned that he will have some data available for the February Board Meeting. There were questions raised regarding missing data from November 2024. The team agreed to investigate the cause of the missing data, particularly since it coincided with the period when the system was not processing information due to the transition from Elite to YARDI. Commissioner Carol Jackson inquired about the reporting of Project-Based Vouchers (PBV). It was clarified that while PBV data is not included in the monthly reports, the number of PBVs is documented, as there is a limit on the number of vouchers that can be issued, which is a certain percentage of the total voucher stock. A concern was raised regarding the number of change orders we receive and whether issues should be identified earlier in a project. It was noted that Mr. Francis Smith has implemented a system that requires more communication and coordination regarding change orders. This new system has significantly reduced their occurrence and has led to more efficient project management. With no further questions regarding Mr. McFarlane's report, the Chairman called for Ms. Aris Ferguson's update.

Ms. Ferguson emphasized that a FOIA request was received from Anna Harris at Live 5 News for information related to quarterly maintenance inspection reports, maintenance logs, and a log of calls for maintenance made by residents (including details of the issue) from September 2023 to date, for all Charleston Housing Authority properties. The Housing Authority responded to this request in its entirety, except for any personal identifying information, which was excluded in compliance with FOIA. Ms. Ferguson also reported that the Housing Authority has granted an easement to the North Charleston Sewer District for construction, maintenance, ingress, and egress to their pump station, which currently exists alongside the property line at Kiawah Homes. The Gadsden Green case was closed following a ruling by Judge Addy on October 31st, which granted summary judgment in favor of the Insurance Reserve Fund, indicating no material issues could be litigated. This decision by the Court officially ends the case. With no further questions regarding Ms. Ferguson's report, the Chairman called for Mr. Peter Sherman's update.

Mr. Sherman began by reiterating the board's warm welcome to Mr. Jeremy Erling, CHA's new Chief Financial Officer. Mr. Sherman, who has served as Interim CFO for the past few years, expressed confidence in Mr. Erling's wealth of experience and knowledge in housing authority operations. Turning to financial matters, Mr. Sherman revisited the bond proceeds from the Kiawah bond issuance. A point of concern last month was the potential interest rate risk when investing the bond proceeds in the local government investment pool. It was questioned whether additional investments in treasury notes would be necessary. Mr. Sherman clarified that the local government investment pool is well-diversified, with investments spanning a range of maturities from one to twelve months, including CDs and commercial paper. Notably, the pool yielded an approximate return of 4.5% in the previous month. Furthermore, Mr. Sherman explained that the bonds were issued at an interest rate of 5%, and at the time of issuance, the yield was 4.85%. In terms of development, Ward Mungo and Ray Nix introduced CHA to Mike Davis, a new architect from Columbia, who will be leading the redesign of 275 Huger Street. The team expects to receive conceptual drawings from Mr. Davis in the near future. The goal for the architectural redesign, which involves 77 units, is to close by the third quarter of this year. The design modifications aim to reduce costs while causing minimal disruption to the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) process. The team will meet with the architect to ensure that everyone is aligned on the project timeline. Additionally, a meeting with Integral's neighborhood consultant, Ray Parks from EJP, is scheduled to further discuss development plans for Gadsden Green. Integral is currently conducting due diligence, engaging with local entities to gather essential information for the development process. With no further questions regarding the Financial Report or Development, Chairman Partlow thanked Mr. Sherman for his comprehensive update and called for Mr. Brad Walbeck's update.

Mr. Walbeck shared that, following a recommendation from Commissioner Carol Jackson, he reached out to the City of Alexandria Housing Authority to inquire about their turnover rates. While their organization is somewhat smaller, they offered valuable insights. The turnover rate at the City of Alexandria Housing Authority is about 30%, reflecting the challenges many organizations are facing in today's job market. CHA experienced only one employee separation in December, but Mr. Walbeck anticipates a more challenging turnover rate in January, especially as the holiday season has ended. Mr. Walbeck plans to gather comprehensive data from ADP to help create an automated, real-time report to better track turnover and staffing trends. Regarding the Director of Housing Management position, it was asked whether the role would be filled internally. Mr. Walbeck confirmed that both internal candidates and external applicants will be considered. With the holidays now behind, CHA is preparing to start the recruitment process for both the Director of Housing Management position and the Executive Assistant role. With no further questions, Chairman Partlow requested a motion to approve the Internal Reports.

Mr. Gregory Voigt made a motion to approve the Internal Reports as submitted, which was seconded by Ms. Kathy Nelson. Following no additional inquiries, the Chairman called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

It was noted that there was no New Business to discuss.

CITIZEN'S PARTICIPATION PERIOD

The Chairman then moved to the Citizen's Participation Period. Anthony G. Bryant of AG Bryant Group, Inc. addressed the board, noting that the CHA Board Meeting had been highly informative and commended the staff for their outstanding work. However, Mr. Bryant expressed concerns about the challenges faced by the housing authority in managing growth, particularly the impact of tourism on local communities. He highlighted the potential effects on the demographic composition of Charleston, stressing the need for attention to these ongoing issues.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

It was noted by Chairman Partlow that there was no business to discuss in the Executive Session.

RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION

Being no further business to come before the Board, the Chairman adjourned the Special Annual Board Meeting of January 29, 202 at 6:13pm.