

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF THE

CITY OF ROANOKE REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Commissioners of the City of Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority met for a regular session on Monday, January 7, 2019, in the City Council Chambers of the City Roanoke, 215 Church Avenue, in the City of Roanoke, Virginia.

Mayor Lea called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. and announced the joint meeting between the City of Roanoke and the City of Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA).

**I. CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL**

Chair Garner declared that a quorum was present.

PRESENT: Commissioners Burruss, Garner, Karnes, Kepley, Smith

ABSENT: Commissioners Anguiano, Witten

OFFICER PRESENT: Mrs. Glenda Edwards Goh, Secretary-Treasurer

CITY COUNCIL: William Bestpitch, Council Member; Djuna Osbourne, Council Member; Michelle Davis, Council Member; Sherman Lea, Mayor; Joseph Cobb, Vice-Mayor

Council Member, Anita Price arrived at 9:03 a.m.

ALSO PRESENT: David Bustamante, VP of Housing; Daniel Callaghan, City Attorney; Matt Chittum, Roanoke Times; Bob Cowell, City Manager; Betsy Crow, VP of Human Resources and Administration; Frederick Gusler, Director of Redevelopment and Revitalization; Crystal Hall, Community Support Services Director; Mark Loftis, RRHA Legal Counsel; Stephanie Moon Reynolds, Deputy City Clerk; Kelly Martin, Senior Executive Assistant; Members of the Hurt Park

## Neighborhood Alliance; Other Interested Persons

**II WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Mayor Lea announced the resignation of Council Member John Garland and stated that City Council would meet in a closed session at 2:00 p.m. to discuss the appointment of a new Council Member.

Mayor Lea stated that, during a meeting several weeks ago with City Manager, Bob Cowell, City of Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) Executive Director, Glenda Goh, and Ed Garner, RRHA Board Chair, he realized it had been some time since Council and RRHA Commissioners had met jointly. Mayor Lea said that RRHA's work is very important to the City, and he would like to have a joint meeting at least once a year. He stated that he was delighted to have the Board of Commissioners from RRHA attend the meeting today.

Chair Garner thanked Mayor Lea and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He stated that he would like to summarize some of RRHA's accomplishments. Chair Garner explained that RRHA went from a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Troubled status to now having maintained High Performer designation for several years. He noted that RRHA has had ten years of audits with no findings and has addressed development needs as much as possible within the changing federal budget. Chair Garner stated that HUD is driving movement from the Public Housing program toward more Section 8 voucher type rental assistance. A primary tool HUD is employing for this effort is the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) Program, which essentially converts Public Housing units to project-based rental assistance. He said that RRHA has submitted a multi-phase RAD application to

facilitate the redevelopment of Lansdowne Park, with the first phase consisting of forty units. Chair Garner stated that RRHA's goals are to provide safe affordable housing to residents, provide a means for the residents to move to self-sufficiency, and to promote and participate in economic development. Chair Garner added that the South Jefferson Redevelopment Plan has been a real success, and RRHA looks forward to continued partnership with the City.

### **III DISCUSSION**

#### **1. RRHA's Executive Director's retirement and search process.**

Chair Garner stated that he and Commissioner Burruss are in the process of reviewing the twenty-three applications that have been submitted to date. They will determine which resumes best align with the position requirements, and the full Board will hold interviews by the end of January. Commissioner Burruss stated that RRHA is fortunate to have some excellent candidates, and she would like to commend Mrs. Goh on giving the Board ample notice so that a comprehensive and thorough process could be developed.

Mayor Lea explained that Commissioner Burruss was also in the meeting he mentioned earlier, and he appreciated the opportunity that was provided for him to share his thoughts concerning the important qualities to seek in the next director. Chair Garner said that the expectation is to have the new director in place by mid-March 2019. In response to Council Member Bestpitch's inquiry, Mrs. Goh confirmed that her retirement date is June 2019, and an overlap period with the new director is anticipated.

#### **2. Multi-phase plan for the redevelopment of Lansdowne Park.**

Chair Garner explained that RRHA has submitted an application to HUD for the

RAD program. Lansdowne Park, built in 1951, is one of RRHA's oldest developments and is in dire need of capital improvements. He stated that RRHA had built up reserves in order to meet some of the capital improvements needs; however, HUD required that housing authorities with reserves use them to fund their current operations and reduced operating subsidies to those authorities, including RRHA. Chair Garner said that housing authorities that were not managed as well and had not built reserves were provided their full operating subsidy. He reported that RRHA had to use reserve funds for operations that could have been utilized for projects like renovation to porches, screen doors, and other repairs and improvements. Chair Garner mentioned that the residents appreciated housing improvements, and that those improvements also helped the image of the City of Roanoke, because they reflect a progressive City, an All-America City.

Responding to Vice-Mayor Cobb's question regarding whether improvements will address only housing or the broader neighborhood, Mrs. Goh said that the redevelopment of Lansdowne Park is one component of the Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan. The Transformation Plan includes goals for housing, people, and neighborhoods. She explained that the neighborhood goals include access to fresh food, health care, and spaces for physical activity, as well as supportive services for childcare, transportation, and job attainment. She stated that RRHA's efforts are guided by the Transformation Plan.

Council Member Price commended Chair Garner on his passion, saying that it was evident that he effectively communicated the Board's commitment. Council Member Price said she also wanted to commend Mrs. Goh and wish her the very best

in her retirement.

Council Member Price inquired about childcare access within Lansdowne Park. Mrs. Goh stated that there is a Head Start center operated by Total Action for Progress (TAP) located on site at Lansdowne Park. She added that RRHA currently has a Jobs Plus Center that is grant funded by HUD, which has funds available to assist with childcare for individuals who are pursuing employment. Mrs. Goh said that RRHA also has a Section 3 program that is geared toward helping residents obtain employment or start their own businesses. One of the possibilities that RRHA is exploring, is to identify residents who might be interested in becoming licensed childcare providers. She stated that this is a potential avenue to help residents become self-employed while providing important supportive services for other residents. Mrs. Goh said that RRHA continues to work with many community partners and connects people with available resources. She explained that RRHA's funding is generally restricted to specific uses related to housing operations, and this is one of the primary reasons that Jobs Plus, which provides flexible funding to address barriers to employment, has been such a wonderful program for Roanoke. Mrs. Goh added that RRHA, in partnership with the City of Roanoke and the Council of Community Services, has submitted a letter of interest to HUD regarding selection as a community for HUD's EnVision Center initiative. If Roanoke is selected, this would provide an opportunity to address issues such as childcare, which are often roadblocks to employment and self-sufficiency. She noted that RRHA has discussed with City staff that the Melrose library building, when it is vacated, would be an excellent location to house resources in one place for easy access by people who live at Lansdowne Park and in the surrounding community.

Responding to Council Member Price's request for information concerning the Jobs Plus Program, Mrs. Goh stated that Jobs Plus was a four year grant for \$3 million and RRHA was one of nine housing authorities selected in the first cohort, a competitive application process; there have been two or three additional rounds so there are now additional Housing Authorities participating. She said that the program focuses on saturating a neighborhood with resources to create a culture of community support for work. RRHA has been able to hire ambassadors, who are residents of Lansdowne Park, to conduct outreach for the program. She said Jobs Plus allows RRHA flexibility that it has not had in other programs, where people can be helped with transportation and childcare and other employment barriers, to essentially meet people where they are and assist them with identifying and achieving their goals. Mrs. Goh stated that Jobs Plus is not a rigidly defined program; instead, it is an array of resources that can be tailored to the needs of the individual family. She explained that RRHA is able to assist families with roadblocks that are hindering movement toward self-sufficiency. She added that the program provides a period of time during which Jobs Plus pays for any rent increases associated with increased household income, which allows families to build savings that can be used toward a down payment on a house, or purchase of a vehicle, or other needs of the family. Mrs. Goh stated that, since the beginning of the program, RRHA has exceeded enrollment goals and employment goals, and RRHA is working hard to find a way to continue the success with Jobs Plus when the grant ends, with one of the best prospects being the EnVision Center initiative.

3. Capital Needs assessment processes for public housing developments and low-income housing tax credits developments.

Chair Garner stated that one area that RRHA is looking into is avenues to try to increase the stock of housing available for low to moderate income individuals. He said that this is quite challenging because of the interest rate situation and because the direction from HUD is toward reducing funding for public housing.

Mrs. Goh said that RRHA manages several Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) developments, including Hurt Park Townhomes, Stepping Stone, Hillcrest Heights and Park Street Square, that operate differently from Public Housing. She stated that the challenges that Chair Garner is speaking of relate to the fact that these properties do not receive operating subsidies or capital funds. She explained that the LIHTC properties received investment of private capital toward construction cost, in return for the investors receiving tax credits. This allows the property to carry less long-term debt and, in return, the property must maintain compliance with rent caps that are below market, established by the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), which provides the long term financing for the developments. Mrs. Goh said that future LIHTC development in which RRHA is involved will likely include some subsidized units, because having only rental income with no subsidies while operating with rent caps has created financial challenges for the developments. Mrs. Goh explained that the properties each have a mortgage payment and a replacement reserve payment each month and, with rent as the only source of revenue, there is insufficient cash flow to address capital needs, particularly as the properties age. She stated that RRHA will continue to use the LIHTC program as one of the avenues for future development, but it will be used differently and in conjunction with subsidized rental programs.

#### 4. Storm doors for Hurt Park Townhomes

Vice-Mayor Cobb said he had the opportunity over the last several months to attend quite a few of the Hurt Park community meetings, and they are very engaged in their neighborhood. A couple of requests have come forward and he would like to see if there are some creative ways that the City and RRHA might work together to help address them. He said that it was his understanding that in the original plan for the Hurt Park Townhomes the doorframes were built in such a way that storm doors or screen doors would be added; he understands that the reason those doors have not been added may be at least partially due to funding. He stated that he was curious about the history of the situation and wanted to know if it was possible to work with Hurt Park residents to facilitate a grant process, such as CDBG or neighborhood grants, or work with local businesses to try and creatively address the need.

Chair Garner said that RRHA has been engaged in trying to identify funding for the requested doors. He added that resident feedback indicated that front doors are preferred, if doors for both front and back are not financially feasible. He stated that the money has been identified in the budget to replace the front doors. Mrs. Goh added that funding for front screen doors has been included in the 2019 budget; however, the budget has to be reviewed and accepted by VHDA, as the entity providing the long term financing for those developments, and Virginia Community Development Corporation, which represents the investor partners. She stated that, if those organizations accept the budgets, storm doors will be installed on the front of the units in 2019. She noted that the original plans for the Hurt Park Townhomes development did not include storm doors front or back; however, RRHA is not opposed to installing front doors, if sufficient funding is available. Mrs. Goh explained that the LIHTC properties encounter some

challenges with regard to seeking grants because the limited partnerships that own the developments are for-profit entities. She added that the ownership structure cannot be changed until the end of the compliance period, which is generally 20 years. Mrs. Goh said that the net income for Hurt Park is generally less than \$20,000 per year, and that amount has to address all capital needs for the property.

Chair Garner said that he was unsure of the date that the compliance period would end for Hurt Park. Mrs. Goh mentioned that the property began operation in 2008 so she would estimate that the compliance period should end in 2028. Chair Garner added that it would be a long time before anything could happen with the ownership structure.

#### 5. Amenities for Hurt Park Community Room

Vice-Mayor Cobb mentioned that Hurt Park has a lovely community room and the residents are struggling to get tables and chairs for meetings and community events. He inquired about furnishings for community rooms at other developments.

Mrs. Goh stated that most of the public housing developments have community rooms with tables and chairs; however, those developments receive operating subsidy each year from HUD, as well as annual Capital Fund Grants. She added that HUD prohibits use of those funds at any non-public housing property. She added that none of the LIHTC properties owned by limited partnerships affiliated with RRHA has that kind of community room outfitted with tables and chairs. Mrs. Goh stated that the resident group may pursue funding for tables and chairs, but she would ask that they work with the property manager to make sure that fire codes are not violated with regard to the capacity of the room and storage capacity.

Vice-Mayor Cobb asked if RRHA staff, who write grant applications could assist the resident group with seeking funding. Mrs. Goh responded that RRHA does not have a grant writer on staff, but staff members with experience writing grant applications can serve as resources to the resident group. She added that Commissioner Smith is the president of the Joint Resident Council, which represents residents in public housing and has had exceptional success in writing grant applications. She stated that she is sure that Commissioner Smith and his colleagues would also be willing to act as resources for the resident group. Commissioner Smith agreed that they would be glad to assist and said that he will be in contact with the group.

Council Member Davis added that Mountain View has had a great deal of success in recent years working with the neighborhood grant application. Specifically, they worked on grant applications for new bus stops and bus shelters and she knows they would be willing to assist. She offered to connect the residents of Hurt Park with the individuals at Mountain View.

#### 6. Public Safety in Public Housing

Mayor Lea inquired about safety at Lansdowne Park, relative to the recent arrests that were made involving firearms, and the publicized statement that guns were being stored at Lansdowne Park.

Chair Garner stated that RRHA contracts with City Police to provide Above Baseline Police protection, which is additional security provided by off-duty police officers for the developments. He reported that RRHA keeps statistics on all the properties and, if a problem exists relative to crimes that are being committed, RRHA ensures that there is an additional police presence at that development. He added that,

approximately ten years ago, surveillance cameras were installed as an additional security measure for all of the major developments. Chair Garner said that RRHA is unaware of any gang activity at RRHA properties. He mentioned that there could be someone there but not necessarily residents and RRHA has made a concerted effort to evict any person who is associated with any of that type of activity.

Mrs. Goh added that, with regard to the report of a stash house at Lansdowne Park, RRHA staff had no knowledge of such a facility. RRHA's Vice President of Housing checked with the police department and they were not aware of it, so although it was mentioned in the media coverage and apparently the news release that addressed the arrests, RRHA was not informed. She added that RRHA staff talked with several Lansdowne Park residents, and they also did not have any knowledge of such a facility at the development. Mrs. Goh stated that, as Chair Garner mentioned, criminal activity quite often does not involve residents at the development; rather, it involves individuals who come on the site and commit crimes. She said that RRHA is able to evict people based on conduct of guests that they allow on the property; she added, however, that some of those individuals arrested had been barred from the property as much as a year ago and should not have been on the Lansdowne Park property. She stated that RRHA property managers can bar individuals who are involved in criminal activity from the property, and the police are able to bar individuals from the property on their own action. Mrs. Goh said that RRHA staff believes that Lansdowne Park is as safe as the surrounding community. She further stated that problems at Lansdowne Park over the years have stemmed from the fact that it is an island in the middle of a neighborhood that serves as an easy location for activity such as drug dealing. RRHA

worked with the police several years ago on a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment at several developments to identify ways to make the physical environment less inviting for criminal activity. Mrs. Goh noted that RRHA cut down trees, adjusted fencing, added lighting, and installed surveillance cameras. She said that RRHA takes safety very seriously; it is always a top priority when the annual capital funding plan is developed. She noted that the effort has to involve not just RRHA and the police, but also people in the community coming together to say that they are not going to allow this to happen in their neighborhood, and they will report crime and testify when necessary. Mrs. Goh stated that there are multiple layers to addressing these community challenges. She noted that this is why she has been adamant for several years in stating that the City's street grid needs to be restored in Lansdowne Park. She said that if the problems in Lansdowne Park are going to be effectively resolved, the development must be reconfigured to become a part of the surrounding neighborhood. Mrs. Goh emphasized that people can drive in to Lansdowne Park or out of Lansdowne Park, but cannot drive through the development. She noted that, although that sounds like a small thing, it is very significant in discussions of safety and crime. She said that this reconfiguration has to be given priority in the context of the transformation of the neighborhood in which Lansdowne Park is located.

Council Member Bestpitch commented that he wanted to thank the Board members. He stated that it is evident that the Board has kept the big picture in mind while also paying attention to some of the smaller details that need to be addressed. He also wanted to recognize Mrs. Goh for her many years of service to the housing

authority and taking it from a place of where it was not exactly in a good situation and leading it to a better position as far as the public housing communities were concerned. He wished her all the best in her retirement.

Council Member Bestpitch said that he also wanted to thank RRHA for making space available, with Mr. Gusler's assistance, for the Kiwanis Club playground committee to meet. Council Member Price and Vice-Mayor Cobb attended a couple of these meetings. He added that the Kiwanis Club is coming up on its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in the City of Roanoke, and the signature project for 2020 is a playground below Horton Park near the new Melrose Library branch, which is nearing completion. Council Member Bestpitch said after the presentation to City Council he started to withdraw from the committee, and he certainly continues to wish them well but feels that at this point others should carry it on. He stated that he would like to thank Mr. Cook for his many years of leadership with the Hurt Park Neighborhood group; he has done an excellent job and has kept them engaged and connected. Council Member Bestpitch said that he appreciates the community volunteers that contribute so much to the wellbeing of the City in various ways.

Mayor Lea also recognized Mrs. Goh and thanked her for her work over the years. He stated that they have communicated on a lot of topics, including touchy issues that the public is unaware of, and that her contributions have proven to be beneficial to the City. He explained that Mrs. Goh worked with him on situations that were not popular, a lot of times going above and beyond to help residents. Mayor Lea said that he wanted to acknowledge and thank her publicly, and he hopes those qualities will be found in the next director.

Mayor Lea pointed out that the City of Roanoke has a Council Liaison, Council Member Osbourne who will be attending RRHA Board meetings. He said that the City would like to know what the issues are and how the Council can assist RRHA. The City Council appreciates the Board of Commissioners for everything they do.

Commissioner Karnes said he would like to thank the Council and Mayor Lea as well as other Council Members for allowing him to serve on RRHA's Board. He said that his term is coming to an end this year, and it has been a pleasure to serve on the Board. He stated that he joined RRHA when it was in some turmoil, and the organization has come a long way. He thanked his fellow Commissioners and Mrs. Goh, who has done an outstanding job.

Mayor Lea thanked the Board of Commissioners for their service.

Council Member Price stated that Commissioner Anguiano reached out and explained he was unable to attend the meeting, and he evidently reached out to several council members which is indicative of the commitment the Commissioners have.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Kepley moved that the meeting be adjourned.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Smith and upon roll call the following vote was recorded:

AYES: Commissioners Burruss, Garner, Karnes, Kepley, Smith

NAYS: None

Chair Garner declared the meeting adjourned at 9:47 a.m.

  
Ed Garner, Chair

  
Glenda Edwards Goh, Secretary-Treasurer

