

Minutes of Meeting of
The Housing Authority of the City of Galveston, Texas
Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center Community Room
4700 Broadway, Galveston, TX 77551
March 27, 2023 – 3:00 p.m.

The Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Galveston, Texas (GHA) met as stated above. Chairman William Ansell called the meeting to order at 3:01 p.m. and declared a quorum was present. He further clarified that the meeting was duly posted. The following commissioners were noted present: Chairman Ansell; Vice-Chair Betty Massey; Raymond Turner; Patricia Toliver; and Brax Easterwood.

Commissioners Absent: None

Others Present: Mona Purgason, Executive Director
Robert Booth, Legal Counsel

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

Vice-Chair Massey moved approval of the minutes of the February 27, 2023 board meeting and Commissioner Turner seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Discussion Item

Workforce Housing at 4700 Broadway – Vice-Chair Massey stated there would be a presentation by Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh, who did the design on The Oleanders, Cedars, and Villas. She stated there is a shortage of affordable housing in Galveston so that people who work here such as public works, servers at restaurants, and phlebotomists cannot afford to live here. She stated as the Housing Authority was at the end of the long stretch of fulfilling the promise to replace 569 units of family public housing demolished after Ike, the Board members started discussing last fall if the Housing Authority might play a role in helping with the workforce housing crisis. She stated that land is hard to come by on Galveston Island, and the Housing Authority owns the nine acres on which the community center sits. She stated the Commissioners decided they needed more information about the potential that could possibly happen on the 4700 Broadway site, and that's what the presentation by UDA is about. She stated it was not a plan, but a capacity study, so GHA could understand what is possible on the site, outlining two scenarios: leaving the community center in place and building around it, or replacing the community center with a new building within the site. She stated the Commissioners needed to hear from the public with comments, questions, and ideas, and they could do that by public comment after the presentation, at the April 20 board meeting, or by emailing info@ghatx.org. She stated one question she had heard was, "Who is going to pay for it?" She stated part of the process is that a Request for Proposals would be solicited from the private development community, and a developer would include as part of their proposal a financial pro forma, explaining all the sources and uses of funding.

Urban Design Associates Presentation to the Community

Ashleigh Walton of Urban Design Associates explained that the Capacity Study shows what can fit on the site in the two different configurations. Alternative one is to retain the existing building, and alternative two is replacing the occupied square footage with new construction office space. Overall objectives were to make sure there was residential frontage along Broadway, make sure there was space for the occupants of the community center, and balancing the parking needs including shared parking. She stated 65,000 square feet is currently occupied, leasable space. Alternative one includes four-story buildings and three-story walk-up buildings. That yields about 218 workforce housing units, resident community space, and the existing WNJ Island Community Center space, with 297 parking spaces. Alternative two includes replacing the WNJICC building with a two-story building on Broadway, four-story elevator buildings, and three-story walk-up buildings, for a total of 300 workforce housing units, with 396 parking spaces.

Vice-Chair Massey stated with alternative two, the current Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center could stay in place until the replacement office building was constructed. Ms. Walton stated the capacity study was designed with that thought in mind.

Commissioner Toliver asked about the bedroom configurations. Ms. Walton stated it was a combination of 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units being shown in the capacity test alternatives. Commissioner Toliver noted that two- and three-bedroom units would most likely require more than one car in the parking lot. Ms. Walton stated the capacity test was based on the idea of shared parking for the residents and the occupants and clients of the community center.

Public Comments

Milton Burrell with Upbring Head Start stated since they have been at the WNJICC they have purchased an ice machine for \$2,779, Smart Boards for \$28,470, Smart Board carts, paid for wall removal to educate additional early head start children, installed sinks, security improvements, and many other things, for a total of over \$123,000.

Torrina Harris stated in the City's Housing and Community Action Plan, objectives include to provide services to support low to moderate income homeownership and tenant based rental assistance, eliminate barriers to affordable housing and impediments to fair housing, supporting health and wellbeing of low to moderate income residents, providing economic development and opportunities to low to moderate income persons and businesses, and coordinating resources in the community. She stated transportation, child care, trade skills, and many other services are present in this building. Decentralizing these services without a clear and comparable means of maintaining accessibility is obstructing services to support the low to moderate income population. She stated removing access to these services to construct workforce housing is robbing Peter to pay Paul. She stated the action plan indicated survey results showing a high need for facilities such as community centers, economic development areas, child and youth services, and homeless prevention services. She further stated the capacity study does not address the overwhelming request from the public for low income and workforce housing to not be concentrated in the same space where it has historically been concentrated.

Angela Brown stated that the parking lot at the Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center was used during Hurricane Laura for evacuation of over 1,000 people to safety. There was availability to use the building for restrooms. There is nowhere else on the island to gather like that. She stated after the storm, they were handing out water to long lines of people with room in the parking lot. In addition events have used the space for fundraisers. She stated sharing parking spaces does not work, and cited the downtown area as an example. She stated supports affordable housing but not in this location.

Linda Alcorn-Arceneaux stated she has traveled around looking at other cities and what they are doing, and Galveston does not even have a park for events on a grand scale. She stated she does not support taking away the community center, where there are services for children and veterans. She stated this is about how it affects people.

David O'Neal stated there needs to be clarity and recommitment to the goal of the Housing Authority, which is to provide housing for low- to moderate-income families. He stated it seems past and projected actions seem contrary to that goal, as currently GHA allows for 50% for market value. He stated GHA commissioners must understand the future of their actions. He stated prior to Hurricane Ike the island's workforce was mostly occupants of GHA properties. He stated if it is again being considered to demolish the Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center, the idea was previously defeated because the action is not the primary objective of providing services for low to moderate income families, the action would jeopardize the current centrally located services to low and moderate income families, and there are other sites where market value housing can be built.

Leon Phillips stated some years back, the topic of tearing down the Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center came up, and it went away. He stated the plan should have been in the newspaper. He stated that to tear down the building and remove debris would cost \$1.5-2 million dollars. He stated GHA should consider buying land in front of the Galveston County justice center and not disrupt everything in place at the community center.

Lonnie Brooks stated the community center should not be taken away. He stated Palm Terrace, Cedar Terrace, Oleander Homes was taken away. He stated building condos, etc isn't helping Galveston.

Linda Dailey stated she is Director of FasTrac Job Training Center, and just signed a three year lease. She stated they are in the business of workforce development. She stated if the building is torn down, resources in the building are being torn down, for 200 units of housing. She stated no one is opposed to affordable housing, but a smart comprehensive strategy working with other entities in Galveston is needed. The services in this building are needed more than 200 units of housing, such as the food pantry, help with utilities, and job training. She stated the board is here to serve the community, and to not discount what the community is saying.

Lillian McGrew stated she attended the last board meeting, and it was her understanding that the community was not in favor of building more affordable housing in the same area north of Broadway. The population dropped and Galveston lost a lot of valuable resources.

In addition people park their cars on this lot and evacuate from this parking lot. She stated the majority of people that have come before the board don't want to tear down the community center or build housing on this land.

David Miller stated the community did not want housing on the site, and if land is needed use the storage spaces. He stated there was a visionary who tried to improve housing for low income people, but he was run out of town. He stated leave us alone.

Rosalyn Jackson stated the study is already made up, and this is already a plan, your mind is already made up. She stated they tore down Palm Terrace, and put one bedroom low-income housing. They put homeownership homes for police, doctors, and lawyers. They were told their credit had to be good to live in the new housing.

Tarris Woods stated he appreciated everyone who came out to speak. He stated he agrees that Galveston has an affordable housing crisis, but GHA is not a panacea for the Island's housing problems. He stated at Oleander homes there will be more units than before, and the housing shouldn't be concentrated north of Broadway. He stated the Island needs more jobs. He stated low income is not \$40,000 to \$100,000. He stated put workforce housing on the west end. He stated there are many entities looking for workforce housing: GISD, UTMB, and Galveston County. He asked if the City of Galveston should be the nucleus for economic development. He stated if this is allowed to happen, it might not turn out like they want it to. He stated this is a \$7 million building, and it is not 30 years old.

Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Easterwood thanked everyone for their input, and stated there were things brought forward that he had not considered. He stated when he looked at the building as an architect, he doesn't have an association with it, and he doesn't find it to be a good building, though everything that's happening there is good. What's happening inside is important, buildings have identities and if the community identifies with this building, that's important. He stated he was in a bad accident and has been to over 50 physical therapy sessions, and that happens in a building similar to this one. He stated if the parking lot is providing something the community identifies with, he is reconsidering his initial reaction. He stated if the building were torn down, there should be no gap in services, and everything should be replaced better. He asked that people come to the next meeting and state how they identify with the site and the building.

Commissioner Toliver stated from what the community has said, this building is very important to the community. She stated with the amount of money that people have put in to the building, they shouldn't have to spend money all over again. She stated millions of dollars would be spent to demolish the community center, and where would people go in a hurricane. She stated FEMA was in this building, and the community came here for services. This parking lot was very valuable. She stated all these services would be interrupted, and some people might lose their jobs, if the building were to be demolished. She stated she is a strong advocate for keeping the building.

Vice-Chair Massey thanked everyone for attending and voicing their opinions. She asked that people continue to communicate with the board and return on April 20 when the board will further discuss and consider the idea.

Financial Statements

Arvle Dunn, Finance Director, reported the following for February, 2023:

Total Operating Revenue:	\$ 38,913,065
Total Operating Expense:	\$ 19,354,720
Net Income:	\$ 19,558,345
Total Liabilities & Net Assets:	\$168,922,677

Secretary's Report

Development Report – Deyna Sims, Director of Real Estate and Development, reported on the 26 scattered site units that the 24 rehab units are occupied with the two new construction units projected to be ready by mid-April. Monique Chavoya from MBS reported construction was progressing well at The Oleanders at Broadway on all of the blocks including in the leasing building where work is being done on drywall, texture, readying for paint, electrical and wiring, and which will be the first building to come online. Other work includes siding, brick masonry, insulation, drywall and stucco. Storm water mitigation will begin after scaffolding comes down. The public housing waiting list for Oleanders will open April 17.

Modernization/Maintenance – Travis Bolte, MOD and Maintenance Director, stated major electrical work at Holland House was completed, as well as modernization at one of the scattered sites.

Housing Report – Odelia Williams reported garden beds were progressing, and a new resident services employee would start work the following Monday. Public Housing was leased up at 96%. HCV was leased up at 97% monthly with 65 voucher holders actively seeking housing.

Human Capital Report – Dr. Fuller of Urban Strategies stated out of 145 assisted families, 131 were receiving services through the Human Capital program, 42 development plans were completed with positive outcomes, and 44 were started. 51/51 referrals were completed with connections. 72 out of 92 eligible residents were employed, with 2 employment placements for the month.

The Board adjourned the meeting temporarily at 4:55 p.m. to conduct a public hearing. The meeting was reconvened at 5:04 p.m.

Action Items/Resolutions

Resolution 2956 – Approval to Amend Contract with CLA for Increase in Audit Fees for GHA FY2022 – Mr. Dunn stated this was correcting the audit year for which CLA had asked for a fee increase. Vice-Chair Massey moved approval of the Resolution and Commissioner Toliver seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution 2957 – Authorizing Submittal of GHA FY2024 (FYB July 1, 2023) Agency Annual Plan to HUD – Ms. Purgason stated this was authorizing the submittal of the annual plan required by HUD. Commissioner Turner moved approval of the Resolution and Commissioner Easterwood seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The Board meeting was adjourned at 5:06 p.m.