

Minutes of Special Meeting of  
The Housing Authority of the City of Galveston, Texas  
Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center Community Room  
4700 Broadway, Galveston, TX 77551  
April 20, 2023 – 9:00 a.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 special meeting to order at 9:00 a.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

### **Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

Vice-Chair Massey stated she served voluntarily on the Board of Build Galveston, but that she had consulted with GHA's attorney, Robert Booth, and he had stated that since neither Build Galveston nor Vision Galveston would be involved in or responding to any RFP regarding the development of workforce housing at 4700 Broadway, there was no reason Vice-Chair Massey could not participate in the discussion and vote on the agenda items.

### **Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings**

Commissioner Easterwood moved approval of the March 13 and March 27, 2023 meetings and Commissioner Turner seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **Public Comments**

*David Miller* asked why are y'all doing this. He stated it seems to him that everything people of color try to do is undone. He stated don't give us what you think we need, we are not children. He stated he wished the Board would not do this. He asked that Commissioner Toliver make a motion to table the Resolution and Commissioner Turner second it.

*Thomas Singleton* stated Galveston is facing an existential crisis in the form of a severe shortage of housing, and this crisis threatens to undermine the progress in rebuilding Galveston. He stated this crisis has a solution and that is to build. He stated as a resident of District 1 he believes the best path forward is to redevelop the community center site, to include purpose built facilities for social services as well as low- to moderate-income housing.

*Leon Phillips* asked that everyone who was not in favor of dealing with the issues on the Agenda to move to one side of the room. He stated there was already an intent to get rid of the building before it was renamed. He stated Oleanders on Broadway will have over 70

apartments for workforce housing. He stated it is not known if those can be filled, but the Board is being asked to vote on something dealing with the 4700 property. He stated it isn't known what income level workforce housing is. He asked the Board to table this until all the l's are dotted and all the t's crossed.

*Cornett Tisdell*, Principal of the early learning academy in the building, which serves Head Start students 18 months to five years, stated she stands against demolition of the building. She stated the free childcare and education serves the community and allows parents to go out and find work. She stated they have invested over \$200,000 in their program and facilities. She stated this site has been designated for emergency management and asked where else would they go. She stated they are against demolition but also against building any housing on the site, due to safety and parking issues.

*Milton Burrell* with Upbring Head Start, stated the school serves low income families and children, and children who are experiencing homelessness. The families pay nothing to be in the program. It allows parents to seek employment and helps the community. The location allows the families in their program to access services that will help with their education. He stated inspections would have to be redone if they had to move. He said adding housing to the site would create safety and traffic issues. He stated in order to move they would need over 10,000 square feet, and many safety and security issues and standards must be put in place.

*Shawn Arthur*, President of the Old Central Carver Park Neighborhood Association, stated he has been out in the community hearing that they do not want the building torn down because so many utilize the services in the community and do not have resources to go somewhere else. He stated there are a lot of things to deal with but this must be tabled and put aside.

*Eric Kingston* asked the Board where is the plan. He stated the community hasn't been provided with anything to explain why they would tear the building down. He stated as a business person in Galveston who owns units, his tenants have to pay taxes, but Galveston Housing Authority doesn't pay taxes. He asked where is the need assessment for housing. He stated the community is against tearing down the building.

*Robert Quintero*, President of LULAC Council 151, stated he was in a meeting years ago where Walter Norris asked him to take the idea for the Island Community Center to then HUD Secretary Jack Kemp. He stated it has remained a one stop shop for social services. He stated the clinic is serving people who don't have insurance, the children are being educated at Head Start, people can shop in the food pantry. He stated tearing the building down would be a disservice.

*Debra Briggs* stated her family has benefited from all the social services in the building and there is no plan for where they would go. She stated she would hate for them to have to leave the island, and that the people who would live in the workforce housing would probably need the services too. She asked that the Board listen to the community and not support the Resolutions on the agenda.

*David O'Neal* stated he is against each of the Resolutions, he is not against affordable housing. He stated GHA is extending itself too far building workforce housing, because the workforce is middle to market rate income. He stated employers need to care for their workforce. He further stated the market rate housing GHA has already built took the place of units that would have been built for the low income workforce. He suggested the Board not approve the Resolutions but come back later with a plan.

*Tiffany Rice*, WIC Director for Galveston County Health District, located in the building, stated they serve thousands of families in the community, educating families on nutrition and health. She stated if their services are removed it would be detrimental to the pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and the children and infants that they serve. She stated she is in complete opposition to demolishing the building. She stated families do not have the resources and transportation to reach the services.

*Linda Dailey*, FastTrac Job Training Center, stated where there is no vision the people cast off restraint. She stated there are many different visions for Galveston, including planning for a better more resilient future, economic growth through tourism, or a community shopping at the corner store, eating at the local restaurants, or getting their hair cut at the local barber. She stated many other cities have had visions that didn't pan out exactly as they had hoped, and that have caused tent cities, spiraling crime, and high cost of housing. She asked how does the Board see the center, do they find value here. She asked how do you want history to remember you. She asked that the Board vote no on all of the Resolutions, and meet with the service providers on a strategic plan.

*Walter Jones*, Pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, stated he was taken aback by the proposal to demolish the building which was established for the services it provides for the low income families. He stated the desire to stop what has been working for many years is counterintuitive, and there are many voices who are helping and who are advocating for those who help provide services for the less fortunate. He asked what is the wisdom in demolishing something to reestablish it on a smaller basis or to start all over interrupting people's abilities to access and learn to thrive from all these organizations.

*Rosalyn Jackson* stated it's a one-stop shop, with WIC, housing, food pantry, this is a place where all people can come and be comfortable. She stated she talks to the community and she knows they want the building to stay. She said transportation is an issue, and there are a lot of homeless, who come here for services. She asked if any of the Board members have been out in the community for input. She stated many elderly people use the building for exercise.

*Jeffrey Hill* stated she is on the Advisory Board for Catholic Charities and they are housed in this building and have recently made a significant investment in the Beacon of Hope Isle Market which is a self-service food pantry, providing food where people can come and shop with dignity and make their own food choices. She stated she believes strongly in the mission of Catholic Charities and all the other organizations in the building. She further stated there is a lack of understanding about the RFP process, and urged the Board to take some time to explain at the most basic level what is happening.

*Bianca Obinyan*, a medical student at UTMB who works with the community and is an advocate, stated she doesn't support the demolition of the building. The building offers a form of mental health, and the disruption of services would be detrimental to the health of the community. She stated the community needs to be consulted before a decision is made.

*Sue Johnson*, Executive Director of the Nia Cultural Center, which has served hundreds of families, many of which have used every service available in this buildings stated that to the city's benefit, many of those who have used the services have gone on to become educated and return to the Island, and would be in need of those affordable houses. She stated the services offer people to be uplifted and to demolish the building would scatter the vital services. She stated affordable housing is needed, but the plan to do that needs to be rethought.

*Rosalyn Preacher* stated there are a lot of vacant areas on the Island. She stated in addition to everything else that had been said, she had three questions: Why this, why here, and why now.

*Priscilla Brown* stated understanding goes a long way, and you have to know the community. She stated even without demolishing the building, too many people in a close proximity together is not healthy. She stated putting apartments on this property is going to cause problems. She stated traffic and parking would be an issue, and it would be an eyesore to tourists and cause confusion. She suggested use the land where the Children's Center is. She stated let's unify one with another and put an end to the rumors and say we're not going to demolish the building, we're not going to cram a bunch of apartments on there.

*Tarris Woods* asked everyone in the audience to give themselves a round of applause. He stated after Ike he was on City Council and they had to fight like hell to get public housing back on the Island. He stated Commissioner Toliver should make a motion to table the Resolution and Commissioner Turner should second it. He stated Robert Booth chimed in and told a board member what they could or could not do. He stated he thought the Commissioners hired the attorney. He stated Robert Booth wants to push forward his Agenda because he approved Betty Massey not having a conflict of interest. He stated he thinks Robert Booth has a conflict of interest because Mills and Shirley who he works with also serve on Boards with Betty Massey. Mr. Woods further stated last time someone came up behind him and said not to talk about her friend, but they were mistaken because it's not 1823. He stated Michael Smith wouldn't print one word about it, and he calls himself the Editor of the Galveston Daily News. He stated Betty signed a form in 2018 that she had a conflict of interest, so how did it disappear. He stated Robert Booth has a vested interest in this because if the RFP goes through, Mills and Shirley would get the job of negotiating the contract. He stated Betty Massey personally received funding and failed to mention it. He stated Betty Massey wrote letters to each of the Board members and based her plan off Michael Smith's article. He stated any time GHA makes applications to sell anything they have to contact HUD, but GHA did not do that. He stated during the rebuilding of public housing people talked all day and didn't have a limit. He stated in three years Betty Massey's group has raised a total of five million dollars. He stated HUD states that a person has a conflict of interest when their public duties or actions lack independence or impartiality

either real or perceived. He stated this attorney wants to cover that up. He stated a housing authority must obtain written approval from HUD before undertaking any transaction involving demolition or disposition of public housing on the property. He stated resident participation that means you, you all have a right to be here. He stated the Board may not have a right to be where they are, and if you vote for another Mayor you can change this Board. He stated public housing must consult with residents who would be affected by what you're doing. He said to the Board it's all about power and money. He stated Betty Massey serves on the Moody Board, and had a meeting with the tenants of the building and asked them if any of them received funding from the Moody Board, and that's blackmail. He stated Michael Smith is going to say that Betty just had to sit there and hear him talk. He stated she can speak, but she won't, because she doesn't want the truth to come out. He stated he asked GHA for the application to HUD, and the response was the documentation doesn't exist, so the answer was no. He stated public housing, because of redlining, when he came to Galveston was worse than Chicago public housing, but they were all on the north side of Broadway. He stated it took fifteen years to rebuild public housing after Ike, and it is all packed on the north side of Broadway. Now Betty wants 309 more houses over here. He stated it would be impossible for traffic. He stated why don't they put those affordable houses on the west end. He said what you're doing is wrong. He stated the reason Walter Norris was run out of town was because he had the audacity to buy Port Holiday Apartments on the south side of Broadway. He wanted to decentralize public housing. He further stated Betty Massey was the only one who voted against naming the building after Walter Norris, because she knew she wanted to demolish this building. He stated Betty, your plot is up. He stated Betty should not participate in any part of this discussion.

*Eric Temple* stated as a BOI and former resident of Oleander Homes, and a former administrator for Galveston Housing Authority, he was very concerned that Ms. Massey would plan to demolish the building after it was named after Walter Norris Jr and his family and friends were invited. He stated he was a former resident commissioner, and Commissioner Turner you are the voice of the residents, please hear their voices. He stated he doesn't support it. He asked the Board to vote no or don't vote at all.

*Torrina Harris* stated she wanted to echo what a lot of other people said, there has been overwhelming expression that a lot of the residents are tired of feeling like black and brown and low and moderate income people are being concentrated in the same area. She stated they want to keep the building as it is, and they want the parking lot to continue to be utilized as it is during hurricanes for evacuation and distribution of supplies. She stated please hear everything that has been shared and not vote for anything that would change that, and explore other alternative options and meet the needs of the community in a way that isn't in direct conflict with what they've expressed that they want.

### **Discussion /Action Items**

Commissioner Toliver read the Galveston Housing Authority Mission and Vision Statements as follows:

**Vision:** GHA uses its resources to create and strengthen inclusive, healthy and sustainable neighborhoods by providing high quality, affordable housing choices and by empowering low and moderate income families, the elderly, Veterans, victims of domestic violence, and the disabled in their journeys toward self-sufficient lives.

**Mission:** GHA creates excellent housing options by fostering public/private partnerships with best in class real estate developers, property managers, and service providers to leverage public funds with private investment and empower individuals, families and communities by providing tools and opportunities to move in, up, and out.

She stated according to this our vision is not workforce housing, our vision is low and moderate housing. She stated she feels like workforce housing is definitely needed, and it should be single-family units. She stated our firemen, police officers, teachers, etc do not need to be on this property all congested without a way to come in and out. She stated there are other entities including the City of Galveston who are interested in workforce housing, Vision Galveston and Build Galveston, let them do the workforce housing. She stated GHA should stick to their vision and mission.

Commissioner Easterwood stated it's obvious to him that the community has a collective memory about this building. He stated as an architect he sees the building as incredibly inefficient, but the community sees it as centralized. Whether the building works or not is not the important thing. The building serves the community. He stated if the Board votes to retain the building it needs serious investment to make it better. He stated the site as a whole is very inefficient, where there is a lost opportunity with infill development on the parking lot. He stated he can't buy into the argument that it is the highest and best use for that frontage property. He stated as a small business owner it has been hard to find employees to come work here much less live here, so he knows there is a need for it.

Commissioner Turner stated he would be voting in preference to what the community wants, not what he wants. He stated the with the rents of workforce housing, he would rather put a down payment on a house. He stated the workforce people this would be built for would not want to be close together, congested. He stated he cannot go along with the idea that this property would be good for workforce housing. He stated the companies who benefit from the workforce should get together with Build Galveston and make that happen.

Chairman Ansell stated it was never the intent to tear down the Walter Norris Jr. building and not create a better newer facility with the name of Walter Norris. He stated he heard things that he had not thought about, like using the parking lot for hurricane preparedness, and people walking inside the building. He stated he is not going to vote to tear this building down. He stated the reason they started looking at this property for workforce housing is because there is very little available land on the Island, and GHA owns this. He stated Commissioner Toliver brought up a good point that perhaps workforce housing is not what GHA is designed to do. He stated if they did vote today, it would just be the start of looking at it. The RFP process would find out if there is a way to do it. He stated he didn't have any intent to hurt any of the tenants. He stated the Board probably needs to do more homework and present something to the public that is more sensible.

Vice-Chair Massey stated the Board heard a lot about her today, questioning her ethics, her motivation, and her personal integrity. She stated she can't say it isn't hurtful, but she wants each Board member to know that she comes to this as a matter of conscience. There is no personal gain to any of this, and there wasn't when she sat on the Board after Ike. She stated that back in 2017 there were 5,417 Galveston households that made combined income less than \$50,000 per year. They were housing cost burdened, which meant to be able to keep a roof over their heads and have water and utilities, those people were using more than 30% of their household income. That means those people were short-changing themselves on medical care or food or recreation for their kids. She stated that data is from six years ago, and heaven only knows how many there are today. She stated that's what brings her to this table.

She stated the Vision Galveston demographic is not necessarily what GHA has to accept as the definition of workforce housing. She said a bus transportation dispatcher in GISD makes between \$27,000 and \$32,000 a year. She stated that may be the kind of workforce housing we are talking about. She stated if they move forward to take it to the RFP stage, that would be one of the discussions they would have, just like the status of the building would be a requirement on the RFP. She stated several people asked, "What's the Plan?" She said getting to the RFP stage helps get to the plan. She stated the framework would be part of the RFP. She stated she heard a lot of concern from the tenants about how parking would work on the site. She stated that might be a requirement in the RFP. But if we shut it down today, we won't get the answers to those questions.

Commissioner Toliver stated the overwhelming majority of the community members don't want housing on this property.

Vice-Chair Massey stated the Board started discussing workforce housing because they recognize that the people who are making this community function cannot choose to live here. She stated she would be voting to leave the Walter Norris Jr. community center in place, if the Board voted to contemplate workforce housing on the property. She said if the Board voted against doing workforce housing, that would be the end of it, but if they voted for it, they would get to the next stage of the process, and start addressing other issues, like demographics, the kind of housing to be built, parking issues, etc.

Commissioner Easterwood made a motion to table the Resolution, and Commissioner Toliver seconded.

Vice-Chair Massey stated she would not vote to table, because she believed they have kicked the can down the road long enough. She stated they may not be able to solve the affordable housing crisis but they could do their part.

The vote was recorded as follows:

AYES: Ansell, Easterwood, Toliver, Turner  
Abstentions: None

NAYS: Massey  
Absences: None

The Board meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.