

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
March 13, 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 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. Attorney Robert Booth stated as Vice-Chair Massey has a fiduciary duty to both boards, that would be a conflict of interest. He stated she cannot participate in any discussions or a vote regarding Build Galveston.

Presentation by Build Galveston

Christine Bryant, CEO of Vision Galveston, stated Vision Galveston is a community-building non-profit designed to connect the wishes of Galveston residents to the resources that make things happen. Vision Galveston presented a report based on meetings and recommendations with residents, and part of that included Build Galveston, focused on the need for workforce housing.

Marshall Tyndall, President of Build Galveston, stated they are focused on the great need of workforce housing and revitalization of underserved neighborhoods. He stated they had been working with UTMB on workforce housing on the Strand, and provided two unit capacity studies to Galveston Independent School District facilities committee, should they consider developing housing on the Alamo school property. He stated they were working with Councilwoman Lewis on how they could be involved in the Old Central Carver Park neighborhood. They have engaged a consultant to look at options to augment workforce housing. They are looking at funding and have posted the need for an Executive Director.

He stated Build Galveston can be the front face of an organization's project to meet the need for workforce housing, as well as help facilitate pre-development activities.

Public Comments

Dr. Tim Sykes, pastor of Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church, and a former GHA Board member, stated he had a background in law enforcement and public housing. He stated Galveston is his hometown, and he was informed that there is a desire to demolish the Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center, and he has grave concerns about the real reason and desire to demolish the building, what's going to happen to it, and things the community is struggling with.

Tarris Woods, president of Galveston County Coalition for Justice, stated he wanted to speak on the artwork on the building, as well as the possible demolition of the building. He stated there are many old buildings on the Island, but the community center is relatively new to be speaking about tearing it down. He stated they don't know who may want to buy the building under the disguise of doing something for poor people. He stated people have been trying to decentralize public housing, but the housing is back on the same footprint. He stated he heard the board talk about revenue for the building, but there is no loss of revenue, because the building is needed as a community place. He stated he strongly objects to the artwork because it is a government building and deserves respect.

Mary Patrick, President of the NAACP, stated the building is a one stop shop for families, providing early childhood education, health and wellness, and utilities assistance among other things, and many residents do not have transportation to go all over the Island, so one stop makes it convenient for them. She stated workforce housing or affordable housing is not supported north of Broadway. She stated they supported Oleanders, and support revitalization in Galveston, but there is enough subsidized housing north of Broadway. She stated there are many tenants in the building who would be displaced. She stated she does not support the mural on the building. She stated they are saying no to destroying the building, because it represents the families who use the services there.

Lillian McGrew thanked the Board for renaming the building after Walter Norris Jr. and stated the community is not in support of demolishing the building, and they have a problem with more affordable housing north of Broadway. She stated they went along with replacing the 569 north of Broadway because that was the property that was available, but the Island does not need more housing north of Broadway. She stated the building is needed to teach and invest in the community.

Rosalyn Jackson stated the building means a lot to the members of the community. She stated she worked there in security and with the children in the gym. People have asked where they would go if the building is torn down. People use it for the Clinic and WorkForce, and people do not have transportation to go other places for the services.

Linda Dailey, Director with FasTrac job training center, stated they just moved to the building two months ago. She stated there is a camaraderie in the building among the tenants such as SER Jobs, the clinic, Catholic Charities, early HeadStart, the Housing Authority. She stated there are so many valuable resources in the building. She stated the building is extremely valuable to the community. She stated when a building is torn down, it tears down services, hopes and dreams, and careers.

Priscilla Brown-Merritte stated she worked for Community Action Council, and this building is the heartbeat of the community. They walk here, go to the clinic, get groceries. She stated they all work together as a family. She stated the city gives assistance with storm evacuation in the parking lot.

Sharon Lewis, District 1 City Council Member, stated the building is an asset in the community and to the people who use the services, not something to be demolished, destroyed, or torn down. She stated a lot of things on the northside are torn down, and they have to keep this building.

David O'Neal stated there must be a collaborative consortium of current and futuristic services without jeopardizing the objective of each member. He stated there needs to be more clarity into what the true objective of GHA is. If it is to provide housing for low to moderate income families, the current and projected actions are contrary to that goal. He stated currently 50% is for low to moderate income and 50% is for market rate. He stated the idea to demolish the community center was defeated once before because that action is not the primary objective of providing services to low and moderate income families, and would jeopardize the people and current centrally located services, and because there are other property sites where market value and low to moderate income housing can be built. He stated leave the Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center as it is and pursue additional land sites elsewhere.

Discussion Items

Proposed Artwork by Coastal Health and Wellness on Walter Norris Jr. Island Community Center – Ms. Purgason stated a request was made by Coastal Health and Wellness to install a mural on the building

Commissioner Easterwood stated it was not the right opportunity to do so because it is a public building.

Commissioner Toliver said the tenants were not in favor of it and she was not interested.

Commissioner Turner stated he was not in favor of desecrating the front of the building, and there are other more appropriate buildings.

Chairman Ansell stated he agreed.

Vice-Chair Massey stated she was not in favor of a mural on the building because it is an old enough structure to qualify to be on the National Register of Historic Places, and doing so would nullify that opportunity.

The Board adjourned into Executive Session at 9:49 a.m. and reconvened the open meeting at 10:22 a.m.

The Board meeting was adjourned at 10:22 a.m.