

Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission  
Draft Minutes of March 28, 2014  
Quarterly Meeting



**I. ATTENDANCE**

**1. Commissioners Present:**

Cola, Jeanne  
DeLuca, William  
Fasano, Mary  
Flynn, Kevin  
Garlick, Joseph  
Hannifan, Chris  
Imondi, Deborah  
Kravatz, Mark A.  
Raymond, Joseph  
Reiner, Jonathan  
Roy, Corinna

Ryczek, Jim  
Sekeres, Bonnie A.  
Taylor, Catherine  
Valliere, Albert  
Vanderslice, Bob  
Ventura, Carol  
Zaslow, Carrie

Chairperson  
Representing Paul McGreevy, RI Dept. of Business Regulation  
Representing David Devault, RI Bankers Association  
Representing Richard Licht, RI Department of Administration  
NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley  
Housing Network of Rhode Island  
RI Mortgage Bankers Association  
Green & Healthy Homes Initiative  
Town of Burrillville  
North Kingstown Planning Department  
Representing Craig Stenning, RI Behavioral Healthcare,  
Developmental Disabilities & Hospital  
Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless  
Shalom Housing, Incorporated  
Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs  
Rhode Island Builders Association  
Representing Michael Fine, RI Department of Health  
Representing James DeRentis, RI Housing  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation

**2. Members Absent**

Freese, Carleton  
Kilmartin, Peter  
Martin, Robert  
McGunagle, Joanne  
Powell, Sandra  
Reed, James

Representing the Homeless  
Rhode Island Attorney General's Office  
Representing RI Association of Realtors  
Comprehensive Community Action Program  
Rhode Island Department of Human Services  
Housing Authority of Newport

### 3. Staff Present

Bray, Mary	Office of Housing & Community Development
House, June	Office of Housing & Community Development
Kue, Simon	Office of Housing & Community Development
Neirinckx, Ray	Office of Housing & Community Development
Sullivan, Laura	Office of Housing & Community Development
Tondra, Michael, Director	Office of Housing and Community Development/HRC
Witcher, Pheamo	Office of Housing & Community Development
Vittorioso, Dawn	RI Division of Planning

### 4. Guests

Clarke, Amanda	United Way of Rhode Island
Lagace, Nicole	Housing Works Rhode Island
Rauch, Kim	RI Department of Human Services

## II. **AGENDA ITEMS**

### 1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order by Jeanne Cola, Chair at 9:00 a.m.

### 2. November 15, 2013 Meeting Minutes – *For vote*

Jeanne asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes of November 15, 2013. Bill DeLuca moved to approve the minutes of November 15, 2013 as submitted. The motion was seconded by Joe Garlick. There was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

### 3. Report of the HRC Chair/Director – *Executive summary of key issues.*

#### Staffing

Mike introduced Mary Bray and said that she will be responsible for the Office of Homelessness. One initiative that Mary will be working on will be to consolidate the multiple Homelessness meetings into a single State Homelessness meeting that will occur once per month. He then reminded the Commission that Darlene Price transitioned to the Office of Healthy Housing.

#### CDBG Disaster Recovery

The CDBG, Disaster Recovery action plan has been submitted to HUD for consideration. The proposal includes the development of affordable housing options in Washington County, rehabilitation of public housing in Newport and numerous infrastructure and planning activities in impacted areas. Mike indicated that HUD will respond to the request within sixty days with a decision to approve or deny the proposal.

#### Building Homes Rhode Island (BHRI)

The next RFP is anticipated in the near future. The State/HRC is working with the City of Providence, State CDBG program staff and RI Housing to incorporate appropriate revisions to application materials – providing

additional information (such as marketing plans and/or waiting lists) determined important to the funding distribution committee deliberations.

### **Continuum of Care (COC)**

COC – The Executive Board of the COC has begun meeting to discuss various administrative items, including support of veterans' homelessness program applications. Operating policies and procedures will be developed in the coming months.

Joe Garlick asked if the RFP for bond money was delayed due to Providence's input. In response, Mike said the delay was due to the revisions to the application forms. In addition, Mike indicated that the State's CDBG Program allocated funding for affordable development. He said instead of distributing funds through the annual competitive cycle, it will be incorporated into the RFP that will go out for the bonds.

Bob Vanderslice expressed his appreciation for the collaborative efforts in regards to the State's lead issues with Darlene Price. He pointed out that there has been a substantial decrease in lead poisoning cases in Providence. Bob said that the City of Providence checks for certificate of conformance to ensure that homes are in compliance with HRC Regulations. He suggested this as a topic to be discussed at a future HRC meeting. Bob would like the Commission's support in efforts to initiate the same protocol throughout the state. Mike indicated that through the CDBG Program, he met with staff from the Child Lead Action Project (CLAP) to discuss a potential training class to educate community development planning officials that manage rehabilitation programs on how to comply with the federal and state regulations. Jeanne asked Bob what initiatives were taken that resulted in such an impact. Bob said that the City of Providence checks an online database for the certificate of conformance and communicates the findings with the homeowner. He also said that when building permits are issued, they check to see if the home was inspected by a lead professional. Mr. Kravatz pointed out that another factor that may have contributed to the decrease in cases is that the City of Providence has a Lead Housing Court and has held approximately 180 hearings.

There being no further questions or comments, Jeanne moved to the next item on the agenda.

#### **4. HRC Budget – *For discussion***

Mike indicated that the Administration's budget for the HRC in FY'2015 was significantly reduced. Essentially, this "constrained budget" proposed significant reduction/elimination of the HRC's assistance for Lead Hazard Reduction activities. The HRC has, historically, provided \$400K - \$500K annually to RI Housing to assist the agency in matching its HUD Lead Hazard Reduction award. The General Assembly is considering the proposed reduction, and the OHCD has started taking actions to mitigate for these cuts, in the event they are ultimately implemented. The OHCD has set aside CDBG funds for housing rehabilitation and are encouraging communities to utilize resources for these purposes.

Mike explained that reductions in the HRC budget must come from one of two places (healthy housing or homelessness which includes rental assistance); homelessness programs faced significant reductions in federal funding last year. Since applications will be accepted in the coming months to obligate next year's HRC homelessness funding, Mike asked the Commission for their feedback and to determine if any adjustments to the budget will be necessary.

Chris Hannifan asked how the reductions affect the match for Rhode Island Housing (RIH). In response, Carol Ventura said the impact would be on RIH's renewal for federal funding and then indicated that the loss of funding will also be reported to HUD. Mike asked Carol if the CDBG investment funding is considered as a match. Carol said yes.

Jeanne asked if the funds could be restored. Mike said that the general assembly could reinstate but a legislative action will need to be ordered. Jim Ryczek said that the proposed legislation would need to come from the existing budget. He then pointed out the reduction will have an impact to 75 individuals. Corinna Roy suggested including all of the impacts and data on the report when it is submitted.

The Commissioners decided to create a subcommittee to address the issues at hand for legislative action. In addition, a letter of support on behalf of the HRC will be submitted to the Administration asking for the restoration of the lead funds.

There being no further questions or comments, Jeanne asked for a motion to send a letter of support on behalf of the HRC to the Administration asking for the restoration of the lead funds. Carol Ventura motioned to approve. The motion was seconded by Jim Ryczek. There was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.

##### **5. Rental Assistance/HOME Program Letter – *For discussion***

Next, Jeanne referred to the letter that was submitted to the HRC on behalf of The Providence Center, which was included in the Commissioner's packets. Mike explained that the Providence Center requested the HRC to consider taking a position on the use of State HOME funds, administered by RI Housing, for Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA). RIH administers the State's allocation under this program which has been significantly reduced in recent years. Funds are primarily used for development costs (acquisition, rehabilitation, construction) associated with affordable housing development. The letter references the shortage of housing vouchers caused by the reductions in federal funds. Mike indicated that he would like to discuss the issue to determine if a "HRC/State" position is appropriate and asked the HRC for their recommendations.

Corinna Roy asked if funds were moved from HOME to the rental subsidies, would there be a violation for the minimum that is required. In response, Mike said that it is an eligible use and pointed out that HOME funding allows the individual to receive assistance for a longer period; HOME funds are only allowed to be used for the existing year.

Chris Hannifan recognized the rental subsidy need but pointed out with one round of BHRI funding the amount of capital that can be made toward new developments will also be reduced. She noted that the new House Speaker is weary of the existing bond items; therefore, the likelihood of a 2014 housing bond is unlikely. Mike acknowledged Chris' concern and said the suggested solution is not a perfect replacement for the lost funds but indicated that he understood and asked Carol Ventura for her input. Carol Ventura said that the reductions will make it difficult to build both permanent supportive housing and rental communities. She said that RI Housing, over the past few years, received \$3M less from the federal government.

Corinna Roy suggested using bridge vouchers as a pilot program and said that as individuals enter the program, they would have the understanding that they would need to find alternative housing within a two-year timeframe.

Bonnie Sekeres noted that a long-term solution is needed and pointed out that the federal government continues to decrease investments within supportive housing. She then explained that the City of Warwick raised property taxes by 6% so she applied for an expense increase with HUD and was only approved for a 2% expense increase.

In closing, the Commissioner's determine that a response letter to The Providence Center will be sent and the letter suggesting that funds be reallocated will not move forward.

There being no further comments, Jeanne thanked everyone for their input and moved to the next item on the agenda.

#### **6. State Rental Subsidy Program Regulations – *For discussion***

Mike referred to the distributed Rental Subsidy Initiative document (Attachment 1) and stated that the State has budgeted \$750K to the HRC to operate a "rental subsidy program". He explained that this year's recipients initiated their programs late in 2013. At this time, agencies report assisting a total of 76 households, with an additional 29 households pending placement. Crossroads RI, the primary contact for "families", report of the 10 households assisted, containing a total of 30 people - 13 adults; 17 children (2 families pending placement).

Mike noted that the HRC will draft regulations to govern the future disbursement of State Rental Assistance Program funds allocated. These regulations will be brought to the HRC at its June meeting for promulgation. If approved, the RFP for funds will be issued immediately after adoption by the HRC with awards commencing in July. A meeting will be held with existing recipients (re-distributing funds as necessary) to maximize expenditures of this year's resources.

At this time, Mike asked if anyone had any questions or comments. Jim Ryczek expressed his concerns of transitional/permanent role of the subsidy program and indicated that case management versus budget will be hard to manage in the future. In response, Mike said that when the document was prepared, it was communicated that it the initiative would be a transitional period. Jim indicated that when communicating to individuals that this is for a transitional period only, the message should be delivered delicately. Mike agreed and indicated that it will be part of the talking points when the draft is prepared.

Jeanne asked if anyone had any additional comments. There being none, she moved onto the next item in the agenda.

#### **7. Homelessness Forum – *For discussion***

Mike indicated that the OHCD/HRC and COC is attempting to coordinate all the State's homelessness meetings into a single day (3 hours). The first meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, April 17<sup>th</sup> from 12-4 at the Benjamin Chester Building (Blackstone Valley Visitors Center), 175 Main Street – 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Pawtucket. He said that an agenda, which will include concurrent "subcommittee/working group" meetings and larger group discussions/updates – will be available in the near future.

## **8. Announcements**

- May 1<sup>st</sup> – Olneyville Housing Corporation’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.olneyville.org](http://www.olneyville.org).
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) 40<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary – events will be communicated in the near future.
- Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBGDR) is seeking low/moderate income projects that meet regulations in relation to hurricanes Sandy, Irene or Nemo. These projects are available statewide. For consideration, contact the Office of Housing and Community Development.
- April 7<sup>th</sup> @ 5:00 p.m. – Governor’s forum at the Ocean State Theater, 1245 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick.
- Acknowledgement – Congratulations to the Coalition for Homelessness on its annual launch and all of the recipients that received an award.

## **9. Public Comment Period**

There were none.

## **10. Adjourn**

There being no further discussion, Commissioner Hannifan motioned to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ryczek and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

# Attachment 1

**Rhode Island  
Housing Resources Commission  
Rental Subsidy Initiative**

In FY'2014, the State has budgeted \$750,000 to the Housing Resources Commission to operate a "rental subsidy program". The Housing Resources Commission has developed the following general distribution plan for these resources, in consultation with stakeholders and consistent with the State's plan to end homelessness, known as Opening Doors Rhode Island.

1) Distribution

The Housing Resources Commission will issue a competitive Request for Proposals under its existing Consolidated Homeless Fund (CHF) program/process. This RFP will be limited to State vendors funded under the Consolidated Homeless Fund, Rhode Island Housing's Road Home Rental Assistance and/or Shelter Plus Care programs. The RFP will also be limited to the following stated priorities.

The use of an existing mechanism to distribute funds will enable resources to be made available in a more timely fashion than if an entirely new program were developed. A new program, with specific regulations promulgated through the State's process, would be employed if continued funding is projected under the Administration's budget for FY'2015. This year's distribution may inform the State on how funds of this nature can best be utilized.

The Consolidated Homeless Fund Partnership will review proposals received and make award recommendations relative to one or more of the applications. The Governor will ultimately approve and announce the final award.

2) Priorities

The Opening Doors Rhode Island plan and comments from stakeholders have revealed the following general priorities. Applicants may apply to meet all or some of the stated priorities. All beneficiaries of this program must be homeless by HUD definition. Funds must be used for "rapid re-housing" of persons who are experiencing homelessness; "homelessness prevention" is not eligible.

- a) Chronically Homeless - One of the goals of Opening Doors Rhode Island is to end homelessness among the Chronically Homeless (long-term homeless) population. To that end, this rental subsidy program should focus resources on this population. The State's Universal Wait List should be utilizing in identifying those individual who should receive the highest priority. Selected vendors should attempt to target their funding to those programs which serve the chronically homeless population, such as Harrington Hall and the 208 Men's Shelter.

- b) Families - The system has seen a spike in family homelessness over the past year. Long-term homeless families, including those currently utilizing the temporary Crossroads families shelter, will be an additional priority under this program.
- c) Funds will be used to provide "Rapid Re-housing" services to the above target populations, who are literally homeless. Limited "Prevention" resources are available through the IHSP and other programs. Prevention efforts must be clearly tied to a vulnerability analysis (currently underway) which clearly shows the household assisted would be homeless if not for this assistance - to assure resources are used where they are most needed.
- c) Services - The emphasis of these resources will be to provide direct rental subsidies to eligible populations. Service costs are not eligible. They are, however, essential to an effective program. Applications must detail how services will be offered, and supported, to those served by this program in their application narrative.
- d) Administration - Not more than 3% of the program may be used to support administrative costs. Applications should be reflective of this limit.

### 3) Goals

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to reduce the population utilizing the shelter system. However, a number of factors outside the control of this program may influence this measure. Funding recipients and/or the State will track the following for all beneficiaries of this program.

- a) Length of time homeless
- b) Systemic cost savings - while it will be difficult to immediately identify the cost savings associated with clients served, these person's usage of State systems/resources will be tracked subsequent to participation in the program and compared, where possible, to their usage prior to receipt of assistance.
- c) The numbers served, period of assistance and demographic characteristics
- d) Other measures such as increased income/employment, access to services, etc. may be tracked through the HMIS.

### 4) Considerations

**Purchasing** - The plan to distribute funds in accordance with the State's delegated authority related to the Emergency Shelter Grants/Consolidated Homeless Fund has been summarized and presented to the Division of Purchases for concurrence.

**Disbursement** - The State is cognizant that rental funding must be readily available on a specific date each month. Those recipients with insufficient cash flow to cover rental costs may be permitted to drawdown working capital advances. Such instances will generally follow the HUD rules for working capital advances, whereas initial funds are forwarded based upon anticipated cash need for some period of time; subsequent requests are based upon actual, documented disbursements. This process is pending review/approval from the Department Chief Financial Officer.

Project-Based Rental Assistance - Applicants may propose to project base all/part of their effort but are reminded that tenancy will constitute permanent housing and must be treated in accordance with all related rules and regulations. Agencies are encouraged to work with local Community Development Corporation in utilizing available units. Additional subsidies may allow units which are partially subsidized to be rented to the lower income populations targeted by this rental assistance effort.

Timeline - All funds available under this program must be fully drawdown by June 30, 2014, with full expenditure occurring no later than September 30, 2014. Proposals should be reflective of these deadlines.

Indirect Targeting - Applicants may propose allocation of resources to occupants of permanent supportive housing (PSH) units who no longer require services offered (move on strategy), provided the freed-up PSH unit is specifically reserved for a target population (chronically homeless) who is also tracked as a beneficiary of the program. This model may be considered by the funding distribution committee but is not guaranteed support.

Leverage - Proposals may leverage other initiatives or resources available/planned. These resources may directly fund the same types of activities (additional rental subsidies) or may be supportive/related (services, employment, etc.). Effective leverage will be considered in the evaluation of proposals.