



**PROVIDENCE HOUSING AUTHORITY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL MEETING:  
Wednesday, April 1, 2020; 5:30 p.m.**

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**Conference Call**

**Phone Access Dial 888-788-0099**

**Code 298-956-223**

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*In accordance with Executive Order 20-05, the meeting was held entirely by telephone conference call. Members and anyone else speaking identified themselves when speaking.*

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Nicolas Retsinas called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:**

Nicolas Retsinas  
Thomas Ryan  
Vivian Medina  
Jessica Cigna  
Lawrence D'Alfonso  
Lonzie Doggett  
Rochelle Lee  
Mary Kay Harris  
Roger Giraud

**Absent:**

John Iglizzi  
Eddie Peguero

Nine members were present, constituting a quorum to conduct business.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Chairman Retsinas called for a motion to accept and approve the minutes of the February 27, 2020 meeting. A motion was made by Vice Chairman Ryan and was seconded by Commissioner Doggett. Commissioner Giraud abstained from voting due his absence of the meeting. The minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

**Resident Comments:**

None

**Chairman's Report:**

Chairman Retsinas elected to withhold his remarks & turn over to Executive Director.

**Executive Director Report:**

Director Sanzaro updated the Board on the following items:

**1. Health Insurance Plan Renewal Update:**

- a) Blue Cross Health Insurance experienced a Rate Increase of 2.9%, reflecting a value of \$62,182 per year. Delta Dental Insurance also experienced a rate increase of 2.9% which will amount to an additional \$4,000 a total yearly increase of approximately \$68,000 per year starting July 1, 2020.

**2. HUD/PHARI Calls:**

- a) The Regional HUD Office coordinated a weekly call with all public Housing Authorities to help review emerging information, provide guidance and share best practices that are beginning to trickle down on the first call last week. HUD

informed the PHA that within two weeks, HUD will release guidance and a broad waiver for Housing Authorities in the areas of Procurement, Section 8 Program, Capital Fund Program, PHAS, SEMAP and other important typically required regulations.

b) Senator Reed's Office, who helped develop the Coronavirus Bill/CARES Act and may join an upcoming HUD/PHARI conference call to share information.

3. **CARES ACT stands for the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act:**

a) The Senate and House just passed the \$2 trillion economic relief legislation on Friday and President Trump then signed the bill into law.

b) This COVID-19 stimulus package is the largest relief measure in American history.

c) Allocated for the Department of Housing and Urban Development

- \$5 billion for the Community Development Block Grant program to enable states, counties, and cities to rapidly respond to COVID-19, the economic and housing impacts caused by it. Including the expansion of community health facilities, childcare centers, food banks, and senior services.
- \$4 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants to help state and local governments to address coronavirus among the homeless population.
- \$1.25 billion for Tenant-Based Rental Assistance to preserve Section 8 voucher rental assistance for seniors, the disabled, and low-income working families, who will experience loss of income from the coronavirus.
- \$685 million for the Public Housing Operating Fund to provide Public Housing Agencies with additional operating assistance to make up for reduced tenant rent payments, and to help contain the spread of coronavirus in public housing properties.
- \$1 billion for Project-Based Rental Assistance to make up for reduced tenant payments as a result of coronavirus.

4. **COVID-19 Update:**

The PHA is currently developing the PHA's Emergency Operations Plan document that captures our response to the pandemic. It is an evolving document as faced with quickly changing times. Next week, the PHA will provide the Board members a BY Department COVID-19 Report to demonstrate the roles and focuses of the teams in the last month. This will continue in the future, as a monthly progress report so that history can be documented essentially.

This plan was developed in a way that would minimize constant adaptations to the emerging changes in the responses to prevent spread, to promote safety, and to serve. The PHA's Public Statement was released on March 19<sup>th</sup>, which covers some of the major highlights and focuses of the emergency operations plan. The plan in response to COVID-19 is as follows and is subject to be amended to adapt to any unfolding crisis.

**MAIN EMERGENCY OPERATIONAL CHANGES:**

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, the PHA followed Executive Orders and sent all employees over the age of 60 years of age, anyone without child-care, or with preexisting medical conditions to stay home. 37 employees were affected.

The PHA made the decision to make every effort to continue providing wages and health/other benefits to employees to limit the stresses that are affecting so many Rhode Islanders associated with COVID-19. As new resources and challenging situations arise, the PHA continues to evaluate this approach.

At this time, the PHA is aware of two positive cases, known only with family disclosure. One in public housing/high-rise and one participant of Section 8. Five employees had to self-quarantine. Two employees who came in contact with the positive resident, one who had a family member who was positive and two due to travel. The components of the plan are as follows.

### **Offices and Hours:**

The PHA is open for business but offices were closed to the public in order to limit social interactions or in person meetings for the PHA to contribute the best to prevent the spread of the virus. The Office hours remain the same.

### **Staffing:**

- All offices and administrative staff will be working from home or telecommuting to connect with those we serve and deliver much-needed services using phone calls and emailing.
- The PHA connected more than 70 additional staff with connectivity to the public housing software and other systems needed to work and provided 22 computers, tablets and hot spots.
- In a very careful strategy to adhere to executive orders, some administrative staff will go to designated safe space offices for a limited time period to be able to process packages, mail and conduct assignments to assist the telecommuters complete certain work.
- The PHA's facilities management staffing model will be reduced in a well-planned rotating schedule to preserve our ranks, focus on emergency work orders, clean and disinfect all high touch areas, maintaining pristine grounds, working in vacant units and doing special assignments.
- Dispatch and Security are available to the public 24-hours a day.

### **New Vendors:**

- On March 20, 2020, Puro Clean, a cleaning company will clean & disinfect high-touch areas of the common areas such as walls, mailboxes, railings, elevator buttons and lobby floors. This will take place in all six high-rises, twice a day, seven days a week including holidays. The PHA is currently looking into an additional measure of prevention with another vendor.
- On March 18, 2020, NESS, a security vendor assists the PHA's existing security staff with patrolling the six high-rises from 4pm-12am and there will be a roving security guard from 12am-8am.
- The performance and time period for the vendor assistance will continue to be evaluated and adjusted as this pandemic unfolds.

### **Community Events and Spaces:**

All PHA sponsored community events were cancelled indefinitely and resident gatherings that exceed the executive order recommendations are disallowed. All community rooms were closed until further notice, with the exception of Dexter Manor, where the community room allows access to the building's laundry room.

### **Evictions and Termination Moratorium:**

- Before any guidance from HUD concerning evictions AND before courts closed, the PHA team decided to halt all evictions, voucher terminations and court matters for monetary or non-payment reasons.
- As clearer guidance on moratoriums are being provided for housing authorities, it will be effective to July 25<sup>th</sup>. The PHA's legal team has been diligent in keeping abreast of Congressional and State's suspension of evictions and voucher terminations.
- The PHA will continue to prioritize and enforce any temporary restraining orders, domestic assaults, and certain criminal matters to the best of their ability.

### **Food Task Force:**

During this difficult time, the PHA's partners and internal and external food programs were disrupted and were no longer safe. The PHA's capacity with food programming prompted them to form the Food Task Force and identify their own funding, seek additional funding and resources, repurpose our central warehouse, delivery docks and staff to offer food to our approximately 1,200 elderly/disabled households.

- The PHA duplicated the USDA's Supplemental Commodities Senior Box that contains balanced, nutritional non-perishable food that last for up to 3 weeks. Without lifting a box, the PHA designed a production line with social distancing to make almost 450 senior boxes and delivered about 200 boxes to seniors to date.
- The phase one goal is to feed 1,000 households within 4 weeks.

- The safe delivery system used which has box trucks, tents, tables and caution tape where residents are called down one by one to get their package outside of the building.
- The PHA is speaking with United Way regarding their experiences with volunteerism in extreme emergencies and are considering donations as they move forward.
- The PHA's focus in this area allowed them to receive 7,000 meals from the Rhode Island Community Food Bank on March 24, 2020. More recently, the PHA was successfully awarded an additional \$75K from the Rhode Island Foundation/United Way to support another 1,900 senior boxes.
- Since the effects of the virus will continue for quite some time, this program is essential and will hopefully continue to help those the PHA serves.

#### **Communications:**

The PHA's communication with federal, state and local government officials and community partners was persistent. Communications were established with HUD, State Offices such as the Governor's Office, Commerce RI, Office of Health Aging, Local Officials like the Mayor, the Police Chief and daily calls with PEMA, Safety Commissioner, the Public-School Departments, Public Works and many more. The PHA has been in constant contact with the public health officials at the Dept of Health. Their hot line is helpful and will spend hours on the line with the PHA as they work through scenarios as presented. Please be aware that the Department of Health and their incident command center will not confirm any cases for privacy and confidentiality.

#### **Employee Communications:**

Employee Communications are with various methods has been and will continue to be a steady series of information, planning announcements and resources. The PHA is in communications with the Union representative who appreciate the approach and support the PHA as they consider adaptations to be safe and fiscally responsible.

#### **Resident Communications:**

Resident Advisory Board Members:

- Strategy & Development calls each of the twenty RAB members twice a week to talk to connect with residents with a weekly report provided to leadership.

Resident Emergency Outreach Log:

- Staff were directed to call all households of our Public Housing and Leased Housing to stay connected, update their emergency contact information, contact number and email. The PHA staff will inform them of the new operations plan and how to reach the PHA and understand how they can continue to serve their housing needs and go beyond housing to learn of their social challenges. As of today, 59% of 2,00 PH households have been reached.

High-Rise Focus:

- The PHA focused our attention on the high-rises and elderly populations based on the tragic, early on reports in nursing homes. In addition to what has already been mentioned, messaging with the staff began, limit the traffic of public and visitors in the high-rises with the exceptions of medical care, food delivery and well-being care/checks.
- The PHA posted on social media, flyers, and created large banners outside the high-rise entrances.
- There is an in-depth communications plan for the housing and service programs which will be part of the EOP and Departmental reports.
- Strategy & Development and Executive Office have been designated as the main point of contact for public relations.

#### **Incident Response Plan:**

The PHA has an incident response plan which involves constant contact with employees, residents and the public health officials were each situation is investigated and addressed on a case by case bases with the most precautionary response possible.

#### **Operational Protocols and Approaches:**

While the PHA is laser focused on maintaining compliance with HUD regulations to the highest degree possible, we are leveraging technology, using common sense and extreme caution and safety as a compass. An approach that was encouraged by regional HUD.

Formal HUD guidance a blanket waivers will be announced within 2 weeks. As this worsens, the PHA is considering a more intense and reactive planning phase.

**5. Strategic Plan Update:**

- a) Soon after the Board meeting in February, the PHA was making great progress with getting the Strategic Plan and developing a shortened Strategic Report and hoped to present the work for the Boards approval. Unfortunately, the coronavirus took all the attention of staff. The Strategic Plan is still the PHA's compass. Our continued work will depend on the looming impacts of the pandemic.

**Report back on Public and RAB comments on Annual Plan, Five Year Plan, and CFP Five Year Plan**

Presented by: Peter Asen and Michelle Booth, Office of Strategy and Development

**RESOLUTIONS:**

**Resolution #4291 Authorizing the Executive Director to have and to exercise emergency powers due to the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Status;** Commissioner Cigna made a motion and Vice Chairman Ryan seconded the motion.

**Votes in favor:** Chairman Retsinas, Vice Chairman Ryan, Commissioner Cigna, D'Alfonso, Doggett, Medina, Lee, Giraud, Harris (9)

**Votes opposed:** none

**Resolution #4292 Approve and authorize submission to HUD of the PHA's Five Year Capital Fund Plan submission for the years 2020-2024**

**Status;** Commissioner D'Alfonso made a motion and Commissioner Medina seconded the motion.

**Votes in favor:** Chairman Retsinas, Vice Chairman Ryan, Commissioner Cigna, D'Alfonso, Doggett, Medina, Lee, Giraud, Harris (9)

**Votes opposed:** none

**Resolution # 4293 Approve and authorize submission to HUD of the PHA's Annual Plan for FY2020 and Five-Year agency Plan for FYs 2020-2024**

**Status;** Commissioner Lee made a motion and Commissioner Doggett seconded the motion.

**Votes in favor:** Chairman Retsinas, Vice Chairman Ryan, Commissioner Cigna, D'Alfonso, Doggett, Medina, Lee, Giraud, Harris (9)

**Votes opposed:** none

**Adjournment:**

Commissioner Harris made a motion that the meeting be adjourned at 6:30pm, seconded by Commissioner Lee. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**Minutes Submitted and Approved By:**

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Taisha Capo  
Recording Secretary

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Melissa Sanzaro  
Executive Director