



**Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
Public & Subsidized Housing Panel Discussion
February 22, 2022
Virtual/Electronic Meeting
6:00 pm**

Public link to meeting rebroadcasts on Boxcast: <https://boxcast.tv/channel/vabajtzeuuy3iclkx1a>

Public link to HRC documents on Box: <https://app.box.com/s/xy3wnn2s1tj8h7trkknvd79bipyxezy>

1. WELCOME

- a. CALL TO ORDER
 - i. Chair, Jessica Harris, called the meeting to order at 6:08 pm
- b. ROLL CALL
 - i. Jessica Harris
 - ii. Ernest Chambers
 - iii. Jeanette Abi-Nader
 - iv. Mary Bauer
 - v. Wolfgang Keppley
 - vi. Kathryn Laughon
 - vii. Lyndele Von Schill
- c. MISSION (recited by all): *Act as a strong advocate to justice and equal opportunity by providing citywide leadership and guidance in the area of civil rights.*

2. PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

- a. The Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR) and Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) will present information related to availability and conditions in subsidized housing
- b. Victoria Horrock: attorney at LAJC
 - i. LAJC is a free legal aid serving income-eligible residents of Charlottesville and surrounding counties; especially focuses on housing
 1. Can call the office to get advice or assistance from an attorney
 - ii. Virginia Tenants' Rights Laws in this area, especially related to conditions, are inadequate for most tenants
 - iii. Everyone who is a tenant in VA is protected by VA Residential Landlord Tenant Act (VRLTA)
 1. Requires landlords to keep unit in "fit and habitable condition"
 2. Repairs should be made within 14-30 days of written notice (unless an emergency, in which case must be remedied within 24 hours of notification)
 - iv. Commissioner asks how quickly landlords must respond to emergencies
 1. There is not a clear law for what qualifies as an emergency, but Victoria assumes that emergencies must be addressed in 24-72 hours for issues like flooding
 - v. It is illegal for landlords to retaliate against tenants for asking for repairs

- vi. Federal and state housing laws prevent discrimination in housing
 - 1. LAJC and OHR can help individuals with these issues
 - 2. Issues in conditions and affordability do not affect people equally
- vii. Subsidized apartments from money from federal government have some of the worst conditions; tenants in these types of housing situations have increased tenant rights under federal law
- c. Shelby Edwards: Executive Director of Charlottesville PHAR
 - i. PHAR's mission is to "Educate and Empower Low-Income Residents to Protect and Improve Our Own Communities through Collective Action"
 - 1. Through PHAR internship program, housing redevelopment efforts, community organizing, and Residents for Respectful Research
 - 2. 24 CFR, 964: HUD regulation that gives PHAR the power to achieve its mission
 - ii. Current state of public housing
 - 1. Tell Shelby if anyone would like access to the documents she references during the presentation
 - 2. Vinegar Hill is one of many examples of racially motivated segregationist policies with significant impact on affordable housing in Charlottesville
 - a. Disinvestment in the public housing occurred under the narrative that poor conditions came as a result of the people living in it, a cycle of impoverished families
 - b. However, this is not the case; families live in public housing not out of an unwillingness to achieve self-sufficiency, but because housing (a scarce resource and basic human right) is priced as a luxury in the United States
 - c. Would have to examine public housing from a resident's perspective to determine whether it is effective
 - 3. Affordability encompasses the residents-- "affordable housing" meets the needs of residents making 0-30% of the area median income
 - a. PHAR gives residents agency in undoing systems of oppression by providing decent and affordable public housing
 - b. Cultural problems still exist, however
 - iii. Midway Manor is not public housing, but PHAR is still here today to advocate on behalf of them
 - 1. In two years, the lease signed last year will end, and residents will have nowhere to go
 - 2. Think about who in Charlottesville is really catering to residents making 0-30% AMI
 - a. Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority (CRHA) is working hard to cater to these residents
 - 3. Urges Midway Manor owners to keep residents informed no matter what happens
 - iv. Commissioner asks who owned Midway Manor before and sold or leased

it to the company that is only keeping it under lease for two more years

1. Shelby does not have the answer to this
 2. Victoria says the company that owns the building and land is a big LLC probably created only to own the building; the management company is separate
 - a. Both have recently switched
 3. There is public application to renew tax credits for the building
 - a. It is a federal program that imposes certain income restrictions in exchange for tax credits
 - b. In the program, rent does not automatically go all the way to the 0-30% AMI
 4. What is expiring in two years is a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract, which is what makes Midway Manor affordable
 - a. The company has said it will keep Midway Manor affordable, but there are questions as to what affordability means
- v. OHR staff says after the meeting with residents in November 2021, people from the meeting composed a letter to the owner at the time, WHH Trice, to specifically request a meeting with corporate leadership to discuss housing conditions
1. Building changed hands in December to owner Standard Property Company and management company Franklin Johnston Group
 2. Resent the letter to the Franklin Johnston Group and received fairly robust response to questions from the letter, including confirming that they intend to apply for 30-year renewal
 3. However, they did not confirm whether they would have a meeting between corporate leadership and residents, so after recently sending another letter, the Franklin Johnston Group representative said this morning that tomorrow (2/23) the company would send out details about holding a meeting
 - a. A chance for residents to hear what the plan is directly from corporate leadership
- vi. Commissioner asks if number of accessible subsidized housing units is currently meeting the demand
1. Shelby says in 2016, there were about 1,100 families on the waiting list for public housing in Charlottesville waiting for 376 units
 - a. In deep need for more affordable housing units
 2. Victoria adds that the National Income Housing Coalition estimated last year the statewide gap being 200,000 affordable housing units to meet demand
 - a. Also, public housing does not work the same way as Social Security—you do not necessarily get it even if you are eligible
 - b. Only about 1 in 4 families who are eligible for affordable housing get it
 3. Shelby recommends the scholarly article “We call these project home,” which says that there is a shortage of about 6 million units

for extremely low-income residents and 5 million units for low-income renters across the country, so gap exists at local and national level

- a. Will provide link to this article
4. Shelby does not currently have information pertaining to accessibility, but would like to do some research and follow up
- vii. Chair says she and Vice-Chair were able to have an informative meeting with Councilor Payne, and is excited to share what they learned with the Commission
 1. Councilor Payne mentioned that there must be change in policies and laws; for instance, changing the fire code to say there must be two elevators working instead of only one
 2. Think about what laws should be changed to address concerns discussed today

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

- a. Joy Johnson
 - i. Has been public housing resident since 1983
 - ii. Says that according to HUD definitions, one must be making \$60,000 or \$80,000 per year to qualify for a tax-credit unit
 - iii. Residents are looking to other funding in order to make it affordable
 - iv. HRC, CRHA, and PHAR could help with educating the public
 - v. Every time you do tax credit, the entire building is a tax-credit building
 1. The investors make this decision, and they can pull out at any time
 - vi. Conditions have been poor; still in the process of righting wrongs
 1. Units getting rebuilt are going to get rehabbed, so people may have to move then come back
 2. Many just assume public housing does not work
 3. Not just rebuilding public housing, but affordable public housing for people 0-60% AMI
 - vii. Shelby reiterates that they are trying to dismantle the systems that the City put into place in the 1960s and 1970s, trying to give power back to residents
 - viii. Commissioner asks what "educating the public" would look like and what current efforts are lacking
 1. Ms. Johnson says community does not understand all of the things that go together to make a deal to build/rebuild
 2. People do not understand what block grant money is to be used for
 3. Monticello Area Community Action Agency (MACAA) used to be an advocacy group that made sure the community understands what is going on with housing and jobs, but community education has since dwindled
 4. Zoning is a huge issue; there are neighborhoods to this day with rules that say Black people cannot live there
 5. Despite talks of equity and equality, certain people still face significant obstacles
 - a. The people making the decisions for low-income

zoning, critical slopes, site plans, etc.

1. The public should know about all of these housing and infrastructure issues
2. Suggests these women should be invited so they can explain to the Commission what they have learned
- ii. Emphasizes that housing is a human right, and the City has not committed to defining what “affordable housing” is
- iii. Commissioner agrees that he would like to see the City’s definition of affordable housing (the City as a whole, not just City Council)
- iv. Victoria adds that Mariah, another LAJC attorney, has delved more deeply into the City’s plans
 1. There is no clear definition of affordable housing here; definitions vary in different City documents
 2. Shelby supports the idea of the Commission pushing the City for a clear definition
- v. Commissioner says HRC is planning its annual retreat, and the Commission will take the information from this meeting to the retreat
- vi. Chair says that the Commission intends to come up with a handful of issues to keep pressing Council about
 1. Will find people on Council to help HRC press for certain issues
 2. Had plan for Midway Manor to be represented at the meeting tonight; technology did not work out, but credits team who was able to talk previously with Midway Manor residents
 3. OHR staff adds that there is a discussion to be had about housing and homelessness and what other supports people need, like with mental health and substance use
 4. There has been a series of listening sessions that Ashley Reynolds-Marshall has been hosting with many people in the housing provider and homelessness services provision realms
 - a. There will be another summit about action items
- vii. Commissioner adds that she hopes the Commission will be attentive to the zoning process that is soon occurring
 1. Legislative changes are a long-term goal, but in the present, the Commission can have a say in zoning plans
 2. New zoning will allow for not having to rely on proffers; the City can enforce the type of housing built
 3. Urges making sure the voice of the HRC is keeping conversations on track
- d. Chair summarizes the main themes of tonight’s meeting: zoning, educating the public, partnerships of power
 - i. Will continue these conversations, especially in deciding on issues during the annual retreat

4. ADJOURN

- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:17 pm