

THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF ERIE

Minutes – January 25, 2010 – 1:15 p.m., EST

The Housing Authority of the City of Erie met at 1:15 p.m., on Monday, January 25, 2010, at 606 Holland Street.

The meeting was called to order by the Chair, Agnes R. Priscaro, and, upon roll call, those present and absent were as follows:

Present

Agnes Priscaro
C. Ted Dombrowski
Trelane C. Sherrod

Absent

Bishop Dwane Brock
Donald C. Meyers

Also in Attendance

John E. Horan, *Executive Director and Secretary*
Donald E. Wright, Jr., Esquire, *Solicitor*
Lynn Little, *Executive Secretary*
Daniel Roessner, *Assistant Director for Development*
Melvin Witherspoon, *Auditor General's Office*
Cynthia Grayson, *Manager*

Kristen Bennett, *Manager*
Kim Preston, *Manager*
Joanne Piskorski, *Manager*
Debra Smith, *City of Erie*
Felix Folletti, *Carpenter Local 81*
Joseph Curlett, *Desktop Resources*

COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

Mr. Horan: We have a special guest with us today, Mr. Melvin Witherspoon, who is from Auditor General Wagner's office. Mr. Witherspoon was also a former Housing Authority Board member and a member of Erie City Council. It's a pleasure to have you back.

Mr. Witherspoon: Thank you.

Mr. Horan: To what do we owe this honor?

Mr. Witherspoon: I am here to make a presentation to the Housing Authority. To those who don't know, twenty years ago this year started Spoon's basketball league for the city youths which has now extended out to the county. This year is the twentieth year I have been doing this with volunteers. I thought it would be fitting to make a presentation to the Housing Authority for their support. From day one, the Erie Housing Authority has supported us by sponsoring four teams for the past 19 years now and I would like to make a presentation to Mr. Horan with this plaque that says, "On behalf of Spoon's Center Basketball League this gold award is presented to the Erie Housing Authority for nineteen years of continued service to the youth of the City of Erie and Erie County. Your support has made a difference!" When we started many years ago, we had a lot of problems in the City. The league has brought quiet. We have not in 19 years had one confrontation or one fight. I never had to call the police. It has always been understood that this is one place that is

a safe haven. What transpires after they leave the court area, that is not my affair or concern, but nothing ever happened there. I want to thank Mr. Horan and the Housing Authority for your support.

Mr. Horan: Thank you very much. Mel started the Spoon League twenty years ago. It's in a neighborhood on East 19th Street between French and Holland. It's a piece of land that was owned by Penelec at the time, they were going to use it as a sub-station that never materialized. It is in the center of a neighborhood where the Housing Authority is a primary property owner. We have our Lake City Dwellings at 16th and German and then we have about 90 single family or duplex houses in the neighborhood between 16th and 18th Streets from French over to German Streets. It was logical for us, the Housing Authority Board to support what Mel was trying to do there. So for very little investment, we were able to provide a recreation facility that did not exist in that particular neighborhood. As Mel said, each year we sponsored four teams for the Spoon League. It is a nominal fee of \$200 for the last nineteen years. The thing that makes it go, and I know because I see it, is because of Mel Witherspoon. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to get volunteers to do things on an on-going basis. You can get volunteers for one year or maybe two years but they have other things to do with their lives. But Mel has been committed to this and really he has almost single-handedly done what he talked about. The reason there is no problems at Spoon's League is because of Mel Witherspoon. During the summer, he commits a large portion of his free time to making sure that things run smoothly throughout the season. It is that type of commitment that really makes things work in the community. He does not get paid for it. He doesn't get anything for it, he just does it because basketball and young people are his passion. Mel has provided that volunteer leadership to make sure that is continued over a very long period of time. We thank you for what you do, Mel.

Mr. Witherspoon: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Priscaro: Are there any other comments from the audience? There being none, Agnes Priscaro continued with the formal agenda.

MINUTES OF DECEMBER 28, 2009 MEETING

Mrs. Sherrod introduced the following resolution:

#6768 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF ERIE THAT THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 28, 2009, REGULAR MEETING OF THE AUTHORITY ARE HEREBY APPROVED AS MAILED.

It was moved by Mrs. Sherrod, and seconded by Mr. Dombrowski, that the resolution be adopted as introduced and read.

On the question, roll was called with the following results:

Ayes: Agnes R. Priscaro, C. Ted Dombrowski, Trelane C. Sherrod

Nays: None

DISBURSEMENTS FOR DECEMBER 2009

Mrs. Sherrod introduced the following resolution:

#6769 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF ERIE THAT THE DISBURSEMENTS FOR DECEMBER 2009, COPIES OF WHICH WERE FORWARDED TO THE MEMBERS AND COUNSEL PRIOR TO THIS MEETING, ARE HEREBY ACCEPTED.

It was moved by Mrs. Sherrod, and seconded by Mr. Dombrowski, that the resolution be adopted as introduced and read.

On the question, roll was called with the following results:

Ayes: Agnes R. Priscaro, C. Ted Dombrowski, Trelane C. Sherrod

Nays: None

CONSOLIDATED PROGRAM

Annual Report 2009

Mr. Horan: The Board has already received our Annual Report for 2009. I will take a few minutes to review some of the highlights. This report is for our calendar year, which ended December 31, 2009. Each year in January we prepare the report and submit it for the Board's review and consideration. As of the end of December we were providing housing assistance to 2,922 families. In 2009, we provided housing assistance to 380 new families, elderly, and persons with disabilities. We also, as you know, make contributions to the City, the County, and the School District in lieu of taxes. We are exempt from real estate taxes. In 2009 we paid \$170,484 in lieu of taxes. One of our high priorities, of course, is to keep our neighborhoods safe. I am happy to report in 2009, the incidents of criminal activity were about where it has been for the last eight years. We had a total of 360 incidents. That number has been consistent, between 350 and 400 since 2002. This level is down by 70 percent from a high of 1,200 incidents in 1993. We believe that has to do with the C.O.P.P.S. program that we provide in all of our residential neighborhoods, with the prevention programs we provide throughout public housing. We are pleased that those numbers continue to be very low and manageable.

Also, the Housing Authority in partnership with the City has been providing the funding for a City Code Enforcement officer assigned to the neighborhoods surrounding public housing. In 2009 that resulted in 1,598 inspections, 70 vacant lots were cleaned, 750 tires were removed, 97 properties were posted for high grass, and 8 buildings were demolished. These were all in neighborhoods surrounding our public housing sites.

In 2009, the Authority awarded contracts totaling \$10,804,000 all of this was for physical improvements to our public housing inventory. As you know, about \$4.6 million of that was directly because of the federal stimulus funds that the Housing Authority received.

In the Section 8 program, we provided housing assistance to 163 new applicants in 2009. That was part of the total of 380 new families for the year, made up between our public housing program and our Section 8 program.

As part of our Capital Improvements we made all of our playgrounds handicap accessible and we also completed construction on our largest playground at the John E. Horan Garden Apartments. We also awarded contracts to make two of our apartments at the C. Ted Dombrowski Apartments accessible to persons with disabilities and that work will be completed early in 2010. That will give us a total of 110 apartments that are fully accessible to families and individuals with physical disabilities.

We also have made progress on our Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program (VASH). We currently have 21 veterans in affordable housing through the VASH program. We hope to increase that to the 35 vouchers in 2010.

We continue to collect the rents that we charge for public housing. We collected a total of \$5,776,000 in 2009. The cash receipts were up \$164,000 from 2008.

Part of our work that was contracted in 2009 to replace 1,050 furnaces throughout our public housing inventory. We estimate that will result in an annual reduction of approximately 25 percent in our natural gas consumption. We also replaced a seventy-year-old electrical distribution system at the John E. Horan Garden Apartments. We also awarded contracts to replace two hundred entry doors at the Priscaro Apartments and at Eastbrook. We also contracted to replace a forty-year-old gas distribution system at the Eastbrook public housing development.

I am also pleased to report that our overtime in the Maintenance department was reduced by 1,005 hours in 2009 over 2008.

We also identified a total of 76 cases of probable tenant fraud in 2009. This is from tenants not reporting their income in a timely fashion. That resulted in repayment agreements totaling \$94,953.

We also continued the HomePLUS program at Schmid Towers and Friendship Apartments where 388 residents are receiving direct services. We estimate that 232 residents have been maintained in their apartments because of the services offered through the HomePLUS program. We also served a total of 12,805 hot meals at Schmid Towers, Friendship Apartments, and Ostrow Apartments in 2009 as part of the HomePLUS program.

With regards to our Section 8 program, we had 61 families in the Self-Sufficiency program in 2009. This was an increase of six over 2008. Part of that is to develop with the participants an escrow savings account. I am happy to say that increased from 30 participants to 47 participants in 2009. The participants in that program now have a total of \$100,462 in escrow. That is up from \$59,000 in 2008. Also, as part of our self-sufficiency efforts, we continued the two learning centers, one at the John E. Horan Garden Apartments and the other at Harbor Homes. Seventy-two residents were placed in jobs in 2009 through the two learning centers.

We also, in 2009, completed the physical conversion of space at the Harbor Homes Marsha Hall Learning Center to accommodate a family health clinic sponsored by the Multi-Cultural Health Evaluation Delivery System. The Pennsylvania Department of Health is providing staff funding for three years for the Clinic.

Those are the highlights of 2009 and this report will be available on our website once the Board approved it today. As I say every year, we have impressive numbers and they are really a credit to the Board first, for their support, and also to the staff who does the day to day work to make sure that we achieve the goals that the Board sets for us each year. Congratulations to each of those. That is my report on the 2009 accomplishments.

Mrs. Sherrod introduced the following resolutions:

#6770 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF ERIE THAT THE ANNUAL REPORT (COPY ATTACHED) ON THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2009 IS HEREBY ACCEPTED.

It was moved by Mrs. Sherrod, and seconded by Mr. Dombrowski, that the resolutions be adopted as introduced and read.

On the question, roll was called with the following results:

Ayes: Agnes R. Priscaro, C. Ted Dombrowski, Trelane C. Sherrod

Nays: None

Proposed Goals and Objectives 2010

Mr. Horan: Each year at this Board meeting the Authority considers and sets forth the Goals and Objectives for the upcoming year. You have received a copy of the proposed 2010 Goals and Objectives. There are five overall goals, I'll read them; The first goal, of course is to improve the livability of public housing and Section 8 housing program; the second goal is to provide housing assistance to more families in 2009; the third goal is to operate all programs efficiently within the budget limits and to improve staff productivity and effectiveness; goal number four is to enhance self-sufficiency of public housing and Section 8 tenants and to promote a greater sense of community and pride among residents; and our fifth goal is to improve neighborhoods surrounding our public housing communities. Each one of these has a series of measurable objectives. There are forty-three objectives related to the five goals. Those are the items, which we will strive to achieve throughout the course of the year and report to you in January 2011.

Mr. Dombrowski introduced the following resolution:

#6771 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF ERIE THAT THE PROPOSED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2010 (COPY ATTACHED) ARE HEREBY ADOPTED.

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED THAT THE STAFF OF THE AUTHORITY IS DIRECTED

TO PURSUE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
THROUGHOUT 2010, AND TO ISSUE A REPORT ON THEIR PROGRESS AT THE
JANUARY 2011, BOARD MEETING.

It was moved by Mr. Dombrowski, and seconded by Mrs. Sherrod, that the resolution be adopted as introduced and read.

On the question, roll was called with the following results:

Ayes: Agnes R. Priscaro, C. Ted Dombrowski, Trelane C. Sherrod

Nays: None

BIDS/PROPOSALS RECEIVED

Casework Services – Columbus Square Apartments and the Lodge on Sass

Mr. Horan: We only have one item for your consideration this afternoon. As you know, we have been providing the funding for two caseworkers, one assigned at the *Lodge on Sass*, which is a 50-unit Section 8 project-based assistance at the corner of 9th and Sassafra. The other is the Columbus Square Apartments located at 655 West 16th Street. They have a 40-unit, single-room occupancy facility there that is also Section 8 assisted. The clients at each one of these facilities are individuals, male and female, that would otherwise be homeless but for the provision of the facilities at the *Lodge on Sass* and Columbus Square Apartments. However, they come with a number of problems, sometimes it is drug and alcohol related problems, they are all very-low income individuals, they may not have steady work or may have come out of a homeless shelter. There are a variety of issues that we are trying to address in addition to providing them with safe and affordable housing. Over the years we have worked with Community Shelter Services who is the sponsor of both of these facilities to provide a case manager at each one of the two facilities to help the individuals who are there to work on whatever their barriers are to become self-sufficient. The caseworkers that have been assigned to each of these buildings and that is their primary job to try to solve with the residents some of the problems they are faced with. I have always said to the Board and publicly that Community Shelter Services, with these two buildings, provides a tremendous service to the community by taking ninety individuals off the streets and provide them with permanent, affordable housing. Our small contribution is to assist them by providing funding for two staff workers, one at each building. We have advertised and solicited proposals for this and received one proposal from Community Shelter Services, who is the current provider, to continue the services at the two buildings at the same cost as last year. The cost to us for the two caseworkers for a 12-month period of time, which includes; staffing costs, fringe benefits and some operating costs, such as housekeeping supplies, community meals, staff training and audit fees for a total of \$102,942 starting February 1, 2010 through January 31, 2011. You have a resolution for your consideration.

Mr. Dombrowski introduced the following resolution:

#6772 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE
CITY OF ERIE THAT THE PROPER AUTHORITY OFFICIALS ARE AUTHORIZED

AND DIRECTED TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH COMMUNITY SHELTER SERVICES, INC., TO PROVIDE CASEWORK SERVICES AT COLUMBUS SQUARE APARTMENTS AND THE *LODGE ON SASS*, FOR THE PERIOD COMMENCING FEBRUARY 1, 2010, THROUGH JANUARY 31, 2011, IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$102,942.

It was moved by Mr. Dombrowski, and seconded by Mrs. Sherrod, that the resolution be adopted as introduced and read.

On the question, roll was called with the following results:

Ayes: Agnes R. Priscaro, C. Ted Dombrowski, Trelane C. Sherrod

Nays: None

2010 AGENCY PLAN SUBMISSION

Mr. Horan: You will recall that last month the Board approved a resolution authorizing the submission of our 2010 Agency Plan. This is a five-year plan that was prepared in conjunction with the residents that live in public housing during the period from November 1 through December the 28 when the Board took their public action on the submission. I am happy to say that the submission occurred on January 13 and we received verification from HUD that they had received our plan and it will be on their web page within 48 hours. We also submitted the required hard copy resolutions and related certifications that had to go directly to the Pittsburgh office. We have met all the requirements for that 2010 Plan submission. We expect that we will get a notification sometime by the first of April notifying us that the plan has been approved and the key element is that it will trigger approximately \$3.5 million in capital funds for this housing authority. So far, so good on the plan submission, we have got nothing back yet requesting any changes, corrections, or amplifications. No action is required at this time.

Mrs. Priscaro: Is there anything else for the good of the order?

Mr. Curlett: You mentioned that you have 30,000 people in public housing. Is that correct?

Mr. Horan: No, we have about 3,000 not 30,000.

Mr. Curlett: Oh, 3,000. Okay, fine. Do you know how many have transitioned out of public housing into the general population?

Mr. Horan: In the course of the year, we have a turnover of about 300 families that move out of public housing. Most of them move into the private sector. Last year we had about 40 that bought their first home.

Mr. Curlett: Another question. There are a number of poverty initiatives going on in the city. I know Erie Community Foundation has an initiative, the United Way has an initiative, GECAC has an initiative, and the City has one where they are trying to eradicate the poverty in the City of Erie and

the County. Is the Housing Authority trying to help with any of that? Or, what are you doing to eradicate poverty in your housing authority system?

Mr. Horan: We met with the City a week ago to talk about their process of doing their 2010 update of their comprehensive plan. Of course, the poverty issues should be a big part of that. We met with them to give them some input into that. We will certainly be happy to be a part of any initiative. I also received information from the United Way about their efforts. We are prepared to do our part on any initiative that will help address the issue of poverty in this community. In our public housing community, a part of our mission is to help our families achieve economic self-sufficiency. We have our own anti-poverty system going on in public housing but that needs to be taken to the next level which would be the entire community. We can give the City all kinds of tips on how to develop effective strategies based on things we have done here over the last 25 years or so. Many of the issues that face low-income families are tied back to education, job training, and opportunities. Those are the three big issues here. If we can figure out on a larger scale how to address those three things, I think we can begin to make headway against this poverty situation.

Mr. Curlett: Most of your people in public housing are in poverty, correct? Well, low-income, anyways. So there are income levels that you go by, correct?

Mr. Horan: We use the federal income guidelines that are provided to us by the federal government. It is the same guidelines that the Community Foundation is using and the City.

Mr. Curlett: What I am saying is that most people in public housing are on public assistance.

Mr. Horan: Actually, no. Most of the people in public housing now have employment as a source of income.

Mr. Curlett: Really?

Mr. Horan: Yes.

Mr. Curlett: Why are they in public housing if they have employment?

Mr. Horan: Because they still have very low income.

Attorney Wright: They are under employed.

Mr. Horan: The point is, when you look at the bigger picture of the City of Erie and Erie County, the low-income folks who are in public housing actually are far better off than the low-income folks in the rest of the community because they have affordable, decent and safe housing. That is something you cannot say for probably the vast majority of other low-income families in the community. Whether they are in Erie City or Erie County. Our population is better off than the poverty population in the rest of the city. We have about eight or nine percent of the city's population. So you have a large percentage of low-income population where none of their issues are being addressed. At least none of their housing affordability issues are being addressed.

Mr. Curlett: I follow you. Thank you.

Mr. Horan: You are welcome.

There being no other comments, the meeting was adjourned upon proper motion at 1:47 p.m.

Agnes R. Priscaro, Chair

John E. Horan, Executive Director and Secretary