

THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA, SC  
January 31, 2019

The Board of Commissioners of The Housing Authority of the City of Columbia, SC convened for a Special Called Meeting on Thursday, January 31, 2019 at 5:00 p.m in the CHA Board Room.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order and upon roll call, those present and absent for the Housing Authority of the City of Columbia were as follows:

PRESENT: Bobby D. Gist, Chairperson  
Ernest Cromartie, III, Commissioner  
Alexena Furgess, Commissioner  
George Green, Commissioner  
Selena Pickens, Commissioner  
Jennifer Rubin, Commissioner  
Bessie Watson, Commissioner  
Gilbert Walker, Executive Director  
Ed Eubanks, Legal Counsel

STAFF: Howard Thomas, Melanie Baker, Donna Gilbert, Ramonda Pollard, Lee McRoberts, Cindy Godbey

VISITORS: Bob Coble, Robert Bolchoz, Diane Sumpter, REC Officers, Members of the Media

Mr. Gist called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm and Mr. Green opened with a prayer.

Mr. Bob Coble gave an update on the recent tragedy and subsequent relocation of all Allen Benedict Court residents. On Monday, January 21, 2019 Mr. Coble was asked to assist in dealing with the tragedy that occurred at the Allen Benedict Court apartments, Attorney Robert Bolchoz was also asked to represent the Authority and DESA, Inc. was brought in to assist with handling resident issues.

Mr. Coble stated that the Authority was devastated and sorry for the death of two individuals and the displacement of over 400 residents in the evacuation that followed.

Mr. Coble said that meetings with City officials have been held twice to date and 3 broad issues have been identified; the status of the City investigation about what occurred, helping displaced residents and the status of the federal grant that is currently under consideration for the demolition and redevelopment of Allen Benedict Court.

Mr. Coble gave updates on the following issues related to the incident and relocation. The Columbia Police Department has issued an unaccompanied death report on the deaths of the residents in J1 and J3, additional reports could be issued. The Columbia Fire Department and City of Columbia Code Enforcement conducted a comprehensive review of all buildings on the

Allen Benedict Court site and reported found infractions and violations in a letter to the Columbia Housing Authority; because of the severity of the issues all buildings were declared unsafe. Coroner Gary Watts released the cause of death as carbon monoxide poisoning. A Class Action law suit has been filed and notice has been received that the victims families have also filed; these will be discussed further in Executive Session. Many Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests have been received from various media outlets, a lawyer from Nexsen Pruet has been assigned to facilitate these requests. The Governor's office has requested and received a briefing on the situation and have offered their help and expressed concern. WLTX reporters were detained on the Allen Benedict Court site this week while attempting to access records; the Authority has apologized, a meeting has been held with security staff and assurances were made it will not happen again.

An independent, comprehensive review by an outside party to determine cause of death, responsibility and how to prevent this situation from ever reoccurring will be conducted. Mr. Cromartie asked if there was a timeframe for how long the investigation would take, Mr. Coble said he did not know specifically but anticipates a lengthy process.

Mr. Gilbert Walker offered condolences to the families of the deceased and said that he was doing everything possible to prevent this from happening again. Mr. Walker gave an update on the status of the displaced residents. Community support has been significant; donations have been received from individuals, businesses and churches. Orientations have begun to issue Section 8 vouchers to all displaced residents; 17 requests for tenancy have been approved, staff is assisting residents identify units and assessments conducted to ensure residents have the required resources at their disposal. All residents will be given the choice of receiving a moving stipend or to have their belongings moved by a moving company. A text message system and 24 hour hotline have been established to communicate with residents as needed. A flyer has been created and circulated within the community identifying items needed for donation.

Mr. Walker said that staff submitted the latest application for funds to redevelop the Allen Benedict Court site last fall and is hopeful about its chances, the federal government shutdown slowed the process but finalists should be announced soon.

Mr. Walker said that carbon monoxide detectors are currently being installed in all units with natural gas and that process should be complete next week; families in those units are being educated about how the detectors work as they are installed.

Mrs. Julia Prater gave an update on the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative grant that was submitted in November, 2018. Notification from HUD on finalists was expected early this year but now that HUD has reopened, progress is expected soon. Staff feels strongly about the application and partnership with the City of Columbia.

At 5:41 p.m. Mr. Cromartie made a motion that the Board go into Executive Session to discuss a legal matter, Mrs. Rubin seconded and amended the motion to include a Personnel Issue, unanimously approved, Executive Session began at 5:41 p.m.

At 7:30 p.m. Mr. Gist stated that Regular Session was back in session and asked Mr. Coble to make remarks.

Mr. Coble recommended the following motions;

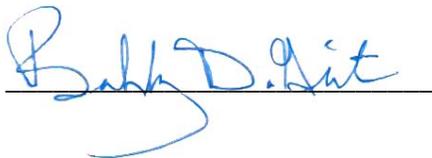
The CHA Board ratifies the previous hiring of Bob Coble, Robert Bolchoz and DESA, Inc. Upon motion of Mrs. Furgess, seconded by Mr. Cromartie it was unanimously approved.

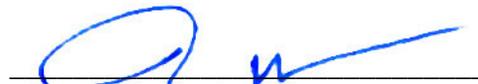
The CHA Board orders an independent and comprehensive investigation of all issues relating to the Allen Benedict Court tragedy and directs counsel, by February 5, 2019, to bring recommendations to the Board at a Special Called Meeting to be held at noon on February 6, 2019 of who can conduct such an investigation. Upon motion of Mr. Cromartie, seconded by Mrs. Rubin it was unanimously approved.

Mr. Green closed with a prayer.

Upon motion of Mrs. Rubin, seconded by Mrs. Furgess, it was unanimously decided to end the meeting at 7:40 pm.

APPROVED:

  
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Secretary