

Housing Authority of the City of Laredo
Regular Board of Commissioners Meeting
Zoom Video Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83086037409>

Call in Number: 1-346-248-7799

Webinar ID: 830 8603 7409

LHA Board Room
2000 San Francisco Ave.

Laredo, Texas 78040

Friday, June 25, 2021

11:30 A.M.

Board of Commissioners

Jose L. Ceballos, Board Chairman
Dr. Sergio D. Garza, Vice-Chairman
Anita L. Guerra, Commissioner

Dr. Marisela Rodriguez Tijerina, Commissioner
Gloria Ann Freeman, Resident Commissioner

NOTE: Due to recent COVID-19 health concerns, this meeting will be held by telephonic/video conferencing and the public may join via conference call number or via website provided above.

A-21-R-7

Minutes

June 25, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza called the meeting to order at 11:32 a.m.

2. INVOCATION PRAYER

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina, led them in prayer: "Dear Lord, let us act upon your wisdom; please guide us Lord, we place this meeting in your hands; we place our hearts and our minds in your hands so that you may direct us in making the right decisions for our tenants, employees and community; in addition, please continue to watch over us and take care of us during this pandemic, Amen."

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza thanked Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina for her prayer.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE Commissioner Ms. Freeman led them in the recital of the pledge.

4. ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Mrs. Mary Gaona, Executive Director, proceeded with roll call and stated that they had a quorum.

Commissioners Present

Jose L. Ceballos, Chairman
Dr. Sergio D. Garza, Vice-Chairman
Anita Guerra, Commissioner
Dr. Marisela Rodriguez Tijerina, Commissioner
Gloria Ann Freeman, Resident Commissioner

Commissioners Absent

Mrs. Gaona stated that Chairman Ceballos will be joining the meeting a little bit later.

Staff Present

Mary Gaona, Executive Director
Christy Ramos, Administrative Assistant
Robert Peña, Director of IT
Jennifer Barrientos, Director of Finance
Sonia Flores (by zoom)
Diana Cruz, Director of HR
Jessica Martinez, Interim Director of Housing Management
Ricardo De Anda, Attorney

Others Present

Dr. Waldo Lopez, Consultant
Carol Sherwood, Habitat for Humanity of Laredo

5. CITIZENS COMMENTS

This is the opportunity for visitors and guests to address the Board of Commissioners on any issue. The Board may not discuss any presented issue, nor may any action be taken on any issues at the time. There will be a 3-minute limitation per speaker. (Texas Attorney General Opinion-JC-0169)

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that there were no citizens comments.

6. DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST FOR BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that there were no disclosures of conflict of interest.

7. PRESENTATION BY CENTRAL RESIDENT COUNCIL

Mrs. Gaona stated that Mrs. Rios, Central Resident Council President, was not able to attend the meeting, but that she had discussed with Mrs. Gaona that she is concerned about the moratorium and Mrs. Gaona mentioned to her that they are extending it through July 31, 2021 and that they will be discussing with tenants at that time once the moratorium is over because some residents are concerned that they are behind on their rent.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that most of them probably got some sort of incentive from the government and stated that these are very hard times, but wondered if at any time they were

told to consider saving up money. Mrs. Gaona confirmed and stated that they were also instructed to look for assistance with the city and the state and they were provided flyers and she knows that some of them did apply with the city, but they just have not heard back from the city in regards to the assistance, but they will be able to send out a lease termination on August 1, 2021, once the moratorium ends on July 31, 2021.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approval of Minutes for Board of Commissioners meeting on March 26, 2021.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina moved to approve the minutes for Board of Commissioners meeting on March 26, 2021.

Commissioner Ms. Guerra seconded the motion.

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes for Board of Commissioners meeting on April 9, 2021.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina moved to approve the minutes for Board of Commissioners meeting on April 9, 2021.

Commissioner Ms. Guerra seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

9. STANDING REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS (No Action to be taken on these items)

A. Executive Director's Report to include status of Rapid Rehousing Grant Program and ongoing construction projects.

Mrs. Gaona presented to the Board and stated that in regards to Staff Development, they had several individuals take some staff development and also some individuals got certified in HVAC inspections being that later they will see in the package that they are receiving some additional vouchers, so they felt that it was appropriate, in case they need, they will pull them out from the maintenance department to go and do inspections and they also had Stephanie Garcia, with Rapid Rehousing, certified to do inspections.

Mrs. Gaona stated that they have a couple of vacant positions and she will be taking two of those today to try to get them filled and mentioned that they will see in the packet that they have started a Permanent Supportive Housing Subcommittee and that they asked Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza to join them in that committee and mentioned that they tried to have a meeting on June 9, 2021, but two of the individuals were not able to attend, so they will be rescheduling the meeting to early next month.

Mrs. Gaona mentioned that she included some procurement contracts in the packet and stated that some time back the Board authorized her to go up to \$50K

for any construction award and she wanted them to see a listing of some of the contracts that were awarded over the \$15K but under the \$50K.

Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they have been struggling a little bit with the leasing of units and they have brought it up the percentage to the high 90's and stated that at Senior Home they are still at 91%, Farm Labor is at 85% and Asherton at 71%. Mrs. Gaona stated that they opened the waiting list and they have been sending out letters, so that they should be progressing, but as they are progressing, they have been finding that they lease three units and they lose two families and she feels that residents know that the moratorium is going to end and that they are behind with their rent, so they just abandon the unit instead of coming to try to make some arrangements or something to help them try to figure it out. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they also have been losing some tenants to the Section 8 program.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza asked what would be a good arrangement for a person that falls behind. Mrs. Gaona stated that it would be to be paying their current rent, but also paying on their back rent which is a payment arrangement they can make, but they need to come in and of course, it needs to be justifiable and they can do this.

Mr. De Anda asked Mrs. Gaona that if in the regular market, if they lose their job, the rent would go down, if they would adjust the rent or reduce it. Mrs. Gaona confirmed. Mr. De Anda asked that if that is the case, how come people are getting behind if they are able to reduce the rent accordingly. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that if they lost their job due to COVID, there are waivers, extensions and processes, but they need to prove it in order for them to reduce the rent. Mr. De Anda asked if they would be getting rental reductions. Mrs. Gaona confirmed that if it is the case that they lost their job.

In regards to Section 8, Mrs. Gaona stated that the utilization is currently at 98.76% in the voucher program and in the mainstream, they are underutilized by 40 units and they are targeting the new waiting list to be able to utilize these vouchers in the mainstream program.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that in the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing Program he sees about 22 vouchers allocated and they have 14 that are leased and asked how they would reach the veterans. Mrs. Gaona stated that they have a Liaison that works with the Veterans Affairs and they are the ones that do the actual leasing for them. Ms. Barrientos mentioned that these vouchers are managed through the VA, so the recommendation comes from them; they get together with the VA on a monthly basis and they recommend individuals to come into the program, so it is all through the VA. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza asked if they are aware that they have 8 vacancies. Ms. Barrientos confirmed and stated that they let them know about the vacancies and it will all depend on the clientele that goes into the VA if they are looking for housing, so if they need housing, they will

send the voucher to them and they will go ahead and look for a house in the private sector. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they had a call the day before yesterday on the Veterans By Name List because there is a by name list of the veterans and they had like three that were on the list, but they were still not able to verify that they were veterans. Ms. Barrientos mentioned that there are 14 vouchers available. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they are in that process and that they know we have the vacancies, but unfortunately, they can only do so much and we have to wait for them to finish their process and stated that we will issue the payment, the management of the voucher, but not the actual leasing or selection of tenant.

Mrs. Gaona stated that in regards to the statistics for the Police Department they had a total of eight thefts throughout the properties and they will be having the managers look into it and they also had some domestic violence. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza asked if the issue is getting better or if it is the same. Mrs. Gaona stated that she has seen it decrease, but they are still seeing those thefts throughout the properties, but she does not see it as high as it was in prior months. Commissioner Ms. Guerra asked about the others section. Mrs. Gaona stated that sometimes they just want to report the loose dog or they want to report too much noise, so they just label it as others.

Mrs. Gaona informed that in regards to the Rapid Rehousing update, they have currently four families that have been housed and five that have completed the initial assessment and we are looking for landlords to be able to fill all the slots in this program and utilize all the funding by January. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza asked how they would look for landlords. Mrs. Gaona stated that they look at the Section 8 list, Bethany House Rapid Rehousing and the city's program, the newspaper, Facebook and anything they can get.

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos joined the meeting at this time, 11:49 a.m.

In regards to the Ana Maria Lozano project, Mrs. Gaona stated that they are at 53% and presented pictures regarding the different stages and mentioned that they have already installed the canopy, the playground and the concrete benches; they are currently pending the painting and are struggling to get the color matches for the benches to be able to do that, but everything is looking really good, if they are passing by, they will really see the changes throughout.

Mrs. Gaona mentioned that at Los Balcones, they are at 52% and stated that they just purchased the insulation to be able to start closing the back units, the electrical, plumbing and HVAC rough in is in; they have passed all inspections in the back and all inspections on the bottom units, so they will start to close all those and push the work through for the next couple of weeks to get all of it closed up. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina asked about the estimated date of completion for Los Balcones. Mrs. Gaona responded that they have it for September and they are pushing for that. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that she was just curious because last time they had it for September. Mrs.

Gaona stated that they are pushing for that and mentioned that they could not find the insulation; they had already been waiting for two weeks, so they went out to McAllen to buy the insulation so that they could be able to start closing those back units.

In regards to the former executive office Mrs. Gaona informed that the inspections are set up and should be passing already, so that they can be able to start doing the closing and mentioned that they are doing the concrete cutting to lay the cable, so on this project they are at 47% completed.

10. CONSENT AGENDA

All of the following items may be acted upon by one motion. No separate discussion or action on any of the items is necessary unless desired by a Commissioner.

Chairman Ceballos stated that the next items are consent agenda which get taken all at once or if the Board would like to take a look at all the items now and pull anything they would like to discuss or just look at those items and they will get voted on as a block.

Mrs. Gaona requested to make one correction, to remove the Commercial Liability from item 10A and stated that it is only the Commercial Property.

Chairman Ceballos asked if all the items were fine as a block or if they needed to discuss any of them and asked if Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza wanted to bring one up and stated that the particular item is an action item and is further on the agenda, item 11E which they would do in executive session since it has some legal implications.

At this time Chairman Ceballos took over the meeting and apologized for being late and stated that he tried his best and mentioned that he schedules meetings in a way to be on time, so he apologized to everybody and thanked Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza and Mrs. Gaona for starting the meeting and everybody present for being on time.

Chairman Ceballos mentioned that these items are voted in block and asked the Board if they would like to discuss any one item, they can pull it out and discuss it and asked them to please take a final look and to let him know if they should bring anything up.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina moved to approve the consent agenda items with the minor correction on Item 10A as stated by Mrs. Gaona.

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

- A. Consideration to authorize the Executive Director to renew the Commercial Liability and Commercial Property insurances for the Laredo Housing Facilities Corporation effective June 27, 2021, for the period through June 26, 2022.**

- B. Consideration to ratify the renewal of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Health and Dental Insurance, effective June 1, 2021 through the period of June 30, 2022.
- C. Consideration to authorize the Executive Director to enter into a collaborative, non-financial Memorandum of Understanding with Texas Homeless Network for the Emergency Housing Voucher Program.
- D. Consideration to authorize the Executive Director to extend the Public Health Expert Consultant Contract for an additional year.
- E. Consideration to approve of writing-off non-collectable amount for vacated Public Housing, Russell Terrace, Meadow Elderly and Farm Labor units from October 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021, as recommended by the Finance Director and the Executive Director.
- F. Consideration to re-authorize the hosting of the 2021 Inner City Housing Summit (previously postponed due to 2020 COVID-related precaution) in collaboration with community stakeholder groups.

11. ACTION ITEM

- A. Discussion and possible action to approve the creation of an emergency community housing repair program and committee jointly with the Habitat for Humanity of Laredo, allocate unrestricted non-federal funding to be determined by this action, appoint representative(s) to oversee the agency's participation, and request a City of Laredo representative, and any other matters incident thereto.

Chairman Ceballos asked Mrs. Gaona if there was a Request Letter in the packet. Mrs. Gaona confirmed. Chairman Ceballos welcomed Ms. Carol Sherwood who stated that she is the Executive Director for Habitat for Humanity of Laredo and mentioned that she is sure they are aware that Habitat for Humanity became the coordinator for disaster relief following the winter vortex storm that happened in February and in addition to that and prior to even completing some projects, another storm hit our area and it was a wind event with more damage in some ways to roofs than the winter vortex storm and of course with any storm in anytime that they see any kind of emergency of weather event, the most vulnerable are the ones that are hit the hardest and stated that many of the houses that they have been attempting to repair have been more than 50 years old; some are as old as 80 years old and in truth, some of them should not be standing at all; they should probably be demolished and rebuilt, but the funding has not been there for any entity to be able to do that which is a discussion for another time, but they saw thousands of people living in our community that are homeowners without insurance that could not repair their own water lines, their electric lines and sometimes their sewer was compromised after the freeze and especially the roofs.

Mrs. Sherwood mentioned that it was at a time when Habitat for Humanity could not have fund raising events last year to raise money due to the challenge of COVID 19 and stated that after the first night with most of Laredo being without electricity, they recognized that they were going to start receiving calls, so she began making calls to some of her colleagues with Habitat International to try to get some solution to get some money in here, but the big worry, for her and even for the general population, was to bring in plumbing supplies and mentioned that they are always the last community at any of the big box stores to receive emergency plumbing, electrical and even sometimes she has heard about not being able to find insulation which were items she knew they were going to need, so through some proactive measures with Habitat International and their personal relationship with Home Depot Corporate Headquarters in Atlanta they were able to bring into the Home Depot Store multiple truckloads of plumbing supplies, so if they were out looking for plumbing supplies on the first days after the freeze one of the reasons was because of their relationship over a period of years with the Home Depot Foundation; in addition to that, Council Members, Community Developments, the City of Laredo and the County Commissioners were contacting her because they have no available emergency funds to handle such a crisis at the time and they have stringent rules and regulations, so they cannot sometimes go into private properties without contracts and all kind of things and as a non-profit they can do things that often times public officials cannot manage to get done in a quick fashion. Mrs. Sherwood mentioned that one of the Council Members, Ms. Cigarroa, along with Trisha Cortez and some other wonderful people came together and contacted her very early and asked them that if they raised money, if they would work in District 8 because there are so many horrible households there and they responded that yes, of course they would, so they raised about \$47K to help in that effort which was how they began their repair work, but also as she mentioned they were probably aware, building materials skyrocketed; if they had to replace a small roof, in the past they might spend \$1,500 on a 700 sq. ft. home, they would be looking at \$3K to \$4K, so the available money they were able to raise, about \$250K, when they started doing roofs which they needed to do almost immediately, especially at the houses that were very vulnerable, so they had less households they could serve and then, they decided they would fix plumbing which is a priority and they had to look at the electrical because the electricity went out and what many people do not realize is that especially in older homes, when the power comes back on, there is a surge and some of the most vulnerable houses, the surge means that the electricity is going to do things it is not supposed to or not come on at all, so electricians are expensive and plumbers are expensive, but they managed to get a group of electricians, plumbers and roofers to work side by side with them and reduce prices and work as much as they could and stated that some plumbers would go in and say that God would get them if they charged a lady for their services, so they said that they would do it for free and stated that they had that type several times and that they are proud of what they were able to achieve, but the truth is that often times they would go in and only had money to prepare the plumbing and as they repaired some of the broken parts and put the full force of the water into that house, multiple lines would burst

because of the age of the line and they are talking about some lead piping too by the way, and mentioned that they had the same situation with the sewer connections and sewer withing houses which was even more devastating, so cost just kept rising and they would do what they absolutely needed to do to get the people sanitary sewer and potable water and if the roof was about to fall down, they tried to make other arrangements for the family and they were successful until they could go back when they got more money to repair the roof which they are doing some of that now, but they are still lacking closing up walls where they had to go in and repair a shower; one house in particular cost them over \$4K and it was a small house, but all the walls had to be left open because there was no money to repair the walls or people to repair the walls and they had to use mostly subcontractors which is not the normal Habitat model, for it can get very expensive, so now they are at the point where they are trying to go back and help the people because they know what they need and help those that they felt horrible like that, but the truth is that many of those homes are going to be costly to repair and they are going to do the best they can do with the least amount of cost, but there are going to be many, and she met hundreds of people in this town that are going to be left that are still very vulnerable. Mrs. Sherwood mentioned that he had an opportunity to apply for a very large grant, but she will not know about it for 90 days and she does not even know if they will receive the funding, but Habitat International reached out to her last week and asked her if she would like to apply and said that it was a good sign because they do not often do that.

Chairman Ceballos thanked Mrs. Sherwood for attending the meeting, for her work and the leadership and stated that they had worked jointly previously with a similar project where he thinks they allocated \$15K for that project that he thinks went fairly well and stated that what he would like to do is to have the Board ask any questions, but Chairman Ceballos stated that he thinks that the City needs to also find resources and obviously they also want to be supportive which is in their house of services, but they cannot use federal funds for that; they can only use unrestricted funds, but stated that the reason he wrote the item this way is there is that he would like the City to find a way so that there are these emergency funds that they can both tap into and the rest of the housing supportive service providers can, so he wrote the request and is trying to put some teams so that they can actually help and they can have an emergency fund going forward which is what Mrs. Sherwood told them last time that she needed and they still need it because she just repeated it and they cannot seem to get it structured in the community to create the process or even the funding, so he wanted to let the Board know that in deliberating on this request, the idea is that the City needs to follow along instead of letting Mrs. Sherwood do it and stated that right now she has great support from the Councilwoman, but he thinks that some of the management needs to follow along and learn and know, although they should know, the conditions these residents live in and the other piece for them is to stay with it, so that they actually also stay engaged and mentioned that those are the neighborhoods that are around our Public Housing and they keep saying it on this Board that it is kind of sad that the Public Housing is the better housing; it is sad in

terms of our community and are pleased that it is the case, but if they look around this neighborhood, it is in worse shape than a property that has been here since the 1940's.

Chairman Ceballos stated that he would leave other discussion for the Board and thanked Mrs. Sherwood for her presentation and mentioned that they appreciate the work she does which she has been doing for a very long time and no one is really tending to it and Chairman Ceballos really applauds her for that and asked the Board if they have any comments in regards to this item and mentioned that the request Mrs. Sherwood has submitted is for \$50K and asked for first the Board and then Mrs. Gaona if they could speak about sourcing the request.

Commissioner Ms. Freeman asked that the money Mrs. Sherwood is requesting she is earmarking it for plumbing and electrical upgrade; it is not for building itself. Mrs. Sherwood responded that it is not for building; it is for the repairs mainly and roofs and stated that they have right now some people that are displaced that need the roof restructured and stated that she is not talking about going in and totally rehabbing the house. Chairman Ceballos stated that she could not, that they would need more than \$50K and mentioned that Mrs. Sherwood is selecting repairs just to get people water and get them showering and leaving walls temporarily exposed and they would want to come back and close those walls. Mrs. Sherwood confirmed and mentioned that some of it might be used for some folks because in some cases they have very sick residents and they need to get help and she stated that she reached out to one resident that just needed to repair one bathroom quickly because the lady is a dialysis patient and she needed it. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that she may tell the Board an average of the cost to go into a house and stabilize their issue. Mrs. Sherwood responded that if it is a roof, it will be in the range of \$5K right now; if it is plumbing, it will be between \$1,500 to about \$3K and the variance would be in how old the pipes were before the storm. Chairman Ceballos asked her that they are looking at about 15 homes being impacted on what she is asking them to partner with. Mrs. Sherwood confirmed and stated that they may be able to find some partnerships; once they have funding, she may be able to go back and find some other partnerships and will mention that they got so much funding and see if others would help and match it and stated that sometimes people find out about a family or hear a story and contact Habitat and would offer to do the labor if Habitat would provide the materials. Mrs. Sherwood stated that they will maximize any funding and that no administrative money will be charged at all.

Chairman Ceballos asked Mrs. Gaona if she would speak about the sourcing of it. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they would have to go to the non-federal funding and stated that she had already talked to Ms. Barrientos in regards to what funding they would use and where the Board decides to allocate it, but she is not sure if they would have the \$50K and she is coming to the Board with another \$50K request. Chairman Ceballos asked if there were any questions or comments. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina asked if what Mrs. Gaona was saying is that

they do not have the \$50K. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that Mrs. Gaona has two projects she needs the \$50K for. Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that she thought it was \$15K. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that it was for a prior amount, almost four years ago. Chairman Ceballos asked if the Board had any questions, comments or thoughts.

Chairman Ceballos mentioned that the other item is their employee incentive program that Mrs. Gaona will be asking them to fund, for both retirement and tuition and mentioned that they are both just as worthy, so if the Board does not have any other questions or comments, he would like to make a motion.

Chairman Ceballos moved to allocate \$25K for this program.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza seconded the motion.

Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that Mrs. Sherwood could also ask other entities to match that. Mrs. Sherwood stated that she would do it and that it is something she does on a daily basis; she will be talking to Council members because she already explored some of that and stated that she is ready to go to Council meetings in that regard.

Chairman Ceballos asked that if Mrs. Sherwood finds another match, to come back to this Board because that would be a great partnership, so she could also have a VPR program because that is actually what they need because that happens every year and people just started tending to it, so they would re-entertain it and stated that their fiscal year runs from April through March, so if something evolves that they would have a more permanent emergency repair program, they would entertain it going into next year. Mrs. Sherwood mentioned that it is something they need to explore as a community and stated she remembers one particular house did not explode; they had a natural gas line and had a little mini fire which could have expanded to the whole block in a very vulnerable area of town. On that note, Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza mentioned that he is originally from Benavides, Texas, and when he was a little boy many years ago, their pipes for the gas were horrible and they did not have any money, but a rich man who he does not know where he came from, came in and fixed the pipes for the entire city. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that they had like a mineral corrosion issue. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza confirmed.

Chairman Ceballos mentioned that he would not want to condition the match and thinks that Mrs. Sherwood is already doing that and the money is needed now, so he asked Commissioner Ms. Freeman if she had any more questions and that it had been moved and seconded and if there was any other discussion.

Chairman Ceballos asked Mrs. Gaona if she would assign someone to follow along in the creation of that committee and to please keep the city on and it would be good for them to follow on whatever number of units, ten or five units, whatever they can work through will help and stated that anything he can do, he will help

with the meetings or help them create it and stated that they are getting a lot of federal funding. Mrs. Sherwood stated that it is sad how it has been allocated and housing is one of those; it is not just emergency rent. Chairman Ceballos confirmed. Mrs. Sherwood stated that Chairman Ceballos is right and stated that she thinks that they have faced that in some of the housing units because they are in an area of town where the sewer and water are not adequate and they are dangerous and stated that she had never been so aware of it until it unfortunately happened. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that they noticed it so well at the inner-city that putting a sewer tap is like \$10K and they can only do two sewer taps with what got allocated and if they actually have a city problem and they have to go into the right of way, she would not afford that; she would probably have to stick to the inside and she probably would select which ones she can even do. Mrs. Sherwood confirmed and mentioned that she would have to look at the most vulnerable and people who have no ability at all and put them in their priority and mentioned that she appreciates the consideration. Chairman Ceballos thanked Mrs. Sherwood. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina also thanked Mrs. Sherwood and mentioned that she thinks it is a great project and to concur with what Chairman Ceballos stated, Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that she thinks they do not need to put any stipulations on it, it would just go to the project for whatever is deemed to be a priority.

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos moved to allocate \$25K for this program.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

- B. Discussion and possible action to approve Amendment # 1 to the 2021-2022 Operating Budget for the Housing Authority of the City of Laredo and to adopt Resolution No. 21-R-06.**

Jennifer Barrientos, Director of Finance, presented to the Board and stated that she was bringing the amendment due to final changes that HUD published and they finalized the operating subsidy; additionally they also finalized the awarding of the Section 8 Program, so they got additional money more than they had projected from the approved budget of April 2021 all the way to March 2022, so it is the operating subsidy and also in Section 8 they got 85 additional vouchers which they will start next month in July for emergency housing which is part of the amendment and mentioned that there was also a change on the consent agenda for the renewal of the Blue Cross Blue Shield rate which went up, so the expenditure went up for the budget which is what she is presenting.

Chairman Ceballos stated that in terms of the HUD subsidy increase, he mentioned that he sees that all of them got a little bit more and asked Mrs. Gaona if she sees that becoming net income if they do not do anything or if she has a plan for expending it. Mrs. Gaona responded that she wanted to come back and mentioned that when she was discussing with the Commissioners, she mentioned that Ana Maria Lozano got a big increase and they had already compared the

budgets to try not leave so many reserves, so Mrs. Gaona stated that she wanted to be able to come back to the Board with some improvements. Chairman Ceballos stated that the Board already knows this because he mentions it all the time, that if they do not use it, it goes into reserves and they cannot use it, so if they have BiblioTechs that are up coming, they got to fund it through this and asked it was for Colonia Guadalupe. Mrs. Gaona confirmed. Chairman Ceballos stated that it is good to have those monies and then asked if there were any questions from the Board and asked Mrs. Gaona if she would bring it back when she actually uses it. Mrs. Gaona confirmed.

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos moved to approve the amendment as prepared by staff.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

- C. Discussion and possible action authorizing the Executive Director to proceed with a loan application with Rural Development for the rehabilitation of the Farm Labor units. The existing loan repayment for this property is nearing completion.

Chairman Ceballos mentioned that in fact, they are basically paying a nominal amount and stated that they covered this a little bit ago, but essentially what he has discussed with Mrs. Gaona is that it would be a great opportunity to continue receiving assistance, so if they close this loan, they lose the subsidy for those units and they can turn it into Section 8 or turn them into something else, but will lose the subsidy and the opportunity is that if they get another loan, make repairs that are paid by the cashflow of that property, they will basically continue receiving the subsidy for those units and stated that it continues to be a challenge to lease them, but he thinks that they are doing better than other times, so he feels that they should go out, redevelop that budget and get that loan and mentioned that right now they owe something super nominal. Mrs. Gaona stated that they owe \$1K. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that Mrs. Gaona is paying that in like \$.15 increments so that they can keep the loan active because if she pays it off, it is over. Chairman Ceballos stated that he was exaggerating, but that it is pretty close. Mrs. Gaona stated that it was less than \$15.

Chairman Ceballos stated that the only other option they were thinking about was to convert them into project-based Section 8 and stated that there are 48 units there that they have subsidized under a different program as opposed to Section 8, so he thinks they will leave them there and if it does not make sense, they will tackle that later. Commissioner Ms. Freeman stated that she agrees as long as they are able to get the subsidy and she would just leave them there as long as they can. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that there is a way to take some units off of the subsidy; they would give them up and put them up to a different program, so along the way, they can do that; they would just need to analyze it when Mrs. Gaona comes back with the redevelopment is the financing on how they are going

to pay back, whenever that comes back, and mentioned that this is the approval to pursue it. Mrs. Gaona confirmed.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza moved to authorize the Executive Director to proceed. Commissioner Ms. Freeman seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- D. Discussion and possible action to approve an update to the LHA Personnel Policies, as it relates to Section 7B Holidays, Section 12B (a) Retirement Plan (Retirement Incentive), Section 12J Continuing Education (Reimbursement Incentive). This item may be discussed in closed session pursuant to Texas Government Code, Section 551.071 (consultation with attorneys) and Section 551.074 (personnel matters).

Chairman Ceballos stated that there are some things he wants to cover in public on part of this item 11D and after that they can take the other two items in executive session.

The part on this item that Chairman Ceballos would like to speak publicly is holidays which they have already talked about in open session and will hammer those in open session because it does not qualify for close session and mentioned that Mrs. Gaona had sent over some recommendations. Mrs. Gaona confirmed and stated that they had already decided to remove the Personal Holiday as of 12/31/2021 and they had considered Cesar Chavez Day and had put the Indigenous Day in October being that they already have a holiday in September. Chairman Ceballos stated that he wants to suggest something and mentioned that he thinks Jovita Idar is very worthy of an acknowledgment and would like to suggest that the Indigenous Day becomes Jovita Idar and Heritage Day and mentioned that heritage may have not been the word and stated that it is just a thought for Board discussion and he thinks that Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina mentioned other cultures too.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez stated that she completely embraces diversity and stated that the problem with today's society is that everyone wants to declare a day, so that was her only concern and to be careful opening the door. Chairman Ceballos stated that then they would have 30 holidays and no one would be working. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they also need to be looking at the Juneteenth Holiday. Chairman Ceballos asked if they have all the Federal Holidays. Mrs. Gaona stated that they just did not have Columbus Day and now the Juneteenth. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that they did not have any holidays in June, so that will make it for June and asked if the rest of the Board had any thoughts. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that he wondered about Columbus Day. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that he had suggested Indigenous Day, that the term came from him and is trying to wrap it around maybe Culture Diversity Day. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that October at one time and especially on October 24 which is his birthday, had United Nations Day, which would cover

everybody. Chairman Ceballos mentioned Cultural Diversity Day in October; Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina confirmed and stated that it takes care of everything. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that he thinks it is all embracing. Chairman Ceballos asked if October 11 was a particular day in the calendar or if it was Indigenous Day. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza and Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that it was Columbus Day. Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they changed it to the summer. Chairman Ceballos stated that he liked the Cultural Diversity and Heritage which covers everything and mentioned that they still have the Juneteenth to deal with. Commissioner Ms. Freeman mentioned that they should go with Juneteenth for the simple fact that it is during the summer and the parents can stay with their kids vs. having a holiday while they are in school if they do not get that day, so Chairman Ceballos mentioned to turn the Cesar Chavez Day to the Cultural Heritage Day. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that he was referring to October. Chairman Ceballos stated that unless they want to add one more holiday and mentioned that they are adding Juneteenth which will put them at 14 holidays, actually 15, so they are adding one more. Commissioner Ms. Freeman stated that last time she suggested Jovita Idar and Cesar Chavez into one Holiday. Chairman Ceballos stated that it would be the Cultural Diversity and Heritage Day, so they will move that to replace it and it will cover Cesar Chavez and Jovita Idar and then the Indigenous does not happen, but the Juneteenth happens, so they lose the Indigenous. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that on Juneteenth banks are closed and everything is closed and they really can't do business. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that it is a good holiday because they can be home.

Chairman Ceballos stated that the idea is that it stays at 14 days, the Cesar Chavez becomes the Cultural Diversity and Heritage Day Holiday and then Juneteenth gets added and Indigenous Day gets removed which will leave them at 14 holidays. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza asked what he was calling that holiday. Chairman Ceballos stated that it is Cultural Diversity and Heritage and asked if anybody had a better way of describing it, to say so now because it is going to get printed.

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos moved to approve Section 7B Holidays, Item 11D as discussed above.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Gaona mentioned that they are removing the Personal Holiday and that they need to make that part of the motion. Chairman Ceballos confirmed and stated that it is as reflected in the document and that the Personal Holiday is basically replaced at this point.

Chairman Ceballos stated that he would like to take the Retirement Plan and Continuing Education into Executive Session because there are sensitivities that relate to staff and asked Mr. De Anda if it would be recommended. Mr. De Anda recommended to take the Retirement Plan to Executive Session because due to

age discrimination issues would require his legal advice and now, they could continue with Continuing Education.

Chairman Ceballos asked Mrs. Gaona to present the item on Continuing Education. Mrs. Gaona stated that she went over all the discussion they had back in March and she went ahead and implemented a policy that would require it to be an accredited institution and it needs to be related to the job and to the employees' career opportunities with the Housing Authority, the reimbursement is tied to the TAMU undergraduate tuition rate for a four-year institution and Laredo College for a two-year institution. Chairman Ceballos asked Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina if they have four-year programs at Laredo College too and if she wants them qualified for that too. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina confirmed. Chairman Ceballos stated that they will have to change that. Mrs. Gaona stated that in regards to the grades, they changed it, for A & B it will be 100%, for C, it will be 75% and mentioned that it is taxable income for the employee and it will be the maximum of six credit hours per enrollment period and a maximum of 12 credit hours per physical year and tuition reimbursement is subject to availability of funds based on prior written commitment. Mrs. Gaona stated that they left the tuition reimbursement at \$1,000.00 and the full tuition reimbursement will be payable from the employee if they separate from the Agency within the 12 months. Chairman Ceballos stated that it was the tricky part, that it is twelve months and up to avoid any recapture and asked if they all agreed with it and stated that it is 12 months and up commitment before somebody should pay back if they leave. Commissioner Ms. Freeman stated that if they are going to take 12 hours, two semesters and six hours, she asked how much that would come up to. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that it depends on the class they are taking because there are classes with lab. Chairman Ceballos asked if there is a cap per student, per request. Mrs. Gaona stated that they just put the 12 credit hours. Chairman Ceballos stated that it is a lot of money. Commissioner Ms. Freeman also stated that it is. Chairman Ceballos stated that it is Commissioner Freeman's point, that they are going to be subsidizing \$5K - \$6K a semester and asked if it is that much sometimes with tuition. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina mentioned that like Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza mentioned, it depends on the program because sometimes there are added fees. Chairman Ceballos asked Mr. De Anda if they could discuss it due to having potential prospects in the room. Mr. De Anda stated that they could. Chairman Ceballos stated that for him it would be to set a cap per person, so that somebody could technically sign up for 12 hours online or four classes online which would be \$4K or \$5K and they can do it twice a year, so he thinks that they need to cap and then if they provide that and they leave in a year, would it be ok? because that is the way it is currently written and mentioned that they need more based on the amount; the amount should say that if they give them \$10K while they are working with the Agency, he wondered how long they should stay working and said that for him it would be great, they capacitated them, but at the same time some of the Commissioners made a point last time that they want the Agency to reach some benefit. Commissioner Ms. Freeman stated that they should go to something like one semester, six hours,

equals twelve months of guaranteed service per semester. Chairman Ceballos stated that it is a good idea.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that she agrees with Commissioner Ms. Freeman and mentioned that at Laredo College they just put two courses because a course could be three semester credit hours, so if they say six, and they take two, but is actually seven, it would depend because some are lecture/lab together, so some can be four or five hours depending on the course of the program. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that it could be a six-hour class. Chairman Ceballos stated that he likes that two courses equal a six-month commitment and asked how much it would be for two courses, if it would be \$2K. Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that they need to include what they are now and mentioned that every year they go up, so they would need to include tuition currently for Laredo College and TAMIU, that way there is no misunderstanding and asked if they are going to adjust it every year because she stated that education inflation is way higher. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that the policy needs to reflect where they are right now and asked if somebody is doing a two-year program and they help them every semester with two classes, how many classes they would be paying for, so it is four semesters, 8 courses that they would be paying for which would be 8 six months. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that nowadays they offer one trimester, Summer Session I, Summer Session II, Fall or Spring.

Chairman Ceballos asked how much it would be for 8 courses X \$2K, if every two course is \$2K more or less? Commissioner Ms. Freeman stated that six years ago it was about \$600 per course. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that to him \$5K would be a good amount, total subsidy for someone that is pursuing a degree. Commissioner Ms. Guerra asked if it would be per semester. Chairman Ceballos responded that the Agency should not be funding \$10K or \$15K and mentioned that \$5K is enough to subsidize and employee. Commissioner Ms. Guerra and Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza asked if it would be for the whole degree plan. Chairman Ceballos responded that it would be for everything; they do not get any more than \$5K and they do not get any more than two classes per semester. Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that it is 30 hours to graduate. Chairman Ceballos stated that they do not have graduate, that it said is all undergraduate and asked if \$5K would be fair. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina agreed and stated that technically under the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, A, B and C are passing and although she does not advocate for C's, she does not think anybody should be penalized for passing a course. Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that if it is undergraduate, it should be fine. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza mentioned that any elective courses not in the degree plan submitted for reimbursement must have been approved by the graduate or under graduate advisor. Chairman Ceballos stated that he thinks \$5K is a good help and if it is only two years, \$5K is going to cover one fourth or maybe more of their expense and asked if it would be \$1,000.00 every six months. Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that it shall be for under graduate and graduate.

Chairman Ceballos stated that Ms. Cruz had some comments. Ms. Diana Cruz, Human Resources Director, stated that one of the questions she included is that they need to provide a financial aid application denial. Chairman Ceballos asked if that was already included in the packet. Ms. Cruz mentioned that it is the form she is preparing. Chairmen Ceballos stated that it needs to be in the policy, so it needs to get added and stated that it is a good idea. To clarify it, Ms. Cruz mentioned that they are not going to be supporting all their financial expenses and that they need to do part to find other resources. Mrs. Gaona stated that it is included in letter E which states that when employee seeks tuition assistance from any other source, they shall only receive reimbursement for the employee's net expense after other tuition assistance has been applied. Commissioner Ms. Guerra mentioned that some people she knows have gotten a lot of loans and they have three masters and considerable loans.

Ms. Cruz stated that financial aid would give them about \$7K throughout their lifetime and they need to keep working to get a degree with that money and mentioned that some people just take electives and start making a lot of poor choices, so in developing the form, she is going to be asking that they provide a copy of the degree plan, a letter from the advisor or the financial aid denial letter. Chairman Ceballos mentioned that all those conditions need to be in the policy to be enforceable, so when they read the policy, they need to make sure that it meets the expectation that is on the form. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that in regards to the financial aid denial, they could get \$30, so where would that get them, nowhere, and then financial aid goes by the parents' income or of course by the income the employee gets. Ms. Cruz stated that in requesting the financial aid, it is to say that they are also looking for other resources and not depending only on Laredo Housing Authority to be their primary source. Chairman Ceballos thanked Ms. Cruz for her input and mentioned that it needs work.

Commissioner Ms. Guerra asked if they can scratch the graduate in J. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that Commissioner Guerra is right, that it is undergraduate. Chairman Ceballos stated that he is for either or and said that they may have some Directors that want to go back and get some polishing and mentioned to Mrs. Gaona that it needs work and that it needs to come back because they are not going to have the time to hammer it out right now and if they disagree, to please say so, but they would want to include C's at 100% and they want to add financial aid to E explicitly, not just tuition assistance, but to make it say financial aid; they want to include graduate and under graduate and mentioned that it is already there and stated that he thinks the policy is too trivial and that it needs to be super simple; otherwise, it is not going to work. Commissioner Ms. Guerra asked if they can add the current rate. Chairman Ceballos stated that he is fine with it and stated that the other question is whether they would want a cap or have a course limit and if \$5K would be sufficient.

Commissioner Ms. Guerra asked if it would be \$5K per semester or per year. Chairman Ceballos stated that it would be \$5K cap per their employment stay regardless and asked how many months they need to stay before they become responsible for repayment. Commissioner Ms. Freeman stated that for \$5K she would say five-year commitment to the Housing Authority. Chairman Ceballos asked if it would be a year for every \$1,000.00 which he thinks seems a little high. Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza stated that he would recommend at least a three-year commitment. Chairman Ceballos stated that he would agree with that and they would break it down proportionately by funding over the three years. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that she thinks they need legal advice. Mr. De Anda stated that they cannot enforce it, but they can require it and it could go into the record that if they fail to live up to the agreement because it is a voluntary agreement, they can require a good faith commitment to work for the Housing Authority for a particular period of time and mentioned that they would not want to make it too long. Chairman Ceballos asked Mr. De Anda if he could simplify the policy for them based on the guidance, they are getting from the Board today and also asked to make sure that the draft form gets to Mr. De Anda so he can make sure those conditions are in the policy. Mr. De Anda mentioned that what they can require is that if they do not meet the commitment, then they would have to pay back certain amount. Chairman Ceballos stated that it is what they are talking about; they are going to sign something that is going to say that if they leave before a particular date, they would owe a certain amount and asked Mr. De Anda if that would be enforceable. Mr. De Anda confirmed. Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina stated that they are going to have situations where a family has to move because the spouse got a promotion somewhere or they are out on FMLA which are things where there is going to be some exceptions, so it would be hard to tie somebody. Chairman Ceballos confirmed and mentioned that the repayment language needs to be clear so that it allows for a repayment plan so that staff does not have to be like guessing and stated that they have taken some time with this policy and asked the Board to consider making this retroactive so that if anybody has been encouraged to go to school, they do not get discouraged because they took forever to subsidize, but maybe they can consider that and it does not have to happen, but it is something they all may think about and they will bring it back at the next meeting. Chairman Ceballos thanked Ms. Cruz.

Chairman Ceballos stated that they will move on to the other items in Executive Session which are Section 12 B, Retirement Plan (Retirement Incentive) which is within 11D and then 11E and 11F.

Chairman Ceballos moved to go into Executive Session at 12:47 p.m. and include the Executive Director, the Attorney and any other staff member that may be required.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

- E. Discussion and possible action on COVID Operational Policies and Vaccination and Mask Requirements and to adopt draft Resolution No. 21-R-07. This item may be discussed in closed session pursuant to Texas Government Code, Section 551.071 (consultation with attorneys) and Section 551.074 (personnel matters).
- F. Discussion and possible action to consider the hiring recommendations that may be made by the Executive Director, for any management positions requiring Board consultation. This item may be discussed in closed session pursuant to Texas Government Code, Section 551.074 (personnel matters).

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TEXAS GOVERNMENT CODE

The Board of Commissioners for the Housing Authority of the City of Laredo reserve the right to adjourn into Executive Session at any time during the course of this meeting to discuss any of the matters listed on the posted agenda, above, as authorized by the Texas Government Code, including Sections 551.071 (consultation with attorneys), 551.072 (deliberations about real property), 551.073 (deliberations about gifts and donations), 551.074 (personnel matters), 551.076 (deliberations about security devices) and 551.086 (economic development).

The Board of Commissioners went into Executive Session at 12:47 p.m.

The Board of Commissioners reconvened from Executive Session at 2:11 p.m.

13. ACTION ON ANY EXECUTIVE SESSION ITEM

The Board of Commissioners came back from Executive Session and Chairman Ceballos stated that as it relates to the Retirement Plan (Retirement Incentive),

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos moved to approve the item as presented with the following edits: that the program be renamed Voluntary Separation/Retirement Incentive and to approve the incentive at 20% and that they budget this year all of those qualified at the age of 65 and over.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

In regards to Item 11E. Discussion and possible action on the COVID Operating Policies and Vaccination and Mask requirement, Chairman Ceballos stated that for purposes of the record and for the staff members present, the Board deliberated in closed session, but always as everybody has seen them, always with the best intentions for everybody, the public, the staff members, our tenants, our vendors and with the idea that first and foremost, they want to keep people healthy and comfortable in their jobs and in visiting with the Board, so they developed the policy that they think meets that thought and stated that obviously COVID is a complex issue and it will continue to be a complex issue and they are only beginning to rebound as this is their first meeting back actually in person, so Chairman Ceballos wants to make sure that the record reflects that they are doing this in the best interest of all the stakeholders including themselves, others, the public and the people they serve, so the motion would be:

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos moved to adopt the Resolution as adopted with a few edits that reflect that they highly encourage and mentioned that they will ask the Attorney to make the edits:

On no. 3, to include language that says that they highly encourage the wearing of a mask after the section that says shall not be required to wear a mask, but the agency highly encourages the wearing of a mask.

Under no. 5, to remove the section that speaks about other venues and add, unless because of a medical necessity.

On no. 6, to remove everything after the word unless, and again, include language that reflects that they highly encourage the use of a mask.

On no. 7, after the word individual on the third line, to add or any individual with symptoms.

On no. 8, strike to discharge from the employee and add as an option for the Director to establish regular testing, meaning regular PCR COVID testing every two weeks.

Chairman Ceballos stated that those are the items with one that he thinks hopefully the employees would be encouraged about, that they also include no. 10 that provides for one paid day off of the employees choosing for anyone that has received the COVID vaccine or receives the COVID vaccine and it goes retroactive to everyone and stated that this was his motion.

Chairman Jose L. Ceballos moved to approve Item 11E. as discussed above.

Commissioner Ms. Freeman seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Ceballos stated that in regards to 11F Discussion and possible action to consider hiring recommendations made by the Executive Director, Chairman Ceballos asked Mrs. Gaona to make her recommendations. Mrs. Gaona stated that she is recommending to promote Sonia Flores to the Senior Accounting position, and the hiring of Alejandro Jimenez Hernandez as the Assistant Director of IT, Laura Villalobos, as Property Manager and Melinda Gavilanes, as Property Manager.

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina moved to approve the recommendations.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Ceballos thanked Mr. De Anda, Mrs. Gaona and Dr. Waldo Lopez for their role in working with them on a number of policies, amongst them the COVID operational policies.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Dr. Rodriguez Tijerina moved to adjourn the meeting.

Vice-Chairman Dr. Garza seconded the motion.
Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 2:17 p.m.



Jose L. Ceballos, Chairman



Mary Gaona, Executive Director