

## **LWV-Kitsap Bremerton/CK Unit Meeting Notes--Saturday, January 14, 2023**

Kitsap United Way Conference Room/Zoom

In Person: Maureen Cervinsky, Raejean Bridges-Avalos, John Cervinsky, Katie Pratt, Connie Marchant, Suzanne Schreiner, Candy Rankin, Carol Larsen (NK); guests Jill Stanton, Executive Director, Bremerton Housing Authority and Heather Blough, Executive Director, Housing Kitsap

Via Zoom: Pat Troxell, Gail Sackman

Maureen introduced our two guests. Jill said she has been with BHA for two years, coming from King County Housing Authority, preceded by 14 years with Everett Housing Authority. Heather retired from a Housing Authority position in California after 30 years & has been with HK since June, 2021. Formerly known as Kitsap County Consolidated Housing Authority, HK has had a difficult history. Heather has already been successful in helping to turn the PHA (Public Housing Authority) around. The two Executive Directors have been working together since day one on their jobs. They meet every week and know they are stronger together. Their partnership is making a very positive impact for all of Kitsap County.

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**The Visions & Missions for BHA & HK are very similar.** Both strive to and do provide safe & affordable housing for families and individuals in our communities with limited financial means. Within the Housing Continuum, PHAs primarily serve households who are very low/extremely low income or rent-burdened and do so with a very successful level of stability. Some HK units are market rent, not restricted. BHA & HK work closely with other agencies which help individuals & families who may be homeless, in need of emergency shelter, transitional or community housing, medical, social or mental health services. Those agencies include: Kitsap Community Resources (KCR), Kitsap Mental Health Services (KMHS), Peninsula Community Health Services (PCHS). KCR & other nonprofits manage programs specific to immediate needs.

**The role of BHA & HK is to administer funding programs that provide long-term housing success.**

BHA manages the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Affordable housing is based on someone's income. Most units require an income limit of 30% of the area median income (for a 2-bedroom unit, that would currently be \$30,850/yr.), though BHA can in some properties serve those with up to 60% of AMI. BHA acts as landlord for Public Housing properties in Bremerton, for which no vouchers are required. Housing Choice Vouchers can be used anywhere within Kitsap or Mason counties, provided the landlord has signed up to participate in the HCV program. Landlords must accept vouchers if the rent they are charging is within the Housing Authority payment standards. Typically, landlords accepting Housing Choice Vouchers rent to a combination of voucher holders & non-voucher holders. To help new voucher holders be successful, BHA provides a series of "Rent Ready" classes.

When Jill came to BHA, vouchers had been underutilized. In addition, HUD's fair market rent (FMR) evaluation was set very low for our area, despite Kitsap County having the third highest median housing prices in WA after King & Snohomish counties. This prohibited BHA from being competitive. They decided to challenge HUD's payment standard, hired WSU to do a study, which resulted in HUD raising our area's

FMR by 20%, quadrupling the number of housing units available. Over the last two years, 200 more vouchers have been utilized and about 400 more are still available.

While BHA pays its portion of rental assistance directly to the landlord, the rental lease is between the voucher holder & the landlord. The average length of stay in a rental by a Section 8 tenant is 7 years compared to 3 years on average, and many landlords are very successful in this program. It's difficult when one tenant with poor behaviors can discourage a landlord from continuing to participate in the program. BHA has a full-time landlord liaison on staff who works hard to build excellent relationships with landlords. Staff sent 100 written thank you cards to those landlords this past year.

**HK's Mutual Self-Help Housing Home Ownership Program:** This unique program offers income eligible applicants the opportunity to own their own home by participating in groups of 8-12 households who build each other's homes, with help & guidance from HK. Each household is responsible for 30+ hours/week of sweat equity labor, spending 12-18 months to complete construction on all the new houses in the neighborhood. Volunteers who help can have their hours distributed to different houses. More than 1400 homeownership units have been added to Kitsap County through this program, giving first time homeowners a real sense of community.

**HK's offerings of affordable housing rentals include a complicated variety of programs, with regulatory agreements unique to each program.** These include Project-Based Vouchers (PBV), Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA), Rural Development Rental Assistance (USDA-RD), Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), USDA Housing Trust program, and Public Housing units. **All of these rental units are managed through a waitlist.** Waiting lists administered by HK are sorted by date & time of application, with some preferences.

**BHA's waitlists for Bremerton & Kitsap County are usually open one time/year.** Depending on the program, the application time frame may last for part of one day or up to about a week. To get the word out when a waitlist opens up, BHA alerts partnering agencies, puts info in local papers & posts notices around the community. Keeping a waitlist open indefinitely becomes overly cumbersome and not manageable. Once a waitlist closes, the applications are randomly sorted to determine the order of the waitlist. Anyone in the U.S. can apply for a voucher here, but must live in Kitsap or Mason County in order to become a voucher holder. The voucher holder must stay here for one year, after which he/she can move.

#### **Numbers of Hard Units:**

**BHA has 578:** 8 apartment complexes, 1 duplex property, 5 single-family homes

**HK has 888:** apartment complexes throughout the county, numbering in the teens; single-family dwellings with 1, 2, 3, & 4 bedrooms

#### **Numbers of Staff Members:**

**BHA has 100:** Half do contract work for the multi-family side of HUD, providing management & compliance monitoring & reporting. BHA is one of only twelve Housing Authorities in the U.S. that do that kind of work. Profits from that BHA branch help enable those working in Housing to provide meaningful impacts in the community.

**HK has 50:** This includes the Self-Help Program, Property Management, Compliance, Accounting.

### **Some of BHA's Most Recent Successes & Most Difficult Challenges Right Now:**

- The Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program, begun 1-1/2 years ago, has placed 13 youth who have aged out of foster care into their own private rental unit. Kitsap County partners with Olive Crest, a Foster Care nonprofit, to provide funding for this program. Five more youths are in process for transitioning to living on their own. Once BHA has used its 25 FYI vouchers, it will be able to give HK an additional 25 for other teens aging out of foster care.
- Focusing on large families by purchasing 5 single-family homes, all now fully occupied
- Emergency Housing Voucher Program
- Pendleton Place partnership with KMHS
- Shelton Veterans Village
- \*\*\*\*\*
- Voucher holders looking for units
- Shortage of landlords accepting vouchers & shortage of affordable housing units
- Lack of funding for development of affordable housing & funding for rental & security deposit assistance

### **Some of HK's Most Recent Successes & Most Difficult Challenges Right Now:**

- Financial reporting now up to date, and most recent submittals on time
- Key Ceremony (prior to moving in) for two groups in Port Orchard & one group in Shelton for the Self-Help Ownership Program
- Collaboration with City of Poulsbo on Nordic Cottages, a new affordable housing development consisting of eight 1-bedroom homes
- Collaboration with City of Port Orchard on owner-occupied rehab program
- Development on new plat in Port Orchard for the Self-Help Program
- \*\*\*\*\*
- Staff retention/capacity
- Lack of capital funding for development of affordable housing
- Lack of buildable land for affordable housing development
- Resident cooperation/compliance. Heather said as landlords to the residents of their properties, HK must work through all the regulations for eviction when it comes to that. WA state is very tenant-friendly.

### **BHA's Strategic Goals:**

Focus on listening to & caring for their residents & program participants; Focus on cultivating relationships with the community, their partners & landlords; Focus on strengthening their financial position; Focus on building their organizational capacity. BHA is looking to grow, with lots of projects in process. They recently hired a DEI specialist.

### **HK's Strategic Goals:**

Review financial mechanisms currently in place & determine best approach for long term sustainability; Re-integrate the HCV program into HK operations; Rehabilitate developments as identified in the Capital needs assessment (requiring lots of funding); Develop additional affordable housing & also programs for residents. HK was historically concentrated on development. Fiscal difficulties necessitated a step back, but HK is now looking to create more affordable housing.

**Community organizations & individuals can help BHA & HK by:** being an advocate for these PHAs, sharing with family & friends about their mission, reaching out to landlords we know, looking for opportunities to support housing stability, volunteering with HK's Self-Help Housing program (applications are available on their website).

We are very appreciative that Jill and Heather agreed to take time out of their Saturday to speak to us about the important work they do. Our community is so fortunate to have these Housing Authority professionals with their years of experience & wide-ranging knowledge of all the complexities & issues involved. It is obvious that they are deeply committed to their mission. Many thanks to you both for all you do each day for our community.

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**NEXT UNIT MEETING (NOTE THE DATE CHANGE):**

**Saturday, February 25 10am-Noon @ United Way & via Zoom**

This will be an important Consensus meeting following a 2-year LWVWA study on The Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy.

A statewide briefing on the study will be held via Zoom Saturday, January 21 10am-11:30am via Zoom. You can register @ <https://lwvwa.org/event-5090197>

**DEMOCRACY LOBBY WEEK IS FEBRUARY 6-10: (from the 1/15/2023 LWVWA**

**Legislative Newsletter:**

[Register now](#) for Democracy Lobby Week, February 6-10. The virtual program will be deep and wide, and will include a number of our Issue Chairs. Take advantage of this opportunity to meet with your legislators to discuss our priority legislation. You'll be with other members of your Legislative District. It's a great way to participate in our state government, and to develop a relationship with your representatives and senators. We'll have a panel of legislators on Monday, Feb. 6th, opening evening. The detailed schedule will be on our [website](#) this week.

Recorded by Candy Rankin