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DATE: August 10, 2023

SUBJECT: RRHA Responds to Public Comments/Feedback on the
2023-24 Annual Agency Plan Submission

Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority welcomes and appreciates your feedback to the RRHA 2023 - 24 Annual Agency Plan. We are open to all suggestions and feedback that enables us to do a better job of serving our families. Per the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines, we will take into consideration all suggestions and comments that we receive prior to RRHA's submission of our final plan.

While not required, RRHA chooses to respond to the concerns raised in the letters and correspondence received regarding our Annual Plan submission. We have taken the time to address every point raised, in order to provide clarity and understanding and offer insight into any and all misconceptions and mischaracterizations about our Agency.

RRHA exists to administer safe, clean, and decent affordable housing to the families that reside in RRHA's communities. RRHA operates within the financial, regulatory, and programmatic constraints established by our governing agency, HUD. It is also worth noting that RRHA is open and receptive to meeting and/or partnering with organizations, agencies and individuals that have viable plans, ideas, and resources to improve the lives of RRHA families.

Please find RRHA's response to each concern raised below in "blue". We sincerely hope this will help correct the various inaccuracies and untruths held by some.

Dear Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority Board Members,

1. We need redevelopment of public housing that preserves 1-for-1 replacement of all public housing rentals with respect to quantity of rentals, family size, and affordability for all incomes.

- Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority has and will continue to fully comply with all of the regulations of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as it relates to one for one replacement.
- Further, Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority offers public housing families living in public housing communities that are being revitalized not just a comparable replacement home, but a voice, a choice and ultimately, a home.

VOICE - Public housing residents get a voice by providing their input in the Tenant Bill of Rights, a legally binding document that is prepared and signed by the RRHA CEO, Richmond City Mayor and City Council officials *prior* to any redevelopment activities. Additionally, families are able to provide input and feedback as they participate in planning meetings with the developer, city officials and other stakeholders about what they would like to see in the new revitalized community.

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- **CHOICE** - They have a choice, based on eligibility, of a tenant protection voucher, an off-site project-based voucher, or the right to return to the newly transformed community once it is complete. Our research shows that RRHA families overwhelmingly want vouchers to leave public housing. Additionally, if they need more time for eligibility they can move into another available RRHA housing unit, while they are completing the eligibility process. This ultimately results in a **HOME**.

2. **The current plans may actually be reducing the amount of rentals available to extremely low income families and sending the poorest families in our community to the streets.**

- RRHA's redevelopment and revitalization plans are made with the number of **public housing residents** that live in the community that is undergoing revitalization. This is a requirement by our HUD regulatory agency and also informs how HUD funds specific projects.

It is important to note that of the 25 percent poverty level in the city of Richmond, not all of these live in public housing. RRHA only has a portion of those low-income families in the entire city and our responsibility first and foremost is to the families that reside in our communities. Our funding, resources, planning and development is to assist those specific families.

3. **As a member of this community, I believe that it is our collective responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to safe, affordable housing. It is unacceptable (to me) that our most vulnerable neighbors are being left behind in the current redevelopment plans.**

- RRHA takes seriously our responsibility of providing safe, clean and affordable housing to the families that live within our public housing communities. It is our mission. RRHA's redevelopment plans are inclusive of the low-income families that we serve and are made with their participation, feedback and input in mind.

4. **I urge you to take a closer look at your policies and consider ways to increase the availability of affordable rentals for extremely low-income families. I believe that this is not only a moral imperative but also a necessary step towards building a more equitable and prosperous city for all.**

- RRHA welcomes responsive and responsible strategies, resources, and partnerships to fulfill demands to build as many brick and mortar units as the marketplace can bear. Our Agency is open and receptive to meeting and/or partnering with organizations, agencies and individuals that have viable plans, ideas, and resources to improve the lives of RRHA families by increasing the availability of affordable housing for our public housing families and voucher holders.

5. **Benefits of minors benefits being factored into total household income to determine rent & property value decrease versus Rental Price Increases.**

According to CFR 5.609(b) and (c) - Earned (employment) income of minors is not counted towards rent calculation. Unearned (amounts received from social security) income is counted towards rent calculation.



6. **Revitalization to senior building not being addressed**
RRHA's CEO, together with his management team, are in the process of making individual visits to all Senior sites to address immediate concerns. Additionally, all Senior sites provided a low, medium and high priority list to the Real Estate team. This will be used to create a plan to address each of the issues cited.
7. **Public Safety, uninhabitable living conditions for Senior communities being left out of Admin Plan.**
Within the very near future, RRHA CEO Steven Nesmith will announce an initiative to provide resources and services for all RRHA senior communities. Some steps that RRHA has taken regarding senior safety are as follows:
 1. Public Safety representatives have attended and will continue to attend senior site tenant meetings to gain the resident's perspective on issues.
 2. Cameras for senior facilities will be transitioned from the family sites (the Big Six) to the senior sites. One camera from each family site will be moved to a senior site and placed in the most advantageous location to provide the best measure of security.
 3. Measures to provide on-site security personnel are being researched as part of the overall security proposal for the family sites.
8. **Mixed income communities provide an imbalance of housing for low-income people.** The research shows definite advantages of low-income residents living in mixed income communities. They include: The promotion of economic diversity and the attraction of further investment into communities, better access to schools and safety for low-income residents, higher property values, improved access to transportation and more retail options, and the expansion of social networks. Studies that underscore these points are:
 1. The Urban Institute's Metropolitan Housing and Communities Center "Effects from Living in Mixed Income Communities for Low-Income Families (Nov. 2010)
<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/27116/412292-Effects-from-Living-in-Mixed-Income-Communities-for-Low-Income-Families.PDF>
 2. National Housing Conference Policy Guide – Nexus "Common Incentives and Offsets in Mixed-Income Housing <https://nhc.org/policy-guide/mixed-income-housing-the-basics/common-incentives-and-offsets-in-mixed-income-housing/>
 3. MacArthur Foundation - How Housing Matters "Mixed Income Neighborhood Expand Social Networks and Benefit Health https://www.macfound.org/media/files/hhm_brief_-_mixed-income_neighborhoods_expand_social_networks_benefit_health.pdf
9. **Shortage of maintenance workers**
RRHA is in the midst of a robust hiring campaign to address the issue of shortages among all staff, particularly maintenance workers. Under the leadership of our current CEO, vacancies among maintenance personnel have been cut drastically.
10. **Affordable rentals for extremely low-income families whose salaries are less than 30%**
As part of RRHA's mission, the Agency continues to look for opportunities to expand public housing. Some recent examples include:



- Grace Place Apartments in downtown Richmond – RRHA purchased the building to keep it as an affordable housing asset.
- Announcement of RRHA’s Homeownership Initiative for public housing residents and voucher holders is in the process of being finalized to include partnerships with several mortgage lending institutions and non-profit agencies to offer a variety of benefits. This initiative will be rolled out in the fourth quarter of 2023 and will also address the supply side of affordable housing for public housing residents and voucher holders.

11. Residents should be notified of the agency plan in an organized manner and given the opportunity to understand it and comment on it.

Below is a timeline of the platforms, means and methods that RRHA utilized to reach out to RRHA families, partners, stakeholders and others in the public domain to ensure awareness of the public comment period, and also provide options for participation in the process. RRHA began outreach on March 30, 2023 providing more than the required 45 days for the public to review and offer comments. The public comment period ended Friday, May 19, 2023.

RRHA Timeline of Outreach/Engagement

- ***Tuesday, January 24, 2023***- Met with Legal Aid Advocacy groups to include members of Central Virginia Legal Aid, Legal Aid Justice Center and the Virginia Poverty Law Center (*Attendees included Omari Al-Qadaffi, Louisa Rich, Steven Fischbach, Kateland Woodcock, Brenda Hicks, Kenyatta Green – RRHA SVP Affordable Housing, Alicia Garcia – RRHA VP of Real Estate & Community Development and Calandra Trotter – Assistant VP of Compliance and Tonise Webb, RRHA Associate Counsel*)
- ***Tuesday, February 7, 2023*** - RRHA met with the Resident Advisory Board (RAB) to provide an in-depth overview of RRHA’s Annual Plan submission and to get feedback on the proposed plan content. As required by HUD, the RAB is made up of representatives from the Low-Income Public Housing Resident councils and the Housing Choice Voucher Program so that they have the information to communicate to the families they represent.
- ***Wednesday, March 29, 2023***– Email blast of the Public Notice flyer to all public housing residents and housing choice voucher participants that the Agency has current emails for.
- ***Wednesday, March 29, 2023*** – Posted on RRHA’s Calendar of Events page on RRHA’s website. <https://www.rrha.com/calendar/>
- ***Thursday, March 30, 2023*** – Richmond Free Press. Ran Public Notice announcing the public comment period and two public meeting sessions scheduled for May 18.
- ***Thursday, March 30, 2023***- RRHA posted the Annual Plan, Administrative Plan for RRHA’s Housing Choice Voucher program, and the Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy for low-income public housing on its website for public review. <https://www.rrha.com/about/reports-plans/> (*clickable link*)
- ***Thursday, March 30, 2023*** - Distributed and posted flyers in all RRHA property management offices, and building common areas.



- **Monday, April 3, 2023** - Posted flyer on RRHA social media
Facebook - (Facebook 46 engagements)
Instagram – (7 Likes)
Twitter - (75 Impressions, 3 Engagements)
- **May 8, 2023** - Mailed Flyers in rental statements to all RRHA public housing families.
- **May 17, 2023** – Reposted public notice flyer on RRHA’s social media platforms
Facebook (512 Impressions, 488 Post reach, 30 Post Engagement)
Linkedin (89 impressions, 2 impressions, 2 clicks)
Twitter (134 Impressions, 2 Engagements)

