



## OBSERVER CORPS REPORT

**MARBLEHEAD HOUSING AUTHORITY** – September 17, 2024

Hybrid Meeting

LWV Observer – Cathy Marie Michael

Board members present: Jenn Schaeffner, Chair, Jean Eldridge, Bill Kuker, Kristin duBay Horton. Cathy Hoog, Executive Director

### **20 Minute Public Comment Period:**

Tenant Elaine McGrath read two pages of comments about the MHA Annual Plan (AP)/Capital Improvement Plan. Ms. McGrath's comments are summarized here and included in full at the end of this report:

- The Board did not meet with the Informal Tenant Organization (ITO) this year to discuss the 100-page Annual Plan
- The AP does not reflect multiple tenant suggestions and requests made over the past year at board meetings
- Tenants' requests such as the need for more maintenance staff and work order requests have been deferred and ignored
- Tenants believe that independent contractors are being brought in at a higher cost than doing the work with in-house maintenance staff. If they had more staff, they could do more for far less money. The current maintenance staff were highly praised for all the work they do.
- Carpets on 2nd, 3rd and 4th floor of Roads School are stained and have not had a deep cleaning for 8 years.
- The elevator was down for over a month this summer. This discussion of the elevator took up the majority of the August 27th board meeting but was only one sentence in the Board's minutes. Questions have not been answered regarding numerous expenses and the continual breakdown of the relatively new elevator.

Other tenants' comments:

- One tenant wanted to know what the capital plan is. She too asked for more maintenance staff.
- Another tenant at Farrell Court voiced concerns about the uneven pavement because it's much too easy to trip.
- A male tenant thought he was unfairly ticketed for parking on Roads School crosswalk for 20 minutes.
- Another tenant expressed concerns that Broughton Rd property, which is owned by MHA is being sold to a for profit developer for too little.

## **Cathy Hoog Report**

- Maintenance - 201 work orders
- 11 vacancies now, 50 new applications
- New pilot program with Salem Food Pantry, SFP will visit 2 different sites 1x each per month, Free food to all MHA residents.
- State has guidelines for amount of maintenance staff allowed, but there is wiggle room

## **Update on Winn Developer Status at Broughton Road from Emily on Zoom**

- Winn is the only bid that came in on time.
- The Board has not yet made the designation, as required in the agreement because Winn has not attended any Board Sessions, nor answered many of our questions.
- Jenn Schaeffner asked for another Board meeting in 2 weeks

**Water Expense** Bill Kuker suggested that \$26 thousand dollars seems very high. How can we cut it?

**Next meeting:** October 15, tentatively scheduled at HS library -  
5:30pm Meet and Greet with Kristen, new board member  
6pm Board meeting

## **\*Report of Tenant Elaine McGrath presented at September 17<sup>th</sup> MHA meeting\***

Since 2021, members of the ITO have reviewed the Annual Plans, filed detailed comments and met with Cathy Hoog to review the Plan before she presented it to the MHA Board for approval. I copied the Board and Cathy on my questions and comments today. The ITO did not meet with Cathy this year.

Many of the comments have been disregarded year-to-year - even errors such as MHA hours have not been corrected; other suggestions such as numbering pages to make discussion easier have been answered with promises to take the suggestion "under consideration" next year.

The detailed comments and questions that make for a clean, accurate document and that reflect the concerns and input of tenants are an effort by tenants to work with the MHA and Board to improve conditions and ensure the safe, decent and sanitary environment public housing residents have a right to. The MHA Board and EOHLC also have a right to accurate information, in order to know what the conditions are at the MHA, address problems and evaluate the performance of the administration.

I would like to highlight a few important points about the draft AP2025:

### **Inaccuracies/omissions**

The AP does not reflect the information provided by tenants in numerous Board meetings on various issues.

The MHA report of “no” deferred W.O.’s is inconsistent with the reports by tenants of W.O.’s that go unaddressed for weeks, months or even beyond.

Most of the preventive maintenance tasks for common areas inside and out of the building are not done year to year. If they are deferred, why don’t they show up in the deferred W.O. report?

The Maintenance Plan Narrative response to “DHCD” questions does not mention that the repainting of the common spaces at the Roads School, for example, has been the responsibility of one maintenance man who also takes care of the building and grounds. Given his numerous duties and despite his hard work, the painting has been sporadic since spring 2024 and is unfinished.

The carpets on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors of the RS are stained and there has only been one deep cleaning in the 8+ years I’ve lived there; furniture in the upstairs common areas is stained and dirty.

However, the MHA knows how to refurbish spaces; the complete redo of the MHA office this year included professional painting over 4 weekends; new furniture; new floors; and even new curtains. Tenants, however, live in spaces that haven’t been freshened up in many years, even decades, and many common areas are deteriorating.

### **Tenant Requests for Capital Projects: where are they?**

This year, at a tenant’s request, the MHA agreed to distribute the 2-page Mel King Institute survey for tenants about annual plan issues. There was no deadline, the MHA mentioned that it was voluntary, and the summary provided at the August 2024 Board meeting did not include all of the tenant suggestions organized under the 4 categories of the survey.

For example, the AP makes no mention of additional maintenance staff at the MHA. At the same time, there are significant contract costs to supplement our 5-man maintenance staff. Because so many of the comments and complaints at Board meetings have to do with an overworked, understaffed maintenance department, why not address how to add maintenance staff?

If the statements of the MHA administration about the importance of tenant input and collaboration are sincere, then tenant information and suggestions need to be reflected in the Annual Plan. Otherwise, it leads to cynicism and lack of engagement by tenants, and a lost opportunity to work effectively together.

### **Request to the MHA Board**

The Board has been made aware, even in the 20-minute Tenant Comment periods, of the inaccuracies and omissions in some MHA reports (see also the problems with recordkeeping highlighted and marked for Corrective Action in the EOHLC comments regarding CHAMP), and of the longstanding need to address chronic problems, such as lack of adequate maintenance staff, mold, the need for better tenant/MHA communication and for MHA initiative on creative funding and staffing solutions.

While the Board does not have direct responsibility for the day-to-day management of the MHA, it does have power over the budget and policies and the best opportunity to ask hard questions and get answers on behalf of tenants, since our time to ask questions and offer information are severely limited by the Board. Tenants rely on the

Board to represent our interests, and to ensure that the Annual Plan is accurate and reflects tenants' interests. Thank you for your attention to this.

Elaine McGrath  
Roads School