

**REAL ESTATE & HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, April 14, 2021**

**3:00 pm**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Call to Order**

Danita Nias, subcommittee co-chair, called the meeting to order at 3:12 pm. Tiffany David, of the City of West Palm Beach Mayor's Office, took attendance of participants for the meeting record. Kayla Elson, of Justice & Sustainability Associates, introduced Danita Nias, the new co-chair of the Real Estate & Housing Subcommittee. She is taking over former subcommittee co-chair Bradley Hurlburt's position. Danita Nias gave a few opening words. Kayla Elson also introduced Milena Almetica, of Justice & Sustainability Associates, she will be observing the meeting and taking notes. Kayla Elson reviewed the agenda.

**March Meeting Minutes**

No comments were made about the March meeting minutes; the meeting minutes were unanimously approved as distributed.

**Panel: Affordable Housing & Homeownership in West Palm Beach**

Tiffany David introduced the three guest speakers. The first to speak was Ms. Mercedes Rodas, the Director of Housing Financial Services at the Housing Authority in West Palm Beach. Ms. Rodas then gave the floor to Ms. Maggie Perez, Executive Director, to describe what the Housing Financial Services does. Ms. Rodas said the Housing Authority provides homeownership education, the Housing Counseling Program, mortgage prevention assistance, and rental counseling, etc. They used the Merry Place Estates at Pleasant City as an example of their work. Danita Nias asked how homebuyers can get involved with these processes and properties. Ms. Rodas responded that once a buyer completes a one-hour orientation, they receive an application package to become income certified and from there, they are referred to several properties to see if they want to do a reservation. Parisa Hamzetash, subcommittee member, asked if the Housing Authority is a government entity or third-party entity. The Housing Authority was created through a state act, so they're quasi-governmental.

The second guest speaker, Mr. Ontario Davis Johnson introduced himself. Mr. Johnson is the community organizer for the organization Neighborhood Renaissance. The Neighborhood Renaissance owns and operates 60 properties (single family homes, apartments, etc.) with a target audience on low-to-moderate income families. The



## Mayor's Task Force for Racial & Ethnic Equality

organization is focused on building brand new single-family homes. One of the challenges his organization encounters is empty/abandoned lots. Neighborhood Renaissance is trying to acquire these lots through the city or by themselves. The organization also takes community feedback on what they believe is needed to improve their community (grass, trees, gates, lighting, road surfacing etc.) and works on obtaining grants to support those ideas.

The third guest speaker, Mr. Craig Glover introduced himself. Mr. Glover is the Executive Director for RISE. RISE is a resident-driven and family assistance-based profit. The Northend area was chosen because of the intergenerational rate of poverty (1 in 3 households in poverty). RISE focuses on housing, education, and wellness at a family level. RISE has one on one conversations with families, gets to know the family, and asks how they can help the family. They're facilitators, so they look for partners who can connect families to resources. RISE is currently working on a comprehensive two-year strategic community improvement plan. RISE put the plan in survey form and received 400 responses from the community with feedback on how to set priorities for those living in the targeted area. RISE is also working on creating more quality affordable housing with a focus on renovating owner-occupied homes, particularly seniors. It also wants to convert vacant lots into affordable housing areas.

### Discussion

Tiffany David asked guest speakers for their thoughts about mixed used development as anchors of sustainable opportunities to close the wealth gaps. Mr. Glover responded that RISE follows a national housing model, and one of the pillars is a mixed-income housing pillar. Mr. Johnson commented that the city can provide support to residents by creating programs that will provide an avenue for people to grow financially. Ms. Rodas commented that the Housing Authority has a Family Self Sufficiency Program which focuses on education and career development. Ms. Rodas also said that there needs to be some type of education and working with folks from the ground up to teach them the basics of homeownership. Mr. Johnson added that many families were removed from the educational process because of redlining and other factors, so how can education missed by families be infused with money and the communities.

Ms. Perez agreed that the Mayor's office should continue doing the housing incentives they've done in the past and to get word out about education programs to help bridge these gaps. Parisa Hamzetash suggested outreach with the schools and incorporating this education at those stages. Danita Nias agreed. Tiffany David stated that the city is trying to build more affordable housing, but the challenge is that the demand is higher in terms of workforce housing and affordability. Mr. Glover suggested to relay information about government incentives/education opportunities through trustworthy sources. Zoning policies should be reviewed, and more money should be invested to help find partners to help out with these actions. The overall question the subcommittee had was



# Mayor's Task Force for Racial & Ethnic Equality

how to take the data/storytelling and merge those together for policy change and bringing in funding?

## Next steps

Tiffany David and Kayla Elson will get a sense of where the subcommittee stands and the status on a presentation from code enforcement. In addition, information around the Action Summit will be sent to subcommittee members, with a focus on support with advertisement.

## Adjournment

Antoinne Wright, subcommittee co-chair, thanked the guest speakers and welcomed Danita Nias again. Antoinne Wright adjourned the meeting at 4:30 pm. The next meeting will be on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021 at 3:30 pm on Zoom.

## ATTENDANCE

### Guest Speakers:

Mercedes Rodas - Director of Housing Financial Services at the Housing  
Maggie Perez - Executive Director, Housing Authority  
Ontario Davis Johnson - Community organizer for Neighborhood Renaissance  
Craig Glover - Executive Director, RISE

### Present:

Danita Nias, Subcommittee Co-Chair  
Antoinne Wright, Subcommittee Co-Chair

Ontario Davis Johnson, Subcommittee Member  
Parisa Hamzetash, Subcommittee Member  
Maricela Torres, Subcommittee Member  
Michael Odum, Subcommittee member

Tiffany David, City of West Palm Beach Mayor's Office  
Kayla Elson, Justice & Sustainability Associates  
Milena Almetica, Justice & Sustainability Associates  
Emma Lipsky, Justice & Sustainability Associates

### Absent:

Ezra Gene Saffold, Subcommittee Member