



**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY
FINAL OFFICIAL MINUTES
Naranja Lakes Community Redevelopment
Agency (CRA)
Special Workshop**

Naranja Neighborhood Center
13955 S.W. 264 Street
Miami, Florida

August 07, 2007
As Advertised

Harvey Ruvin, Clerk
Board of County Commissioners

Kay Madry Sullivan, Director
Clerk of the Board Division

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**CLERK'S SUMMARY AND OFFICIAL MINUTES
NARANJA LAKES
COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CRA)
AUGUST 07, 2007**

The Naranja Lakes Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Board convened in a special workshop session at the Naranja Neighborhood Center, 13955 S.W. 264th Street, Miami, Florida, at 6:00 p.m. on August 07, 2007; there being present upon roll call: Mr. Stuart Archer, Mr. Kenneth Forbes, Mr. Moe Hakssa and Mr. Rene Infante; (Chairperson Nina Betancourt, Mr. Daniel Lipe, Mr. Parsuram Ramkisson, and Ms. Volkert were absent); Mr. Jason Rodriguez, CRA Analyst, Office of Strategic Business Management (OSBM); and Deputy Clerk Jill Thornton.

I. Start of Special Workshop Meeting Call to Order

Mr. Forbes called the CRA Special Workshop to order at 6:24 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Upon roll call, the Board proceeded to consider tonight's agenda.

III. Introductions

Mr. Forbes recognized the following County staff member(s): Mr. Jason Rodriguez, CRA Analyst, OSBM, Sergeant Ozzie Hernandez, Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD), Cutler Ridge District; Ms. Unita Gustave, Aide to Commissioner Moss, District 9, and Mr. Steven Lewis, Attorney from Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.

Mr. Forbes noted the purpose of tonight's workshop was to obtain legal advice from the Legal Services of Greater Miami on tenant/landlord issues pertaining to the Villages of Naranja and Hidden Groves Apartments and to provide guidance to the tenants on how to address their concerns.

IV. Open Forum for Public Comments

Mr. Forbes opened the public hearing and the following persons appeared before the CRA and stated their concerns:

1. Ms. Gloria Johnson, 13830 SW 268th Street, Building #13, Apartment #102, expressed concern with the mistreatment of tenants by landlord/management company; with the late rent fee increased to \$75 and charged the third day of the month, rather than the 5th; with management not providing proper eviction notices; and with language barriers between management and tenants who did not speak/understand the Spanish language. Ms. Johnson spoke on behalf of tenant, Ms. Robinson, a single mother who received a notice demanding payment of \$439 but was not served a 3-day eviction notice.

Responding to Mr. Hakssa's question as to whether Ms. Robinson had paid rent in June, Ms. Johnson noted Ms. Robinson made a late rent payment for June; and management refused her payments for July and August.

Mr. Lewis, attorney from Legal Services of Greater Miami, explained the document Ms. Johnson referred to was a Writ of Possession, which gave the sheriff permission by the Court to remove a person from a property once a 3-day notice to pay or vacate was served; and the \$439 amount may be part of the attorney's flat rate fee charged for uncontested evictions. He noted the tenant should receive a 3-day eviction notice by mail, and an additional copy posted on the door as well. In the event the tenant failed to vacate by the third day, the landlord could file an eviction action in court. Mr. Lewis further noted that, assuming the complaint was received, a tenant had 5-days to file a response with the court, and deposit the amount of rent requested into the court registry.

Mr. Lewis noted the Court holds strictly to the requirement of the amount requested to be deposited in the court registry, or a tenant would not be afforded the opportunity to defend themselves. If the tenant disagreed with the amount requested in the Writ, the tenant could file with the Court a document contesting the amount and requesting the Court to decide the amount that should be deposited in the registry, he noted. Once this was done, the tenant would have the opportunity to settle the complaint by mediation or before the court. Mr. Lewis noted the importance of the tenant filing, as soon as possible, a written statement explaining they were not served with an eviction notice and requesting the writ of possession be set aside to allow the tenant time to resolve the issue and prevent the sheriff from removing his/her personal property.

Mr. Forbes identified for the record, Ms. Tangela Robinson, 13820 SW 268 Street, Building 4, Unit #104, as the subject defendant in the Writ of Possession they were discussing.

Mr. Archer noted that the management office should provide an English speaking person to communicate disputes properly with the tenants. He noted Ms. Johnson served as a spokesperson for tenants who lacked funds for legal representation and offered guidance to those who had difficulty understanding the process; and that the process needed to be simplified for them.

Mr. Lewis noted the only requirement was that management provide a staff person who speaks English adequately; that the tenants had the right to receive proper communication, and should be able to communicate with management; however, if the issue was that the staff spoke no English or an English speaking person was unavailable, then the tenants had a legitimate grievance towards the management company.

Mr. Infante suggested the CRA might be able to implement a hiring program that enticed business/management companies to hire English speaking workers from within the CRA district.

Ms. Johnson expressed an additional concern that adult tenants were prohibited from sitting out on their balconies, or from walking around the complex after dark. She noted that the lease contained no rules pertaining to curfews, and some kids had complained that the police were harassing them. She stated she understood the rationale for limiting children from being out after dark, but not for prohibiting the adult residents.

In response to Mr. Hakssa's question concerning whether the explanation of the police officer's behavior was based on the tenants safety, Ms. Johnson noted she was unaware of any incidents that had occurred since the new management company had taken over the project.

Responding to Mr. Hakssa's question whether Ms. Johnson had observed any improvements since the new management company had taken over the project, Ms. Johnson noted the pool had been

cleaned, the lawn was mowed and the garbage picked up. She noted the majority of improvements were outside and not to the interior of occupied units in need of repairs.

Mr. Forbes referred to a document provided at a previous CRA meeting that stated the property management company executed an agreement with the MDPD for off-duty policing from July through September to control vandalism; and that the MDPD's first response was to relieve the area of any perceived dangers. Mr. Forbes asked that the tenants be patient, and allow the police to learn the security issues within the area. He noted many of the issues were being addressed and the solutions were forthcoming, and asked Ms. Johnson to share this message among the tenants.

Ms. Johnson commended the police department for a good job done at protecting and securing the area, but noted her primary concern was with management not following the proper eviction process and charging tenants a \$75 late fee for overdue rent. She also noted the drainage in the area needed improving and cleaning to prevent flooding.

Mr. Forbes advised that many of the communities within the CRA district also had drainage problems, and the CRA would address this issue at the appropriate time.

2. Mr. Phillip Murray, 13248 SW 256th Street, noted he read language in the Miami Dade Housing Rental Regulatory Agreement document stating housing quality standards, as it related to issues still being resolved with the Villages of Naranja and the Hidden Grove Apartments. He noted the majority of the Villages of Naranja and the Hidden Grove Apartment units were not Section 8 units, and the primary issues involved health and safety, which the CRA could assist with. He asked who would monitor and ensure the new management company would comply with the standards, particularly concerning Section 8, which should have a local agency monitoring and inspecting the units; and asked who the tenants could report health and safety issues to and receive follow-up to prevent this from occurring again.

Mr. Forbes emphasized that the lack of oversight was a major concern; including the fact that the management company allowed the situation of deteriorating buildings to occur, and the agencies did not exert aggressive action to prevent it. He noted the CRA had a responsibility of oversight, and to see what transpired, and hopefully develop a solution to ensure this would not occur again under the CRA's watch.

Mr. Lewis advised that all Section 8 units were separately regulated by the Miami-Dade Housing Agency (MDHA) and inspected annually; which must pass a minimal level of health and safety conditions. He noted that if an inspector determines a violation, the owner would be given notice to correct it within a certain period of time; and if not corrected by the final inspection, MDHA would cease payment of the housing assistance subsidy and notify the tenant that they would need to move to another unit, since the owner had not corrected the conditions.

Regarding Tax Credit properties, Mr. Lewis noted the terms and conditions of the Department of Special Housing Program's Rental Regulatory Agreement specifically identified the process for a tenant to make a complaint, in the event that the landlord did not correct the health and safety issues. He also noted all parties within the agreement acknowledge that the Surtax and Loan Administration (SLA) within the Miami-Dade County Department of Special Housing Program shall act as a designee for the purpose of monitoring the agreement and that the landlord was obligated to comply

with this agreement. Regarding inspections, he noted a provision within this agreement existed to ensure that the property maintained a sanitary condition, and the SLA shall annually inspect the property, including all dwelling units and common areas to determine whether a sanitary condition was sustained; and provide the owners with a copy of the inspection results, with a 30 day deadline to correct any deficiencies or violations of the Miami-Dade County Housing Codes property standards. He noted a provision also existed for non-compliance, which may result in the owner forfeiting the tax credit.

Mr. Forbes noted the CRA brought this document to the attention of the Miami-Dade Housing Agency and distinguished between the Section 8 and the Tax Credit for owners. He noted Section 8 would just withhold the subsidy payment but Special Housing had the burden to prevent what occurred. He noted the tenants suffered because the agency allowed this situation to occur, and the CRA was trying to work through this issue to understand the process and ensure that tenants have a clean and safe place to live.

Mr. Murray commented that the rules and regulations in place should have prevented this situation from occurring. He noted the living conditions were deplorable and many tenants did not have a voice; and asking them to be patient would only fuel their frustrations.

Mr. Archer indicated that the CRA brought the issues to the surface through Channel 4 and The Miami Herald, but another effective channel would be for the tenants to voice their concerns with their District Commissioner.

Mr. Infante noted the CRA had a tremendous responsibility to improve these conditions, and to improve the CRA as a whole, but the process needed to start with the tenants, who could join their voices with the CRA to complain.

Mr. Lewis advised that voicing complaints of non-compliance to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) was also another effective avenue to explore, since these programs received funding from the Federal government.

Following Mr. Hakssa's comments that the CRA held advertised workshops for residents to voice their concerns, but many residents failed to appear at these meetings, Mr. Murphy stated that the residents failed to show because they felt their comments would fall on deaf ears, and they were told these issues would take time to resolve.

Mr. Forbes noted the Villages of Naranja faced a similar situation in 2001, prior to the establishment of the CRA, when Commissioner Moss convened a meeting between residents and some staff members from County agencies directly responsible. The result of that meeting, he noted, was for County staff and tenants to work out an agreement to improve the conditions, but after two additional meetings were held the County could never get the tenants involved. He reminded the tenants that the CRA only meets once a month, but they needed to commit some time to work with the CRA on addressing these issues.

3. Ms. Minnie Williams, 13920 SW 268th Street, Building 9, expressed appreciation to the CRA for the changes initiated at the Villages of Naranja, and asked whether the CRA neighborhood workshops would no longer be conducted. She expressed concern with faulty electricity in her unit that caused lights to dim and flicker, and asked whether residents were

suppose to notify FPL or maintenance regarding this issue. She also expressed concern with deteriorated mailboxes in need of repair; and that she has to drive to Princeton to receive her mail. She stated she notified the Post Office and received conflicting information from the Post Office and the management company regarding who was responsible for maintaining/repairing the mailboxes. She stated she did not mind being patient as long as they would communicate with the tenants.

Mr. Hakssa clarified that tonight's workshop was the last public workshop to address tenant concerns at Villages of Naranja, but not the last NLCRA meeting.

Mr. Infante noted it seemed that someone from the County's Building Department should visit the location and provide proper direction concerning this matter.

Mr. Archer noted that MDHA was responsible overall, and the management company or the Post Master of Homestead was responsible for repairing those mailboxes; and that an electrician should check the faulty wires to ensure these conditions were corrected.

Mr. Lewis noted Team Metro could handle this, particularly if it was unsafe and presented a health issue. He also noted the owner could receive a hefty fine from Team Metro, if not corrected.

Ms. Unita Gustave, Aide to Commissioner Moss, noted she would be responsible for notifying Team Metro and asked Ms. Williams to provide her with the pertinent information at the conclusion of tonight's workshop.

Mr. Infante questioned whether the CRA could assign and address these issues with a County Department. He noted Commissioner Moss certainly had the authority to mandate the MDHA to conduct a meeting on a monthly basis with the tenants to resolve the issues expeditiously.

Mr. Forbes stated his preference was for the CRA to receive all reports requested in order to understand this process entirely and then make their recommendations to the Commissioners.

Mr. Archer noted he believed the Miami-Dade County's Building Department or the Fire Department needed to inspect the complex for safety, given the issues with faulty wiring.

Mr. Lewis concurred that both the MDHA's Section 8 Division and Team Metro could be contacted regarding the electrical issues and the owner could be fined by Team Metro for non-compliance, but agreed that Section 8 would only withhold the subsidy payment.

Ms. Williams concurred with Ms. Johnson's concerns regarding language barriers and the tenants' inability to communicate with the new management company. She also noted she reported to the property management company that she could hear water running within the bathroom wall, although she had not observed any leakages.

In response to Mr. Jason Rodriguez' request that Ms. Williams provide her Unit # for the record, so that staff could following up with her concerns, Ms. Williams noted for the record that she lived in unit #105, Building #9.

Responding to Mr. Rodriguez' question regarding whether the new management company had inspected her unit to observe the electrical conditions, Ms. Williams noted both a representative from Section 8 Division and the new management company had inspected her unit but not for electrical issues. She also noted they observed some things in need of repair and the carpet needed to be cleaned.

Mr. Forbes advised Ms. Williams to contact Section 8 Division and file a compliant regarding her inability to receive mail at the complex due to damaged mailboxes. He stated he believed that if the Post Office notified the owner regarding the condition of the mailboxes, than the management company was responsible for fixing them.

Mr. Hakssa stated he personally would offer his assistance to Ms. Williams to contact Section 8 and the Post Office on her behalf and notify them of the situation.

4. Mr. Derrick Lester, 26725 SW 135th Avenue, Naranja, noted he was the founder and president of the Hard Knocks Foundation that served to steer youth away from crime, and assisted in preparing them for the FCAT and SAT exams, at no cost. He further noted he recently had an opportunity to take some kids from the Naranja area on a trip to California to expose them to other colleges/areas. He expressed appreciation to Mr. Hakssa for donating tee shirts to these kids for this event, and to Commissioner Moss for his financial support of this cause. He stated he was present tonight to learn more about the CRA, its geographical parameters, and to introduce his Foundation to the CRA and to see what support the CRA could provide for these kids.

Mr. Forbes advised Mr. Lester that the CRA members could not discuss or make decisions regarding any funding proposals at a workshop, but suggested he speak with Mr. Jason Rodriguez to share his proposal and organization information, so that Jason could schedule a time for him to make a presentation at a regular NLCRA meeting.

Sergeant Ozzie Hernandez addressed the concerns of Ms. Williams and Mr. Murray regarding accountability. He noted Mandarin Lakes faced a similar situation with Castle Management, which lacked the stage for the Home Owners Association (HOA) and community to meet and address concerns on a monthly basis. He noted many of the issues could be addressed between management and the tenants if they would set up a monthly forum at a location on site at the Villages of Naranja. He noted people needed to coordinate and put pressure on management to make them accountable when the issues were brought before them. He noted the HOA could meet with the tenants and the management company on a monthly basis to address minor issues through mediation and if outside funding was required, the tenants could come before the CRA. Sergeant Hernandez noted the community needed to come together to support monthly meetings, and the Police Department would support this effort as well, but it would take someone from the community to initiate this effort.

Mr. Infante pointed out that the Villages of Naranja and Hidden Grove Apartments only had a management company, and not an HOA.

Following discussion, Mr. Infante requested that each CRA member send Mr. Jason Rodriguez recommendations on how to deal with the Villages of Naranja and Hidden Grove Apartment issues for discussion to make final recommendations.

Mr. Forbes noted he was advised that some of the information requested had been delayed due to the budget cuts and the reorganizing/merging of the Miami Dade Housing Agency. He noted the CRA members should receive an update at the next regular NLCRA meeting and could make recommendations at that time.

On behalf of the CRA, Mr. Archer thanked every person present tonight, and tenants for coming out to share their concerns.

V. Setting of Next Workshop Date

Responding to Mr. Forbes question directed at Sergeant Hernandez regarding whether the police department was ready to present a general overview of last year's community policing progress, Sergeant Hernandez noted the only change needed in this year's proposed budget from last year's budget was a 4% adjustment to reflect a cost of living increase in police salaries.

Mr. Forbes noted the CRA wanted information from the MDPD regarding the following: social economic issues, police enhancements and input on what contributed to the crime.

Sergeant Hernandez questioned whether the CRA wanted an overview of statistical community policing; projects completed for the year, and how the empowerment team could be applied to the existing program. He noted the empowerment team differed from enforcement in that it required more resources and man hours, and was a whole different level of policing as compared to making daily contacts and working with community and businesses leaders to conduct community fairs.

Mr. Infante noted the CRA just wanted to be informed of the police department's vision of what the empowering team entailed, and what the police had done in other communities.

Mr. Jason Rodriguez expounded that the police overview should be a tangible report that the CRA could review, which specifically states what the police department's vision was for the upcoming year so that the CRA could assess whether to implement any enhancements when considering next year's budget. Mr. Rodriguez also advised that the three members assigned to the CRA's Budget Committee needed to schedule a workshop meeting in the week of August 20th to discuss the upcoming budget.

Mr. Forbes announced that the next NLCRA Special Workshop would be held on September 4, 2007, at the South Dade Government Center, at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the MDPD community policing.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the CRA, the Special Workshop session adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Kenneth Forbes, Acting Chairperson
Naranja Lakes Community Redevelopment Agency