



FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE STUDY SESSION

RE: American Rescue Act Funding

County of Champaign, Urbana, Illinois

Monday, August 31, 2021 – *6:00 P.M. *PLEASE NOTE TIME

Shields-Carter Meeting Room/Zoom

Brookens Administrative Center

1776 East Washington Street, Urbana, Illinois

MINUTES – Approved as Distributed on November 9, 2021

Members Present:	Samantha Carter, Lorraine Cowart, Aaron Esry, Stan Harper, Mary King, Jenny Lokshin, Jim McGuire, Chris Stohr, Jennifer Straub, Steve Summers, Eric Thorsland, Kyle Patterson
Members Physically Present:	Stephanie Fortado
Members Absent:	Jim Goss, Diane Michaels, Brad Passalacqua, Jacob Paul, Emily Rodriguez, Leah Taylor, Jodi Wolken
Others Present:	Darlene Kloeppel (County Executive), Kathy Larson (ARPA Project Manager), Lisa Benson (RPC – Community Services Director), Megan Robison (Recording Secretary)

Agenda Items

I. Call to Order

Chair Fortado called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

II. *Roll Call

A verbal roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

III. Approval of Agenda

MOTION by Ms. Straub to approve the agenda; seconded by Ms. Cowart. Upon roll call vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

IV. Public Participation

Hrant Kebantsi, Urbana resident, spoke about the rent burden on the community and the upcoming end to the eviction moratorium. He urges the Board to take local action to protect the community against eviction.

Marlon Mitchell, Champaign resident, shared his experiences with housing in the community. He has seen an influx of individuals looking for housing.

Alex Taylor, PhD student, is asking the Board to cease all evictions in our community. He believes this will only exacerbate the current problems. He thinks it would be best to fund programs that provide permanent shelter to help fight criminality and poverty.

Nathan Alexander, Urbana resident and representative of University LGBT Resource Center, wanted to bring to light there are other minority populations that do not have equal access to assistance. It may be necessary for these programs to increase access to other minority populations.

Mike Ingram reminded everyone about a scam letter that is going around to extort money from homeowners. These records are free or low-cost within your local Recorder of Deeds Office. He also gave details about propertyfraud.com that will alert people about any records that come through his office in their name.

The Board suspended the rules during discussion to give someone, that arrived late, the opportunity for public participation. Linda Reynolds, Urbana resident, stated she has been involved with groups that help with rent control issues. She emphasized how important it is to have safe affordable housing and to feel safe in your community. She knows there are a lot of non-profits in our community that really know what they are doing. She requested for the County Board to invest in video surveillance for a safer community.

V. Communications

Ms. Fortado mentioned the City of Champaign's study session tonight about the infrastructure in Garden Hills and the County Board's water infrastructure study session on September 9th. She also let everyone know that they plan to allow the elected officials some space to speak about their requests in a future meeting.

Mr. Thorsland explained that they have cancelled the ELUC meeting to allow more time for the ELUC Study Session regarding water infrastructure.

Mr. McGuire stated we may want to get updated information from the City of Champaign about their plans for Garden Hills.

Ms. King stated the City of Champaign is still in the decision-making process for the Garden Hills infrastructure and they do not have any plans, yet.

VI. Discussion – Affordable Housing

Ms. Fortado introduced the speakers for tonight's topic of affordable housing and what they will be presenting to the Board. The speakers will be Lily Walton, Lisa Benson, Danielle Chynoweth, Andy Quarnstrom, Clark Solutions and the Central Illinois Land Bank.

Ms. Walton, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of Champaign County, shared a presentation that gave background information about their programs and some of the work that they are currently doing. She shared some uses for ARPA funds and how they would benefit the community.

Ms. King asked Ms. Walton to expand on the idea of supporting local landlords. Ms. Walton explained the landlords are struggling financially, as well. Support for them could include intervention programs for renters or incentives for the landlords to take on the more traditionally risky renters. Mr. Patterson asked how often the HACC has seen landlords discriminate against voucher holders. Ms. Walton said they definitely don't have enough landlords willing to take renters who have vouchers. She would really like to see source of income protections in Champaign County or throughout the whole state, so the landlords are not able to discriminate against voucher holders.

Ms. Carter asked about Bristol Place, the rent to own program. Ms. Walton explained the program is still underdevelopment and too new to see an impact. She also explained exactly how the program works. Ms. Lokshin asked about the mixed-income model in this neighborhood and how that is working. Ms. Walton said it is working very well at both locations where they use this model.

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Mr. McGuire asked how to get emergency housing for homeless and housing for those going through the Re-entry program. He also asked how people are being helped to apply for the rental assistance and if they have any figures to show how many people in Champaign County are at risk for being evicted. Ms. Walton stated that all emergency housing requests would need to go through the Continuum of Service Providers for the Homeless. She explained they do not have any programs to directly refer people to the HACC for vouchers but the best way to receive vouchers would be to refer individuals to First Followers. To answer Mr. McGuire's additional questions, Ms. Walton stated she does not have figures for evictions in Champaign County but assured the Board that the HACC does help their clients find and apply for assistance.

Mr. Summers asked if the Youth Build Program is affiliated or engaged with the local trade unions. Ms. Walton said they are beginning the conversations with the local trades on how to make this program a little more robust. Mr. Stohr asked about their programs to refurbish the older homes. Ms. Walton explained they are using their Youth Build Program to bring life back to these older homes.

After suspending the rules to allow a public participant to share comment, Ms. Fortado introduced the next presentation from the Regional Planning Commission. Ms. Benson, Community Services Director, began by listing some assistance programs they have in the community, but stated she has come to speak specifically about the emergency rent assistance program. She gave background information about this program, qualifications for the program and details of assistance provided to-date. Ms. Benson also mentioned that she believes there is a need to use funds for internet access and risk mitigation for landlords.

Ms. Carter asked if the landlords are complying with the requirements for the tenants to receive assistance and the threshold for the poverty level requirements. Ms. Benson explained they have ways to pay the tenants directly, but they try to work with the landlords before going that route. She also explained that most programs assist people with an income of up to 200% of the poverty level but there are some that will drop back down to their pre-COVID levels on October 1st.

Mr. McGuire asked about the reporting requirements and expanding on the risk mitigation suggestion. Ms. Benson explained they are constantly recording and reporting data and the types of data they collect. She also stated that she does not have a lot of information about the risk mitigation, but they are looking into ideas for this.

Ms. Fortado asked why the Hispanic/Latino population was not provided in the race statistics and wanted to make sure there isn't a disconnect with that group in our community. Ms. Benson explained that she did not pull all of the data into her presentation, but they do have resources available to help that community receive the rental assistance.

Ms. Chynoweth, Cunningham Township Supervisor, shared the Township's 2020 statistics and some of the services they provided to the community. She encourages the Board to collaborate with the City's to develop ideas for the housing needs in the community. She also shared the current needs, some of the data to support those needs and things that need to be done to prevent homelessness in our community.

Mr. McGuire asked about the open housing within the County and if the vouchers would be able to pay for rent for that housing. He also asked, if tenants are not paying their rent then how are we going to safeguard the income for these landlords that are not receiving rent. Ms. Chynoweth encouraged everyone to look at the amount given for the vouchers. She believes the voucher payments are very reasonable for our area. For the assistance to landlords, she pointed out that landlords had an opportunity to apply for assistance from the government specifically for them along with the ability to help their tenants apply for rental assistance.

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Ms. Fortado asked about the people that have vouchers and are unable to find housing and if there is a current waitlist for vouchers. Ms. Chynoweth explained that there is so much discrimination against people with vouchers. This discrimination must end before change can happen. She also stated there is a waitlist for vouchers and it is estimated that only 1 in 5 people, that qualify, actually receive vouchers.

Ms. Fortado explained that Mr. Quarnstrom had to leave the meeting due to another commitment, but he would be sharing his slides with the Board. She extended her apologies for this.

Byron Clark, President of Clark Solutions, and Craig Walker, Project Supervisor of Clark Solutions, presented their plan: Homes for Homeless Families. They explained their plan, statistics to support the need for this plan, how it would work and their proposal for the County to use 5% of the ARPA funds for their plan.

Mike Davis, Executive Director of the Central Illinois Land Bank, shared his background in the affordable housing field. He also shared his approach for the communities, funding that is available for his work, his proposal to use \$500,000 of ARPA funding for homeowner-occupied rehab projects and ways to sustain funding for this work. He believes this is an opportunity to drive significant resources to the rural areas of the County where people may feel left out of grant opportunities. Mr. Davis also detailed some of the pilot programs they are currently running.

Ms. Fortado began the discussion with Clark Solutions and the Central Illinois Land Bank. She asked both groups, does your budget account for the prevailing wage requirement for these funds, are you thinking about how to keep the work local and using this as a pathway into construction trades for underrepresented populations. Mr. Walker explained how they came up with their original budget, that they did take the Davis-Bacon Act into consideration and that they do plan to incorporate programs like Youth Build or the Swift Program to connect the community to their projects. Mr. Davis explained that many communities are already doing the work he is proposing, everything he does must be prevailing wage, and he has an open-ended request for qualifications for contractors.

Mr. Stohr asked if they have considered a sweat equity program like Habitat for Humanity. Mr. Walker stated he has talked to Habitat for Humanity about this program and how that may work with his program. Mr. Davis believes and explained why a sweat equity program wouldn't be beneficial for the projects in his proposal.

Several Board members continued the discussion about the pros and cons of both of these proposals. Ms. Fortado wrapped up the meeting by stating, no matter where you live, you have the right to decent housing and access to basic infrastructure and the County Board currently has the opportunity to make this possible within our community.

VII. Adjournment

Chair Fortado adjourned the meeting at 9:46 p.m.