



Ministerial Statement

by

Lt. Col. the Hon. David A Burch, OBE (Mil), ED, JP, MP

Minister of Public Works

Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financials for the Year 2021

March 4th 2022

Good morning, **Mr. Speaker**, I lay before this Honourable House the Bermuda Housing Trust (“the Trust”) Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending March 2021.

Mr. Speaker, just like many other organizations in Bermuda, the financial year 2020-21 proved to be a challenging year for the Bermuda Housing Trust due almost entirely to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 and its very necessary protocols have had an impact on practically every level of operation and on all fronts. Notwithstanding these challenges, I am pleased to report that the Trust maintained its commitment to its mission:

“to provide quality and affordable rental accommodation for Bermuda’s independent seniors and to create a sense of community that enhances the quality of their lives.”

Mr. Speaker, members will be reminded that The Trust manages close to 200 units spread over five properties throughout the island with just as many resident seniors. These properties vary in age, some of them dating back over 50 years.

Yes, maintenance has been an issue, compounded in part by COVID and all it has wrought in terms of supply, prices and the availability of labour to undertake the work. Thankfully, we do have a dedicated pool of contractors

that we are able to call upon. Nevertheless, like us, they too have had to navigate around how and when they could work. It has not been easy and some work (of a non-essential nature) had to be deferred. We have this year begun to catch up.

Mr. Speaker, seniors and vulnerable persons are our priority. COVID protocols had to be followed and will continue to be followed for so long as necessary and required. Office hours were restricted, and access controlled to ensure safety. It has made the job harder but not impossible. Many thanks must be given to the staff (one full time administrator and two-part timers) and trustees who stepped up to do what needed to be done.

For instance, extra effort and extra time were required to meet the demands of our annual audit, the result of which is tabled in the Legislature today.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues will note, it is once again a clean audit and once again one of which the Trust and the Government is justifiably proud. A couple of highlights worth noting are:

- The Trust continues to see to it that expenses do not exceed revenue. This is no easy task in the face of mounting maintenance and rising prices, while, at the same time, the Trust continues with its long-standing policy of not raising rents on sitting tenants. This policy has been in place now for well over ten years. Nevertheless, maintenance costs can reasonably be expected to increase and to continue to increase this year and in the years ahead.
- Fund-raising is a potential solution, but, as can be seen from the audited statements, fund raising was a challenge this past year and donations halved. The Trust will continue its efforts.
- The loan which funded the construction of Dr. Cann Park continues to be paid down from the original amount of \$12.5 million in 2006 to just over \$4-million today. Any year end surpluses are held in reserve not just for payment on the loan but for unforeseen and extraordinary maintenance that do arise and have arisen from time to time with an ageing infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, Trustees also believe it important to continue to (1) build up a reserve and (2) pay down on this loan as quickly as possible to put the Trust in a stronger position to fund and to raise funds for future development. There

is no question that seniors could benefit from additional units as the Trust now has a waiting list of applicants that exceeds 100 persons.

Mr. Speaker, the financial year 2020-2021 saw the completion of the construction of two additional rental units at Ferguson Park, Southside, St. David's. It was funded by the Trust with the aid of donations. The Ministry of Public Works provided oversight of the project through the Bermuda Housing Corporation. Thanks must also be given to the Public Officers at the Ministry whom have been instrumental in assisting with some of the challenges the Trust has encountered throughout the year.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to express gratitude to BELCO for their charitable donation that assisted with the revamping of lighting and fencing at some of our properties.

We believe that these partnerships with Government, and with private businesses, are key to any future success the Trust is to enjoy in fulfilling its mission in these challenging times.

Mr. Speaker, this past year, has emphasized both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Trust organization. Following a retreat early in the year 2020, the trustees committed to building on those strengths and minimizing the weaknesses. To that end, I have been advised that in the coming months an overhaul of the Trust organization may occur that might ultimately lead to changes to the 1965 Act to improve the service to our clients.

Mr. Speaker, just as I have said last year, with every organization there is so much that goes on behind the scenes that the average person is completely unaware of – and this for the most part is a thankless job. Therefore, I want to publically thank the Chairman, the Hon. John Barritt, his able deputy Mr. Vance Campbell, JP, MP and the entire Board of Trustees for all they have given to the senior community. I would especially like to thank the two retiring Trustees, Mr. Bruce Wilkie who served for ten years on the Bermuda Housing Trust and Ms. Cheryl Pooley-Alves. Thank you for your service to our community.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker!**