

RESIDENT COUNCIL NEWS

AUGUST 28, 2025
ISSUE IV

RBJ SENIOR HOUSING AWARDED \$100K GRANT FROM CITY OF AUSTIN



In April, the city's Public Health Department released a \$631,000 grant opportunity to fund aging services in Austin. This opportunity was long awaited by local organizations, because it has been several years since funding was last made available for aging services. And with many nonprofits facing an uncertain future due to federal funding cuts, the competition for this local money was going to be strong. The city anticipated that only four organizations in Austin would be awarded.

The RBJ Senior Housing team, only six months into the job and still learning the ropes, had already begun to develop a case for support. RBJ staff had invited the University of Texas School of Nursing to survey RBJ residents on their needs. RBJ staff provided backbone support with the launch of Resident Council and supported a monthly meeting space where residents could share their needs and wants in more detail. The information collected from surveys and Resident Council meetings

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MAINTENANCE TIPS FROM LUIS



We visited Luis Sandoval in his shop to talk maintenance at RBJ. We learned much more.

Luis has been in property maintenance for five years. Before property maintenance, his trade was HVAC, and as a technician he worked many different job sites. This included, on occasion, jobs at apartment buildings. For property managers, a good maintenance plan is often difficult because good work is often hard to find. But on Luis' visits to apartment buildings, he quickly stood out as being both reliable and skilled. A property manager keeps workers with those qualities on speed dial.

Luis has since been recruited by properties in California and Texas, but RBJ has been a different experience for him. Luis is candid about his childhood, speaking of his grandparents and sharing that once he moved to the U.S., he didn't get to see them much.

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MEET THE RESIDENT COUNCIL STEERING COMMITTEE



Willie Fletcher has lived at the Lady Bird since 2022. He is a very familiar face in Serafina Pantry, hosting cooking classes, and he is someone you will see out and about among neighbors. He came to the Lady Bird in search of a 55 and older apartment in a great location by Lady Bird Lake. As a resident, he always encourages good times and as a member of Resident Council he wants to make our community the safest and most beautiful it can be.



Sharon Stewart has lived at the Lady Bird since mid 2023, and moved to Austin from the North Texas area near Denton. She was drawn to the Lady Bird's beautiful gardens, parks and trees; its affordability; and by the opportunity to be part of an active and friendly senior community. She believes that with the development of the Resident Council, citizens of the Lady Bird and soon the Rebekah are bringing together resident voices which will guide and influence the quality and health of their lives, and of life in general at RBJ properties.



Janet Roberts has lived at the Lady Bird since 2022 and before that lived at the RBJ tower for 9 years. She views Resident Council as a vital part of her life and is interested in doing everything possible to help residents. She has seen growth in the past few months and thinks it is remarkable!



Ludy Zambrano has lived at the Lady Bird since 2022. In earlier years, Ludy's work responsibilities had brought her to visit residents at the RBJ Tower, so this place has always felt like home. Once retired, she was looking forward to a friendly, supportive, and active community. At the Lady Bird, the gardens were a magnet and the trail along the lake sealed the deal. As part of Resident Council, Ludy wants to help residents be heard and get their needs met.

**WE ARE LOOKING FOR RESIDENTS TO JOIN THE STEERING
COMMITTEE. TURN TO PAGE 8 FOR MORE INFORMATION.
SUBMIT YOUR SELF-NOMINATION TODAY!**



“I love the residents and the relationships I have built. They recognize the work I’m doing and appreciate that I’m trying to make the community better.”

RBJ makes Luis feel a closer connection to his grandparents, and he says, “I love to chitchat.” The residents make his job fulfilling, but maintenance at RBJ is still challenging work. When we caught up with Luis, it was days before the annual government inspection. This is a hectic time for any property, but especially one with as much going on as RBJ does. With The Rebekah opening, move outs, new move-ins, and a recent fire, it was all hands on deck. Luis is thankful to have Ruben Rodriguez who recently joined the maintenance team, and of course, Janie to help out.

When it comes to maintenance at RBJ, Luis shares some of the same frustrations that have been discussed at Resident Council meetings. Take for example smoking. Luis says smoking is a maintenance nightmare. The smell seeps into

apartments and hallways, and ruins building materials. It’s awful for the residents who live nearby the smoking offender. Trash is another shared concern. Luis says that issues with bugs and pests would better controlled if residents were more careful with trash disposal. In some cases, trash is not even bagged and food waste is scattered inside the trash rooms. This drives more rats and roaches into the building.

There are real challenges, but Luis believes residents can be partners in helping to create a first rate maintenance plan at RBJ. He shared some tips to keep in mind.

- Keep your A/C set no lower than 72 degrees, and turn it up to 75 when you leave your home. This prevents the blower from burning out, the system from freezing, and maintains the life of your unit.
- You can pick up air filters from the leasing office anytime. This is helpful if you prefer to change your filter more frequently.
- If you have multiple items for a maintenance request, log them all together in a single work order. This is preferred by maintenance to prevent disorganization or oversight which can happen if there are multiple work orders for a single apartment. Instead, maintenance prefers to arrive at your home with a checklist with all items submitted in a single work order.

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was used to articulate the need for financial support, as residents saw it. RBJ staff also reviewed historical documents to make connections to the organization's origin and mission, and the future direction this grant opportunity would make possible.

The need for senior housing paired with on-site supportive services had only grown since RBJ was founded as the Austin Geriatric Center in 1968 and the Rebekah Baines Johnson Center first opened its doors in 1972. For many years, local researchers and policymakers had talked about the many benefits of investing in aging services at RBJ. Those proposals had strong champions but never gained traction, and RBJ's focus turned to a redevelopment plan. Still today the Holly neighborhood of East Austin has the highest rate of low-income older adults in all of Austin.

The RBJ team crafted a grant proposal titled "RBJ Senior Center of Excellence," pulling together residents' needs and community-level data to create a strong case for support and a request for \$245,000 in funding.

The budget included the salaries for full-time staff in the RBJ Resident Services office, support for Serafina Pantry, and it covered the cost of providing even more social activities and enrichment. And with this funding, RBJ would improve the quality of life for residents and track progress.

On June 9, RBJ Senior Housing received the email congratulating the organization on its award for the "RBJ Senior Center of Excellence" program. The award is only a portion of the original request amount, but it will fund services at RBJ for five years, or until 2030. The City of Austin shared the following feedback with the RBJ:

"The evaluation panel was very impressed with the clarity and comprehensiveness of your proposal."

Final approval goes before City Council on September 11 and RBJ receives funding beginning on October 1. With this award, RBJ is confident even more financial support will follow and the future of RBJ and its residents is filled with promise.

SUBMIT YOUR FEEDBACK



- Open the camera app on your smartphone
- Allow the barcode to come into focus, but don't take a picture.
- Wait for the link to appear on your screen and click it.

RESIDENT COUNCIL CHARTER

The Resident Council is a tenant-led group whose mission is to improve the lives of residents living at The Lady Bird. All residents who hold a lease at The Lady Bird are members of the Resident Council and can attend and participate in Resident Council meetings, events, and activities. In addition, a steering committee of five appointed residents take on additional responsibilities to help plan, coordinate, and support the continuity of Resident Council.

Our Duties / Why We Are Here

1. Communicate problems and other needs of the fellow residents to the RBJ Senior Housing Board of Directors.
2. Identify property improvements that may be needed.
3. Make recommendations to the RBJ Senior Housing Board of Directors for the types of services the nonprofit should be providing for residents.

Group Agreements

Group agreements are essential for creating a safe, productive, and collaborative environment. Resident Council members are expected to uphold our group agreements during meetings:

1. Raise your hand to speak.
2. Respect differences in opinion.
3. Try to be brief with your remarks to allow others time. Avoid interruptions.
4. Ask questions if there is something you do not understand.
5. Be open to new ideas, possibilities, and ways of thinking.

FOR THE RECORD: LAST MONTH'S REVIEW

Welcome to *For the Record*, a new section of Resident Council News dedicated to keeping our members updated on the monthly Resident Council meetings. Here you will find a summary the past month's meeting.

Recap from July Resident Council Meeting:

City of Austin Quality of Life on Aging Study: Staff from Cortez Consulting presented on a city study aimed at improving services for older adults and their caregivers in Austin. RBJ residents will participate in upcoming activities, including a photo project and a survey.

Other Announcements: Cesar Siavichay-Diaz was introduced as a Service Coordinator joining the RBJ Resident Services team; Resident Tootsie Gardner's passing was acknowledged and residents shared memories; Latest issue of Resident Council News was distributed and articles highlighted; Updates to the Resident Council web page were presented; Call for self-nominations to join Resident Council Steering Committee.

Ongoing Discussion on Safety and Security: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles were presented including natural surveillance, access control, and maintenance and management.

Resident Concerns on Safety: Comments shared included lighting and poor illumination on Navasota St with several lights broken; examples of poor maintenance were shared included rusted fences and missing window screens; theft and vandalism of indoor and outdoor patios is a concern and demonstrates the need for more security cameras throughout the building; trespassing, package security and improvements to the fitness amenities are also noted.

Budgeting Exercise: Residents participated in a budget activity to prioritize safety investments. Each resident received \$200 and had four options based on previous APD recommendations. The results will be used to guide budget decisions for the upcoming fiscal year. Emphasis was placed on this activity being a democratic tool giving residents direct influence over community investments.

You can find the full meeting minutes of the July Resident Council meeting by visiting the Resident Council webpage.

- Visit www.rbjseniorhousing.org
- On the "Programs" menu, click Resident Council
- On this page you will find all Resident Council materials including meeting minutes and issues of Resident Council News

LAURA'S HOMEMADE ICE CREAM RECIPE

Ingredients:

1 pint of whipping cream
2 teaspoon vanilla
¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
¼ cup confectioners powdered sugar
1 can of condensed milk

Instructions:

Chill the mixing bowl, condensed milk and whipping cream in the refrigerator.

Put the whipped cream, confectioners sugar, vanilla and cream of tartar into the cold mixing bowl, and beat with an electric mixer until fluffy.

Gently fold in the cold condensed milk until blended.

Add additional flavors and ingredients as desired to make a variety of flavors.

Store in the freezer for at least four hours, preferably overnight.

Move to the refrigerator 30-60 minutes before serving to make it ready to scoop.

THE NEWSLETTER OF RESIDENT COUNCIL

Newsletter Committee Members

Chuck and Marsha

RBJ Staff Support

Aly Tharp and Dylan Lowery

Issue IV.

We want to hear from you!

Submit your letters, feedback, and essays to Dylan Lowery. Email to dlowery@rbjseniorhousing.org or deliver material to Resident Services office.

Nomination Form to Join Resident Council Steering Committee

Information:

The RBJ Resident Council is looking for residents to join the Resident Council Steering Committee. This group is involved in planning, coordination, and supports the ongoing work of Resident Council.

The Steering Committee involvement includes:

- Approximately 10-20 hours that includes the monthly community meeting and separate planning meetings during the month. Planning meetings are typically held on Thursday afternoons.
- Collaborating with RBJ support staff to plan monthly agendas.
- Serving as a resource and being a positive representation of the RBJ Resident Council.

Questionnaire:

1. Please describe your motivation and/or interest in joining the Resident Council Steering Committee.
2. Describe any unique skills or perspectives that you would bring to Resident Council.
This may include past work experience, volunteerism, advocacy/activism, and faith-based activities. You can also share any experience you have as a renter.
3. Can you meet the monthly time commitment of approximately 10 - 20 hours of involvement?
4. Tell us about a time you worked with other people to reach a goal. What was your role, how did you help, and how did you handle any problems or disagreements?
5. Describe your hopes, wishes, and/or vision for the future of RBJ.

Instructions:

Answer the five questions above on separate sheet of paper either typed or handwritten. There is no page limit. Also include your name, contact information (phone or email), and whether you are a resident of The Ladybird or The Rebekah.

Submit your responses to Dylan Lowery in person, or via email at dlowery@rbjseniorhousing.org. If you need assistance or more information, please call or text Dylan at (737) 343-5747.