



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

APRIL MINUTES Approved May 13, 2019

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met at “McDonald House” at 49 Old South St. Northampton, Ma. on Monday, April 8, 2019.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 6:29 p.m.

Upon Roll Call, those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT: Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Laufer and Commissioner Silver.
Chairperson Richards was present via Skype.

ABSENT: Commissioner Jones

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Maria Walton; Deb Dunphy; Keith Walsh; Sharon Kimble; Lisa Donoghue; Tom O'Connor; Lynn King; Betsy Medina; Joseph & Angela Santaniello; John Wyda; Brenda Thompson; Ronald Hebert; Roy Martin; Heidi Sousse; Pat Sullivan; George Friend; Cindy Tobin; Peter Cushing and Michael A

Approval of the February 2019 Minutes

Commissioner Silver put forth the motion to approve seconded by Commissioner Laufer.

Approval of the March 2019 Minutes

Commissioner Silver put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Laufer.

PUBLIC HEARING – ANNUAL PHA PLAN & 5 YEAR PHA PLAN

The NHA in compliance with the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act is required to prepare and approve an annual plan and five year annual plan in the first and subsequent fifth year and submit the plan to HUD for approval. The purpose of this public hearing which was advertised on February 23rd and 27th is to provide the public ample opportunity to review the plans as they were being developed and to make suggestions. The purpose of this public hearing is to allow the Board of Commissioners to hear comments from interested parties about the five year annual plan and the annual plan. Are there any comments from the public?

Commissioner Silver asked if everyone has had a chance to see the plans? Is it all properties?

Tenants said they did not see the plans.

Cara – it is only a portion of the properties and it has been advertised in the paper and a copy is available at the front desk. Joe Santaniello asked if it is available during the week.

Cara – it is available any time our office is open. It has all been advertised and handled in accordance with regulations.

Commissioner Silver – can you give us a general summary?

Cara – The 5 Year portion is what we propose to do at the different properties and the capital projects and the monies the funding agency gives. Attached is the 5 year action plan and each page shows what is going to be replaced – for example in 2021 Florence Hts. we will do vanities for 50 units, Screen doors for Florence Heights, repair water penetration in the basement, LED lights in the common areas at McDonald House. This is just for the Federally funded properties, Florence Heights and McDonald.

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Joe Santaniello asked if some of these projects are carryovers.

Cara – Some of them are works in progress and some are carryovers. We do this for every five years, so essentially we are just adding a year on the end of the plan.

Commissioner Silver – Can you describe the process you go through for this annual plan?

Cara – will have Sharon Kimble respond.

Sharon – it is the five year plan – every year HUD grants us money – we add a year and take off a year so this is for 2019 – 2023. Last week there was a meeting at McDonald for the tenants to ask questions and I went over the Capital Budget. In 2019-2020 we are replacing the elevators in McDonald. The grant is about \$205,000.00 – so the elevators will take up most of that money. So when we get into the further years out we go back to what we normally do which is appliances and floors, etc. The Capital Fund is set by HUD – the CIP is state – so this portion is HUD. They give us a grant and ask what we want to do this year what are the physical needs.

Cara – we walk the properties and prioritize what needs to be done.

Commissioner Silver – is this discussed with the tenants as it is put together?

Cara – yes, we discuss with the Resident Advisory Board. Send out surveys and then have a meeting and see what they would like to see happen at the properties.

Commissioner Silver – so when you ask for comments today, it has been determined that the elevators at McDonald will be replaced were there comments on that? The tenants are very happy that is being done, it is well needed.

Cara – so this part is when the public can come and ask questions as we have advertised it in the paper on a week day and a weekend day.

At 6:37 p.m. the Public Hearing was closed and the meeting turned over to Vice Chairperson Brooks.

EMPLOYEE ISSUES: NONE

TENANT ISSUES

George Friend – Salvo #203 – asked what the policy and review process was for putting postings in the bulletin board?

Cara responded – a resident asked to post a religious flyer about a presentation at the Big E. George Friend said it was a political flyer. Because a resident requested it, any non- racist or non- biased, not representing any illegal, we would allow them to post it. Mr. Friend responded that what is posted is monitored and put behind our locked bulletin board with a key. Cara responded that it is locked because people were taking things down. There is a resident posting board on every floor. Mr. Friend – who reviews the submissions? Cara- when it comes from the residents the RSC checks it and if she has any questions brings it to the Executive team to see if it is appropriate. Has it been questioned on political grounds?

Commissioner Laufer – can you fill us in on what is happening in regards to this?

George Friend – Franklin Graham is a political operative of the far right. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing and the religious issue is a pretext for a political rally.

Commissioner Laufer – so a poster of him was put in the bulletin board?

George Friend – yes and I urge you to go to Salvo and see it, then the justifying statement is disingenuous.

Commissioner Silver – I just want to say that it seems to me that if you are asking about policy, and that policy is in the purview of the Board, that we should probably get together and talk about developing a policy. I am trying to address your concerns, so if you would give us a couple of days to take a look at this and think about what we might be able to formulate in terms of a policy. We will take a look at what is legal and reasonable and formulate a policy that will give us a guide of what can be posted.

George Friend – I have spoken with the Northampton Senior Center and they have a policy that everything has to be submitted and reviewed, they will not accept religious or political postings.

Commissioner Silver – we will take a look at their policy.

Richard Donoghue – Salvo #721 – suggests putting a large bulletin board across from the mailbox area as an open posting board. A solution to putting postings behind glass would be to leave a public board open for all postings.

Peter Cushing – Forsander. When are the property managers going to meet with the tenants? Jack Redman made an appointment on the September Board Meeting saying we would meet the second week of November but nobody showed. Cara – we were actually at Forsander. Peter Cushing – where was the meeting posted? No one got any notice. Cara – we would have sent a memo out which we will get him a copy of. Peter – you are not talking to the residents, we have a bed bug problem, six out of the 10 Bldgs. Cara – that is incorrect. Peter – Bldg. J, K, R, Q and P and the Community Room. Community is locked. Cara – the Community room was treated and cured and then tested to make sure there were no further bedbugs and then it has been re-infested, so we closed it down.

Cindy Tobin – Forsander – yes there is a bed bug problem but I feel bad that some residents cant use the community room – one resident has waited all year to watch the NCAA tournament and couldn't. We can no longer play cards or do puzzles and when we call down to the Housing Authority, we only get a recording. She has proof and her daughter has written since December and only twice received a response. I have been begging for some help with the tenant upstairs and not once have I been called back and I was hospitalized as I am having a breakdown. All I want is openness and getting back to know what is going on we are left in the dark. I think is very unfair that we can't use the Community Room - why is it taking you three weeks to fix the community room? Cara – Mrs. Tobin would you like me to go down the list and address the specific things? I know you are having issues with the tenant above you, when the issues are brought to us, we deal with them according to law. We can't notify you about someone because it is a violation of their privacy so what we do is turn it over to our Attorney, Tom O'Connor, who has diligently been working on dealing with that. Unfortunately, our hands are tied at times from the court system and the legal process and we are not able to resolve an issue fast enough. As far as the bed bugs go, I can't give out that information either. We don't know if someone has bed bugs until they notify us. So when they do we right away is have the bed bug dog come out and test the premise. After the third complaint we became proactive and had the whole property tested by the dog. . Any units found with bedbugs were scheduled for treatment. The first two units were treated with chemicals and then when that is not effective we do the heat treatment which heats up the unit to 140 degrees and kills them. However, if someone brings bedbugs back into the unit, we would not know that unless someone calls us again, and I have found that to be an issue at Forsander. Some residents have had to be referred to Legal because of non-compliance with this issue, and it has created a problem with the community room and in an effort to keep it from spreading, we closed the community room. It is very costly to heat treat the community room, we did it, it was cured and inspected and a few weeks later when one of the workers used the bathroom in the community room he found a bedbug on the couch. He notified our office and we closed it down immediately. Peter Cushing said he called the state on the 21st and 15 minutes later they closed the community room.

Cara – I have been communicating with your daughter via email and she responded back to me that everything was all set. If there are any more issues put it in writing to me. We are working on the issues and if you or your daughter want to come in to see any paperwork please feel free to do so.

Mrs. Tobin responded that she is frustrated that when she tries to call to NHA all she gets is recordings of Cara, Jack or Lisa – they will get back to us. She never gets a call back. Cara – have you called in the last two weeks we have been having an issue with our phones? Mrs. Tobin - that's another excuse. I gave up and I wrote to Boston. We have been trying to tweak the phone system, please let me know if there are still issues – send me an email. Mrs. Tobin – you tell me to call the police and when I do at 2:00 am they think I am nuts and it is costing the city, this should be handled by Housing. Judge Goggins after a case that was dismissed, said “Housing should be ashamed of themselves, this is not a court matter. “

Cara – Remember, when it comes to legal stuff I have to defer to our Attorney.

Commissioner Laufer – the very first thing you spoke about Peter, is that you had a planned tenants meeting and that Jack was going to come. During the September 2018 Board Meeting I requested a meeting, Jack Redman stood up and said all properties will have meetings and Forsander will be the second week of November.

Cindy Tobin – I would like to know what is going on with the intercom system. On December 28th you had a meeting with the residents and said within six weeks we would have an intercom in working condition in one of the buildings. It is now April 8th and every time the police come it is in my building and it is my intercom that everyone is buzzing, I am getting the brunt of it all.

Cara – I have an email that I can give you a copy of. If the police is doing that let Jody or I know, they should not be doing that as they have keys and not bothering you.

With respect to the intercoms – we got the sample and it ended up because of where the electricity is going to be run from the basement, we were unable to do so because of where it was located. So we came up with another solution. We looked at Cahill, and found we could not use that kind either. We then contacted a few contractors to see if they could install them and the cost was exorbitant. So we have been in the process of getting bids. They are coming in at over \$50,000.00.

Cindy Tobin – why couldn't you send us a little letter explaining this?

Cara – you did not get a letter from public housing.

Cindy – nothing- you leave us in the lurch, we feel like second class citizens and we deserve not respect whatsoever.

Commissioner Laufer – I have listened to your concerns and they are very valid and concerning and you are right that this is lack of communication. I feel if Jack had followed through, this would have been diluted a lot with communication. I am also a little sad to hear that you did not get any memos regarding intercoms because we had addressed this at our last board meeting and we actually told that you had received memos regarding that. It was actually a question that I had asked. Going forward we will be looking closely at the communication with tenants.

Angela Santaniello – Salvo – I honestly don't see any problem with residents going to the RSC and asking for anything to be posted in the bulletin boards. If they are willing to go and communicate with them, 9 times out of 10 they are going to post as long as it is an acceptable format. I don't understand why there is such a big issue about one little posting. In all reality, she does a good job of getting things posted., We have asked to post things for the Neighborhood Watch and Northampton Neighbors and she has always been willing to work with us. As far as the Neighborhood Watch goes, we have been in communication with multiple executives and management staff and they have stayed in communication with us and appreciating whatever information we give them. Sometimes when we don't get a response and we have to issue a second or third request, eventually they do respond. It helps to send an email because we know how busy they are and we all need to step back and realize how much they have on their plate. I appreciate what you do and having an open door policy allowing us to send you the issues we have and trying to make it a better place to live.

Roy Martin – Salvo – Does anyone know the meaning of the word “Censorship”. We have to go to Lynn King to get anything posted, it sometimes takes a week to get something posted, and then if they don't feel it is appropriate it doesn't get posted. The poster that is up there, he asked Karen Polito who was n town, and she said it should not be up there. Send her a copy of the poster and write a letter to her in Boston, and she would look at it and forward a copy of the rules to Cara. She also told him to go and talk to the Mayor. Roy stated that it is a religious poster and we are not supposed to promote it or anything political. We are supposed to be neutral. Some new tenants asked him about the garden, NHA said they set up a meeting, I never got anything about a meeting, so I am out for putting things out front. I have a meeting with Tom O'Connor tomorrow. Also, new tenants should get an orientation as some have moved

in and have left things in the hallway, and it disappeared because they didn't know they couldn't leave anything out there, as maintenance would get rid of it.

Heidi Sousse – Salvo - tried to email Maria Walton and it was kicked back. Cara – we have a new domain and it is not forwarding emails. I will do some research. Heidi – also when we call NHA can someone answer the phone? It's frustrating because all I can do is leave a message.

Richard Donoghue – the discussion regarding the bulletin boards is more heated than I anticipated. I am not advocating for closing down a bulletin board, the Housing Authority Board is well encompassed and maybe a public board. Also, please fix the elevators.

Joe Santaniello – Salvo – just to give you a monthly update – everything is right on track with the Neighborhood Watch and any issues we had have been dealt with by Sgt. Robinson. He will be calling the Executive Director to set up a meeting with the Attorney. He has one question that needs to be clarified. That should be happening in the next 30 days. Thank you all for your patience.

Appointment of Committee Members

Grievance Panel

Commissioner Laufer – how often does that committee meet?

Cara – the grievance committee is for residents and applicants. If they have gone through the chain of command and not received a resolution they would go to this committee. For example, there was an applicant, and there was a drug raid and he was found with drugs on him but there was no conviction yet. He requested a grievance because we had denied him. When a grievance has been received we notify the panel and request a meeting.

Commissioner Laufer – with your experience how often do they meet?

Cara – the grievance panels meets they hear the Housing Authority's side with Attorney O'Connor present and then the residents side and then they make a decision. There is a long process on that which one of the coming board meetings I have already talked to Tom about to see how it has been in the past is much different on how it needs to be. The actual CMR determines who is picked – by regulation. Two board members and another who is a resident of Northampton.

Commissioner Silver – thank you for doing the work of the committee members panel. This is a great way of looking at it and giving the Board the oversight that it is obligated to take on. Do you want us to vote on this tonight?

Chairperson Richards – hoping for approval of the reorganization. The biggest changes are probably in finance and governance. The whole objective is to give the Board more responsibility and oversight and involvement in working with the Housing Authority ED and staff to make things better. I think it has been a recommendation to us in the last HUD evaluation. I would ask for recommendation to approve the restructuring and then at the next meeting after I have contacted each of you, we will assign committees.

Commissioner Silver – can I ask a question? Under procurement it says recommend eliminating and adding to ED job description. I have been going through the training modules and one of the things it says is that creating a procurement policy is a Board duty so when you say eliminating it from Board I don't know if you are talking about a policy or the specific nitty gritty of doing the procurement.

Chairperson Richards – I am talking about the day to day duties of the procurement. So the policy and if you look under governance would be directed by the Board. The details would be presented by the ED and approved by the Board.

Commissioner Silver – that makes sense to me and I would be happy to propose a motion to accept the reorganization of the committee presented tonight.

Seconded by Commissioner Laufer.

VOTING AYE: Commissioner Silver, Laufer, Vice Chairperson Brooks and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: N ONE

Whereby Vice Chairperson Brooks approved the Motion.

NEW BUSINESS.

Approve Air Conditioner Policy

Cara – 3 other Mass Housing Authority current air conditioner policies and what they do. We then created a draft based on some things that would be appropriate for us.

Commissioner Laufer – may I please have a copy?

Commissioner Silver – have the tenants had a chance to review this?

Cara – DHCD said that this is something that we put out, give residents 30 days to respond in writing. When you do something like this you are supposed to give the residents 30 days notice.

Commissioner Silver - Before the policy is adopted.

Cara – after the Board approves the draft, we will then make it a policy, send it out and give the residents 30 days to respond.

Commissioner Silver – I read all of this including the Springfield housing authority’s policies that were also included and I appreciate you doing the draft. I am not prepared to vote on this tonight. I know policy development is in the purview of the Board and I think the Board should take this draft and work with it. In the past when I worked with Housing Authority tenants I had understood that Maintenance had always installed the air conditioners in the past.

Cara – yes, but there was no policy in place. The issue came into play when residents were suing the Authority for damage to their property and also in regards to having a REAC inspection we were being held accountable for A/c units that were there and did not work and they were threatening not to pass us. I have a whole packet I put together is you would like to see it. It was determined based on liability, we had a workmans comp issue due to putting in an air conditioner. Because there was no policy in place and by our labor attorney, we stopped putting them in but when everything went public and it became a problem we put them in last year. We are presenting this to you now because residents are concerned as air conditioning season is approaching.

Commissioner Silver – I agree that we need to deal with this quickly.

Cara – We had the RSC reach out to agencies to help residents. Residents are paying for the service. Ms. King was able to get services cheaper. She worked with the Senior Center –Bob who is now retired. He would charge \$10 - \$15.00 but Lynn looked into other places and they would charge \$30 or more depending on how much time it took and how big they were.

Vice Chairperson Brooks said he looked into this and the charge was around \$100.00. Even though Maintenance never formally had a policy, it was always done by them from the very beginning of Northampton Housing, so a precedent was set. This should be a major interaction between the Board and the tenants. I live in a Federal Apartment and I have a sleeve for my air conditioner in my living room. My apartment heats up to 90 degrees by noontime.

Commissioner Silver – has concern for tenants who are on a fixed income. We want to make sure that we preserve the standard utility allowance. We want air conditioners installed in a safe, reliable manner so that no one is hurt during the installation or removal, at the convenience of the tenants so they can be comfortable in the apartment. We want to make this tenant friendly, not punitive in tone. Given that this is a policy, and it is the purview of the Board, I appreciate the draft, but I think over the next couple of weeks the Board needs to hone this policy.

Chairperson Richards agreed that it should be tenant friendly.

Joe Santaniello – Salvo – it will cost the Housing something because of the design of the window in Salvo, they have put in wooden forms for the air conditioners.

Ron Hebert – McDonald – air conditioners are very heavy and it should be two people installing, so that someone doesn’t get hurt.

Vice Chairperson Brooks said the maintenance person who installed his worked alone, and it was too heavy.

Commissioner Jones put forth the motion to adjourn the March meeting at 7:55 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

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