



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

APPROVED –JANUARY MINUTES

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met at “McDonald House” at 49 Old South St. Northampton, MA. On Monday, January 27, 2020.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

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

PRESENT: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Laufer, and Commissioner Silver.

ALSO PRESENT: Deb Dunphy Smith; Sharon Kimble, Jack Redman, Keith Walsh, Gary DePace, Tom O'Connor, Kaitlin Hanning, Heather Maxwell, Donyael Parrish, Jose Cruz, Danielle McColgan, Maitty Ramirez, Jada Tarbutton, Joseph & Angela Santaniello, Diana Lawson, Rosa Figueroa, Cathy Donaghy, David Arce, Jan Monson, Sacred Elder, Mary Chapman and Christine Haigney.

QUARTERLY FINANCIALS

Gary Depace, Fee Accountant, explained that all the Budgets were approved for 2020 without changes. The budget has been implemented and there are few line items that are a little high. If we have to, we will do a budget revision. Overall, we are on target, there is nothing alarming.

Chairperson Richards - what are the line items that are flagged?

Gary responded - Legal, Salaries and administrative, went into a little bit of the detail. Cara to explain further.

Chairperson Richards – Nevertheless we may have to do a revision. Thank You, Gary.

Commissioner Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Jones.

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Brooks, Jones and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Financials.

MOTION TO APPROVE FEE ACCOUNTANT CONTRACT

Currently the Fee Accountant has a two year contract. It is recommended that we go to a five year term, which is what it used to be. The new contract will go from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2024.

Commissioner Silver – why did we go from a five year contract to a two year contract?

Cara – There were only three members present at the meeting and a prior Board Member who is no longer on the Board, wanted a two year contract. At the time there were only three Board Members, two wanted it to stay at five and the one Board Member wanted it for two. Commissioner Jones spoke that the Board member was probably worried about costs, the prior member had a little give and take with Mr. Depace. Mr. Depace said this is the same contract as set up by DHCD. His job is to also help fill in the gaps when needed by NHA.

Chairperson Richards asked Mr. Depace to give an example of filling in the gaps.

Gary – During the Audit, if something is needed, he helps out – Sharon, Jack, Cara, etc. Audits change every year. Advises NHA on changes.

Commissioner Silver – this contract can be terminated in 30 days by either party and notify DHCD and if we do terminate and Mr. Depace stated that the board must notify DHCD as to why.

Chairperson Richards – a sincere thank you to Gary!

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

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Brooks, Jones and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Fee Accountant 5 Year Contract.

AT THIS TIME THE NEW PUBLIC HOUSING MANAGERS WERE INTRODUCED BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Maitty Ramirez Delhoyo – McDonald and Florence Heights, Donyael Parrish – Salvo; Jose Cruz-Salvo; Heather Maxwell – Tobin and Forsander; Danielle McColgan – Resident Service Coordinator – Salvo, McDonald, Cahill, Forsander and Tobin; Kaitlin Hanning – Cahill.

Commissioner Laufer asked if the Board could get business cards from them.

Chairperson Richards – See Cara, also their names will be in the minutes.

TENANT ISSUES

Diana Lawson – #106 Salvo – she has roaches in her unit and people around her apartment are throwing food outside by the balconies. She also said someone is coming in the hallway with their dog, and their dog is messing in the hallway, and it is being left there. Regarding the roaches – the treatment they did to her apartment is not working, found a roach in her cereal. Her neighbor came from the 6th floor and they are very messy. Cara – someone from NHA will contact you tomorrow.

Roy Martin – #529 Salvo – how come the tenants can't get a copy of the minutes? Cara – who have you asked? Donyael.

Cara – we post them and they are torn down, we are not going to keep putting them back up.

Roy – tenants want to know what is going on. Last week there was a death at Salvo and there is a rumor that it was a murder. The office should have shut down the rumor. Communication is needed.

Chairperson Richards also said regarding the death, there is also a factor of privacy for the individual.

Mary Chapman – #201 McDonald – thanks for providing heat, water, shelter, etc. Regarding the buddy alarm system – thanks to Maitty for working on a grant for buttons. We need a liaison person for McDonald.

Is there a notice given on a death?

Chairperson Richards – the more tenants get used to the property managers the better it will benefit them, use this service wisely.

Jada Tarbutton – Salvo – when a tenant dies, other tenants get frightened because they don't know the circumstances and rumors happen. In the past, when Lynn King was at NHA, she had a healing time during the lunch hour and it was nice. Cara – we will continue to do that. Jada – maybe you could post something in the glass bulletin board when there is a death. Jada said she also met Jose and Donya. Sent emails and photos for items in her apartment to be fixed. Cara – someone will contact you tomorrow.

Chairperson Richards – thank you for your comments on the recognition of people that have passed.

Sacred Elder – McDonald – the liaison between McDonald and the NHA is the tenant association. Also May, June and July issues he brought forth has had no response. Does not appreciate Cara right now writing a message to a Board Member as he is speaking. Spoke about the police report about him attacking someone at McDonald. He comes down many times and no one is in the office. When there is a holiday and the office is closed, it is not posted. He would like to sit and talk with the Board. When mailings to him are sent registered mail he cannot get to the Post Office.

Chairperson Richards – a letter was sent to you many months ago. Sacred Elder – he did not get it.

Chairperson Richards – someone will get back to you.

Angela Santaniello – #525 Salvo – since the inception of the new office, it has gone well. Several new people have moved in to Salvo. The NHA website has good information for tenants. Last week they lodged a complaint, and today they had a letter under their door. Kudos to the new group.

Commissioner Laufer – do Angela and Sacred Elder know each other? No.

Cara – each property manager has a book, and they go by this to deal with issues that arise so that it is consistent across the agency.

Chairperson Richards – Sacred Elder has received a response.

Christine Haigney – McDonald – loves the new floor in the elevator, debris in the light has been removed, and the front office is more responsive. She likes Maitty's ideas.

Diana Lawson – Salvo – the no smoking sign is scratched out and people are still smoking out front.

Chairperson Richards – it is exciting to have the property managers at the sites – utilize these folks, they are here to help you.

Maitty Ramirez-Delhoyo stood up and spoke to the crowd that she has an open door policy. Her office will be open Monday and Friday going forward. She is always happy to meet with the residents and she does listen. She had the floors in the elevator replaced and she is trying to keep the building clean. Anyone wants to meet with her, she is there.

APPROVAL OF THE DECEMBER 2019 MINUTES

Commissioner Silver – regarding the bulletin boards – there is one glass and one open. Can minutes be posted there?

Cara – the minutes are on the shared drive for each property manager to have access and they are also on the website.

Chairperson Richards – people can also go to the office.

Commissioner Silver – can get a list of the updated staff?

Cara – Postings are at the properties. Can go there when office is open.

Commissioner Jones – would like the minutes to be amended to say that he did not attend the last meeting.

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

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Brooks, Jones and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Minutes.

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director read the report.

Commissioner Laufer – Was that the Public Housing Notice?

Cara - Yes

Chairperson Richards – Two requests for clarification – Commissioner Jones and Brooks.

Commissioner Laufer – Regarding the after school grant, what will NHA do to continue it once the money from grant is used up? Cara – The RSC will try to get more grants.

Chairperson Richards asked to move the 911 Help Alert System and as well as the Salvo Cameras up on the agenda.

MOTION – 911 HELP NOW ALERT SYSTEM FOR RESIDENTS

The ED found a solution was found that is cost effective for residents – “911 Now, My Save 911 & Fast Help. It looks like the Lifeline button. Cara found pricing of \$99.00; \$88.00 and Fast help had a price of \$299.00 with \$150.00 off. She found a manufacturer of \$79.00 and if order over 200 the price goes down by 5%. On the State housing, we are removing the buddy alarms as residents move out. McDonald – buddy systems are removed when move outs. NHA will purchase the buttons. When resident leaves they turn them in.

Chairperson Richards – are you asking the Board to purchase these for McDonald, because we are to remove the buddy system?

Cara – State wants them out when resident moves out.

Chairperson Richards – what about the state properties? Cara – Our RSC will work with the tenants.

Chairperson Richards – NHA should set up a payment plan for these.

Commissioner Silver – How does this differ from the buddy system? Cara – at McDonald, you pull a cord and it sounds an alarm that neighbors can hear. The new system directly calls 911.

Chairperson Richards – The buddy alarm then is a false sense of security.

Commissioner Silver – Have tenants been approached about this? Is this something they want?

Cara – It has been discussed with some of the residents. We will be holding meetings once they are purchased.

Chairperson Richards – We approved the removal of the buddy alarms last year, this is the best Cara came up with – need approval to purchase for McDonald.

Commissioner Silver – is this identical to lifeline? Cara – lifeline calls 911 with a monthly charge. The Mysafe 911 – you depress the call button for 5 seconds and the device calls 911 until an operator can be reached.

Cara recommended the NHA pay for these for McDonald Residents as there has always been buddy alarms in place. For other sites, we are offering it to all residents but they will have to buy them.

Commissioner Brooks – Recused himself from the vote due to residency however as a resident he stated that he thinks it will be great for the tenants at McDonald. He fell twice in the shower and he was lucky to have the buddy alarm system.

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

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Jones and Chairperson Richards.

RECUSED: Commissioner Brooks

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

MOTION – APPROVE DHCD’S LOW BIDDER ON SALVO CAMERAS – FISH # 214105

Goodless Electric was the low bidder at \$75,260.00. Cameras are for both inside and outside.

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

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Jones, Brooks and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

MOTION – APPROVE DHCD 5 YEAR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

This is for the years 2120 – 2125.

Commissioner Silver – it feels like this is the second time this has been brought forward to the Board. Has questions on items without fish numbers. If NHA found other sources of income for window

replacement, would it free up money? What is not on the Capital Plan, can it be put on a list and we find other money?

Sharon Kimble – The Capital Plan is our wish list. We receive funding, and each year we have projects. Projects can be moved up from one year to another year if need be. Once a year is over, we add another year on to the Capital Plan.

Chairperson Richards – are these all capitalized items?

Cara – yes, we work with DHCD and participate in 3 hours of “District Hours” to do this plan.

Commissioner Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Jones.

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Jones, Brooks and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

DISCUSSION – TIMING OF THE BOARD PACKAGE

It was noted that it is difficult to get the Board package on Friday night and be prepared for Monday’s meeting and to vote on items. Would like to get the ED’s thoughts on getting materials earlier.

Cara – Board meeting is once a month but sometimes there are special meetings during a month. There is a lot of work that goes into preparing for the Board Meeting and she is sometimes working on information throughout the day on Friday.

Chairperson Richards – the Commissioners are struggling to do due diligence.

Attorney O’Connor – all month information is being gathered,

Commissioner Jones – When Jon Hite was the ED, the minutes were out within two weeks. The minutes were mailed to the commissioners by the ED. He really feels the minutes need to be out within the two week time period.

Commissioner Laufer – can you email the Board members as the stuff comes in? Minutes, etc. Cara – yes she can create a folder and dump items into it as she gets them. Commissioner Laufer would like Cara to let them know when she has put something into the folder so they don’t have to check it daily.

Commissioner Silver – next Board meeting is on a Wednesday, she needs more time to look over the agenda items. Should come out to the Board as you get information.

Chairperson Richards – Commissioners Jones and Brooks – you have been here the longest -can you give us any suggestions?

Commissioner Jones – we always received our package on Friday night. It used to be delivered to our house. We then had the weekend to review the package. If the meetings get changed to the second Wednesday of the month, he would be favorable.

Cara – needs to be put on the agenda to have the meetings changed to Wednesday. Is there a time change as well?

DISCUSSION – EVALUATION FORMS

Chairperson Richards asked to move the Evaluation Forms to the next meeting as a package after discussion of the 360 evaluation.

Commissioner Laufer – can we talk about the Evaluation tonight?

Chairperson Richards – will talk about an email that was sent from Attorney Pender.

Commissioner Silver – so we will put off what's been worked on for 4 months.

There was a lengthy discussion on the subject, here are some of the highlights.

Commissioner Laufer - How would we look and see what you are suggesting? How would we know if we pass or not? Would you provide us with the information we need?

Cara – Yes, tonight we talked about our REAC score which we passed with a high score. The agency sends out surveys and collects information about all staff and generate a report regarding one their own budget.

Commissioner Laufer – As a resident, I feel likelier to fill out a survey coming from my Housing Authority because its more personal then something send from the State.

Cara – All the things I look for is if it could work or not work. The issue would be there are 618 Public Housing, in addition to Landlords and Section 8. Mailing to all will cost us over \$2000 which is not in the budget.

Commissioner Laufer – How would you suggest getting surveys out to residents?

Chairperson Richards - Can we take your thoughts, which are really good and put it in the parking lot for a few minutes. I would like to share the comments from the HR and in-house attorney's.

Chairperson Richards spoke about the email received by Attorney Pender. She can email the letter to the Board Members, but it can't be read aloud as it jeopardizes the Attorney/Client privilege. She touched on certain points of his email.

Chairperson Richards – I've been a manager, supervisor for 30 years now and you can get into big problems regarding HR so we worked with Jim Pender and Thomas O'Connor. I always take the route to protect us. A 360 review is commonly used in the private sector, and he does not think it is a best practice for Housing Authorities. Surveying residents – suggested not to be done in conjunction with the ED review – do it at another time in the year. Furthermore, the executive director evaluation is the primary responsibility of the board as the ED is not always popular.

Cara – I mail out monthly maintenance questionnaires to the residents for their feedback. I could also include a survey on staff personnel.

Chairperson Richards – Continues talking about points from email. DHCD already provides feedback. The HUD review suggested that we need to focus on other things. It does not need to go to the city as they would rely on media and it is too granular and it needs to be broader. The preexisting form is a good one and additionally the review should include goals.

Commissioner Laufer – Why does it have to be mailed? Half the stuff we receive are not mailed, they are placed on their doors. Personally, I can't budge on tenant feedback and recognize that it could be skewed.

Cara – I know but these documents say they have to be mailed.

Commissioner Laufer – If you want to cut cost, mail out to your Section 8 and hand delivery the other surveys at our doors.

Commissioner Laufer – Part of the reason why I want to give surveys out to tenants are because half do not know Cara and to me that's the issue. There has to be more involvement with the Housing Authority, which you started to do.

Cara - Did anyone tell you I attended all the property meetings?

Commissioner Laufer – Great, when we do your evaluation you can present that to us.

Cara – When Tom said they don't know me because I'm not going there, no matter what they aren't going to know my performance, their only going to know their perception of me.

Commissioner Silver – can go on Survey Monkey which is free for the tenants. The core mission of the Housing Authority is for tenants and their well-being. I have a problem with how this is being characterized.

Attorney O'Connor responded to Commissioner Silver – What he means by tenants not knowing Cara, is that they don't know what the ED does on a day to day basis. The reality is they don't have information on how she is doing her job. As for the 360 evaluation, there is a better way to get information.

Attorney O'Connor states that he agrees with attorney Pender and that the 360 is too much. While more information is better, you can be overwhelmed by it also. There are 618 units in Public Housing, not including Section 8 – maybe 1500 surveys-expense to pay to have this done, and many hours to implement the survey. Cara's \$2000 appears to be on the low side. How many residents actually know Cara? We would spend a ton of money and time to get information that would be not valuable.

Commissioner Silver – This has nothing to do with Cara. First of all, back to the mailing and the cost, and this and that, I disagree about the cost. Survey monkey could be used and the cost is nothing. They tabulate the information and it is given back all done for you. The input from the tenants is not do you know and like Cara but about their day to day lives and their sense of well-being. This is our core mission and obligation as a housing authority. To suggest that there is any good reason whether or be skewed results or cost, or anything of that nature, for not getting input from tenants, does a disservice to what our core mission is. We need to look beyond these issues, maybe we can look into the timing but I think it is fine to look at. These are all red herrings among many that I do take issue with and if we had the guts to go to the tenants, to go to staff, and the city, all of with whom the housing authority has core missions and obligations. It is not a question of guts but about what we are going to figure out. Especially for those of us who have no contact with staff or tenants other than what we hear here. Are we going blindly into the evaluation only with what we get on a Friday night for a Monday meeting? That is not reasonable.

I looked at the job description and this is where these questions came from and is the only way we can get the input is to do these surveys. There is not another way to get this input. The housing authority has an obligation to work with tenants because they live here, the staff because they employed here, and the city/organizations because we should join with them for the well-being of our community. I would like to think that we are smart enough to figure out what of the complaints are factual and that some of them would be legitimate or not. They are not a pronouncement of who you are as a person (to Cara). They are for the board to consider and with all due respect to attorney Pender, I think the best practice is to get as much information as you can.

I want to point out that Cara's informational email about how the authority is graded had nothing about her in it personally.

Commissioner Silver – I want to move away from Cara because the tenants, stops speaking, and I want to remove this from personal, this is not personal. This is an evaluation of an executive director whether it is Cara or anyone else.

Cara – Excuse me, but you say this isn't personal, but I'm going to go out on a limb here and say what's on my mind. Elizabeth you calling it a red herring and constantly acting in front of my staff and residents that what I am telling you is not accurate, what I am telling you is a lie, and saying that "something" is going on, for example, employee issues are happening because employees have left. Maria, as an example. Pardon me for getting emotional but you make this job very difficult. Difficult because you approach everything as though "something is up/it's a red herring/someone is lying" and that is the perception you are putting out there. Whether it is me sitting in this seat, or someone else, that is what is happening. My staff is concerned because you approach them and it causes problems that you don't see because you are not here every day working with staff and residents. .

Commissioner Laufer – This is a personal conversation and it should be had at another time.

Cara – Well it was already brought up here with the board so it needed to be said. I apologize if you do not like what I said but I don't often say what is on my mind but it was necessary.

Commissioner Silver – I would like to respond. I'm sorry you have that impression but I'm the newest on the board. I do not like voting on things when I don't understand them. I don't talk to staff or tenants or anyone. I just don't.

Cara – Yes you do and we can discuss specifics later if you would like.

Commissioner Silver – I just want to say this has to be an objective evaluation and the board has to have the input to do so. Half the questions on the last form were unanswerable and we need to do our duty.

Chairperson Richards - I don't think Tom is finished.

Attorney O'Connor – Tenants don't know what Cara does or the decisions she makes day to day and how it impacts them. The reality is, many residents do not have the information about whether she is doing her job.

Commissioner Laufer – They know what they need and if we are getting them everything they need and getting back to them.

Chairperson Richards – I would like to hear from the other board members but we have our rendering from our HR and our in-house attorney's and their suggestion is not do this as part of an evaluation. I will distribute the email from the attorney but cannot read it.

Commissioner Silver – Who is attorney Pender's client?

Chairperson Richards – we are. I'll send the email first thing in the morning but I want to hear from Jeff and Jim.

Commissioner Jones – I support commissioner Laufer's feedback about residents. However, the 360 review is too much for me. I go back to the fact that this is a volunteer board and we are not supposed to know everything. When I sat here over the years, I would get a copy of the auditor report and the auditors would come and present. I only have to look at a few pages and listen to them. Should we as board follow-up on items and items such SEMAP, yes. If we get a report in March, have we checked later to see what has happened? Has the items been fixed.

There is so much information and everything has always been limited. I appreciate the comments about Jeff knowing all this stuff

I like tenant input. When I was chair I wanted to see associations at every site. They didn't keep them together though. I am happy we are not voting on this tonight.

Attorney O'Connor – Madam Chair, if I can comment, my input is to the 360 review and tenant input is important but there has to be a better way.

Chairperson Richards – Commissioner Brooks?

Commissioner Brooks – I've been here 20 years and I don't think sending out to everyone is going to get the information we need. I agree with Jeff that we need to put some trust in Cara and staff to do the best job they can. I have to say that since I go into finance just about every day to sign checks, I must say that everyone in this place functions as well as any team I've ever seen or any place I've ever worked. The level of interplay between people is unbelievable. So I am going to say that you have pare it down and not go through the crevices and minutia of the information.

Chairperson Richards – this was a good meeting, everyone expressed their opinions – even the hard ones. I ask everyone to look at this information and come to the next meeting to discuss.

Cara – I agree that residents input should be there but the proper way.

Commissioner Laufer – what other ways could we get information from residents on how they feel about well-being in Housing.

TABLE EVALUATION FORMS TO NEXT MEETING

Motion was put forth by Commissioner Jones, seconded by Commissioner Laufer.

VOTING AYE: Commissioners Laufer, Silver, Jones, Brooks and Chairperson Richards.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Whereupon Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

Commissioner Laufer put forth the motion to adjourn the January meeting at 9:05 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Jones.