



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

APPROVED OCTOBER 2020 OCTOBER SPECIAL MEETING

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” meeting on Tuesday, October 6, 2020.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Chairperson Richards: Called the meeting to order and reminded the public and the Board that we are participating remotely today and that we want to verify that through the roll call.

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

PRESENT: Chairperson Richards; Commissioner Brooks, Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Laufer.

ABSENT: Commissioner Silver.

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Deb Dunphy Smith; Jack Redman; Keith Walsh; Sharon Kimble; Gary DePace; Donyael Parrish; Jose Cruz; Heather Maxwell;

Chairperson Richards: Thank you all for making time of your day to attend this Special Meeting, and so now we will entertain the only thing that is on our agenda.

AUTHORIZE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO ENTER INTO A MANAGEMENT CONTRACT TO OVERSEE THE HAMPSHIRE COUNTY REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY (HCRHA) AS REQUESTED BY DHCD AND ACCEPTED BY THE HCRHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairperson Richards: I hope you all had a chance to read the attached materials. We will go into discussion. Cara, do you want to provide an overview?

Cara: received an email and several calls from DHCD explaining that the Executive Director was retiring, and asking if we would be willing to step in until they regionalize, or permanently step in depending on how it worked out. And so, I was very excited about that because that means we are helping to keep housing available for people in need. The Housing Authority was struggling for quite some time because the Executive Director position is part-time, and that is difficult to fill. When they reached out and asked us to take it over on a management basis, and I know that each of you are of a like mind to be able to provide housing to those in need, I embraced it, and said I would go and take a look and see how far away it is and if it would be plausible, and then they met with the HCRHA Board up there. DHCD went to bat for us saying we are doing a good job and that we have a perfect PMR, and they are very pleased with us, and that they recommended us to them. That Board of Directors voted that they would like us to oversee their Housing Authority by way of a management contract.

Chairperson Richards: Can you tell us a little bit about how many units etc.?

Cara: Sure, it's two properties, and then a couple of multi-family homes. One has 3 bedrooms, and there are two 2 bedrooms as the family portion of it. The other two developments are elderly and disabled. One is in Cumington with 12 units and the other is in Huntington with 21 units, I believe. I actually have those numbers wrong. If you need the exact numbers, I have them in the email, but they are cute, cute little properties. The Executive Team got together last week and took a drive up there and took a look at the properties and the condition and location, and how they are in proximity to our current properties. They already have a maintenance staff. I think I would supplement out our Senior



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Service Staff Technicians to go up and assist as far as management, if those guys need a little bit of help or not, and then it would be covered by the management fees.

Chairperson Richards: Let me get one thing straight before I open it up for discussion. So, this is a management contract and they maintain their own Board of Directors, correct?

Cara: That is correct. The only part our Board participates in is this vote and whether or not to. The initial term would be for one year to see how it goes, and there is a 60 day opt-out for either party, so if they can regionalize or it's not working out for us, we can opt-out. The only thing our Board would do is to address this contract. Everything else goes through their Board. It doesn't create more work for you guys. We would assign it into a portfolio of one of our property managers so there's a presence there because right now at the largest property there is no management presence at all. The smaller property has some minor office hours, but right now no one. So to provide some better customer service, we would assign it into one of our property manager's portfolios.

Chairperson Richards: Thank you Cara. Let's open it now for discussion and questions from the Board.

Vice Chairperson Brooks: My first question, and I already asked Cara this, if anyone's gone up to the Hill Towns in the snow? Especially Huntington.

Cara: So, I've been up there. Like I said to you when you asked me the question off the record, I've been up there. I almost bought property on the same street as one of the developments, and they don't plow up there, but we are going to be the ones doing the actual plowing. We will utilize whatever their current service is. I don't know all the details yet, whether they do it in-house or if they have a contractor that takes care of it, but we maintain what they are currently doing.

Chairperson Richards: Other comments, questions?

Commissioner Jones: Why was the resignation? Was it a sudden resignation? What is the plan for succession? You mentioned regionalization. Is that seriously being looked at? Is this a try-out for NHA to expand potentially down the road? Where does all this stand?

Cara: Regionalization has been looked at. The Executive Director that was there has been there a long time, and she actually retired October 1st, but she's been still kind of helping out. They tried looking at regionalization before. They did try to have the Franklin County Housing Authority take over the one that was closer to it, but that's the smaller of the properties, and they weren't willing to look at the one that's in Huntington which was too far for them. And so I think it's an amazing opportunity for us to expand, and I think it's helping DHCD in any way I/we can and maintaining the housing for those in need. I think it opens up a lot of doors for us, we willing to do it, and that we're willing to take it on.

Commissioner Richards: Any more questions, Jeff?

Commissioner Jones: Did they know this resignation was coming, or was it sudden?

Cara: They knew it was coming. They had tried to fill the position of hiring another Executive Director, and in my talks with Gary, Gary DePace is also the fee accountant there, so that's a plus for us as well. They just weren't able to fill it. The Board there is frustrated according to DHCD. Laura Taylor and Ben Stone of Hudson have had some pretty extensive conversations with them, and they are kind of frustrated because they felt left out as the step-children because they are so far out, and Ben and Lisa said they think we can give their residents good customer service. That was really nice to hear, actually.

Chairperson Richards: Cara, I have some questions about customer service. I would imagine that if residents were allowed to ask questions during this special meeting, which they're not, they might ask a



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

question about sometimes it's hard to get maintenance services or help immediately when they need it, or as soon as they need it. Is this going to affect our current residents at all in terms of customer service?

Cara: No, they have their own maintenance staff, and so our maintenance staff remain committed to their individual properties that they are assigned to. The only people that I might have assist are occasionally the Senior Service Techs. And don't get me wrong, in an emergency I might have to pull someone, yes. I don't foresee that happening, they have their own maintenance staff, but I might have our Senior Service Tech take a ride up just to check on things, but our residents wouldn't suffer from that. Also, to let you know Marilyn, Ms. Silver has raised her hand a couple of times.

Chairperson Richards: I'm sorry, I hadn't seen it. Commissioner Silver please.

Commissioner Silver: Thanks. Generally, I think it's probably a good move to help out up there. I wanted to know how much staff they have up there assured of maintaining their position; whether or not they are unionized, if they are, if they're not, how does that dovetail with the current staff under the NHA? What's your relationship to the Board, whether the Board is your supervisor Cara in that circumstance, and what control they have over you that might create tensions with what we need to have done? (Jokingly) These were about 10 questions, so have at it.

Cara: I don't know if they are unionized. I don't believe they are, I don't think they are, but I can get back to you on that. There's two maintenance guys. There was one administrator and an Executive Director. The Executive Director retired, and the administration person can't commit to the hours anymore. That essentially means there is no administration staff for us. I think that it looks like the properties are very well maintained and we wouldn't be looking to make any staff changes unnecessarily. The Board would be one just like you guys are to me. I would report to them through the management contract. I don't think I got all of your questions. Elizabeth can you tell me the ones that I've missed?

Commissioner Silver: Well, you're doing pretty good. The only staff that are left is the maintenance people?

Cara: Correct.

Commissioner Silver: So there's issue of them keeping their jobs?

Cara: In my mind, I don't know the circumstances around their performance or anything of that. So we're going in like we'd be taking over another. They would essentially remain unless there was already previous issues with DHCD or the previous Executive Director already have in place, but it appears the properties look good. The day our team went up there and took a look, maintenance was up on ladders with hoses cleaning out the gutters and stuff.

Commissioner Silver: But you become their boss, right?

Cara: Yes, But the guys will report to a property manager just like our guys do.

Commissioner Silver: And you hire the property manager if you become the Executive Director?

Cara: Yes. Well we're not going to hire a new property manager. We're going to roll it into one of our current property manager's portfolio.

Commissioner Silver: Ok. How does their Board working with you dovetail with our Board working with you? Perhaps in the event of conflicting different rules, instructions, policies? How does it all work together?



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Cara: Their bylaws, it is run completely separate. I can't think of an instance when it might conflict, unless you guys wanted to have a Board meeting at the same time, but their Board meetings are different too. I can't think of instances where that might be an issue. Can you give any examples maybe that you could think of?

Commissioner Silver: I can't think of any at this point where, but if you've got two bosses operating, that are giving you instructions, I can see the potential for conflict there.

Cara: So the instructions that they would give would only relate to their properties, not NHA properties on any level. Same thing with you guys. Nothing you guys would say or do would affect their properties or their Housing Authority.

Commissioner Silver: I understand that, although the two different directions, the two different boards could be giving you potentially could be conflicting. Actions, behaviors, policies, I'm just trying to sort this out. I can't think of anything, but part of all of this is trying to anticipate what might come up. And so how does this affect any salary piece for anybody?

Cara: I thought, and in my communications with Laura Taylor, that it would be nice to offer an increase while the contract is in place to any of our employees who would be doing additional work. For example, our accounts payable and receivable would be doing additional work. Sharon Kimball, Jack, the property manager, and if the Senior Service Tech guys are sent up there, to give them a slight increase to reflect the additional work they might be doing. To go from there, it does affect my contract as well. It does include a percentage that DHCD calculates.

Vice-Chairman Brooks: Well it's a 30% increase isn't it Cara?

Cara: No, Sharon isn't it 20%?

Sharon Kimball: It's 20% of the total.

Vice-Chairperson Brooks: I thought I read 30.

Sharon Kimball: It's 20.

Chairperson Richards: Can you explain what total?

Sharon Kimball: We're estimating right now the fees are going to be about \$2800.00 a month. That comes out to be about \$33,600.00 a year, so 20% of that is like less than \$7000.00. Like 68, 69?

Chairperson Richards: Cara can you give us all the good things and reasons why we're doing this, other than helping the people of the Hill Towns who need this?

Cara: For DHCD to reach out to us means that they need our help. For us to step up and help where we can, I think opens up a lot of other opportunities for us. It shows that we are a team player and I really think it's kudos that we're doing a good job, and that they're hearing we're doing a good job, and that they'd like to see the residents get the same customer service out residents are getting for other Housing Authorities. In addition, it's going to bring us in some revenue that we previously didn't have. Like Sharon said, just over \$30,000.00 of revenue. Some of which will be used to offset people's workload, the rest will be used to offset our budget on a whole.

Chairperson Richards: Will you be able to implement some of the improvements that you have done with our staff in terms of service in the same way in the Hill Towns?

Cara: DHCD did ask that I look at that. Obviously, it would be up to their board. I'm sure that they have their own employee handbook, and of course I'd have to look at all of that first. Primarily getting them up and going. Where calls are being answered like ours are all the time, as opposed to a couple of hours



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

a week. Getting somebody there physically, being able to do certifications online. They don't have any of these kinds of things for their residents at their disposal. And I think they are looking at getting some more services to the residents. I think that's what the Board there wants too.

Chairperson Richards: I would say that too. On a personal level the hospital where I work, we've been working with the Hill Towns at the Community Health Center for a number of years. About four years ago we were able to open up a health center in our county. There is a health center in Huntington and Worthington, and a good one. We have a good working relationship with the Hill Town's folks and we've meshed very well. Are there questions from the Board?

Commissioner Jones: So is it fair to say this is going to go one of two ways? Either it's going to go regionalization, or go potential incorporation with the NHA after the year? Because the one thing I haven't heard on is that there's going to be an ongoing search for a part-time Executive Director.

Cara: I don't think that they are going to search for a part-time Executive Director. I think that they are going to look at regionalization or continuing a management contract if they don't regionalize. I think that as long as we're doing a good job they will renew with us.

Chairperson Richards: There are several Housing Authorities that have management contracts because they are small. Is that correct Cara?

Cara: Yes, it is.

Commissioner Silver: There is a question in the chat from a J.E. Kirkpatrick.

Cara: That is a resident and we can't take comment.

Commissioner Silver: It's about community gardens and it referred to Marilyn's comment about health care centers supporting community gardens. I think we can take that up to your connections up there Marilyn, and use them well.

Chairperson Richards: Thank you for your comment. In this meeting we are only taking questions from the Board at this point, and if there are no more questions from commissioners?

Vice-Chairperson Brooks: Tom do you have any input here?

Cara: We can't hear you Tom, you're muted.

Chairperson Richards and Vice-Chairperson Brooks: Tom?

Tom O'Connor: Thank you Mr. Brooks. No, other than that I looked at the contract and it seems fair and reasonable to me, and it seemed like a good opportunity for the Housing Authority. So, nice recommendation by DHCD, but my focus was on the legality of the contract.

Vice-Chairperson Brooks: Well, that was my question.

Tom O'Connor: It seemed very fair and reasonable to me.

Chairperson Richards: Thank you Tom.

Commissioner Silver: Can you circulate the contract Tom?

Cara: It was sent out last week.

Commissioner Silver: saw like a 12 page guide and then a three pager. Is the three pager what you are talking about?

Tom O'Connor: It was the contract Cara sent out last week.

Commissioner Silver: Was that the three pager, because the 12 pager looks as if it's just a guide.

Cara: It's five pages.

Tom O'Connor: Yes, I thought it was longer than three. I don't have a hard copy in front of me right now.



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Commissioner Silver: But that's it, the one you're talking about right? Thanks.

Chairperson Richards: O.K., if there are no more questions, we are ready to vote on this, and we will use the new Open Meeting laws. Because we are remote, we must do it by roll call. So at this time I will ask the Secretary to call the roll call and we will answer yay or nay.

Commissioner Silver: Don't you have to have a motion first?

Chairperson Richards: I introduced the motion. I made the motion.

Commissioner Silver: Sorry, I missed that.

Cara: Chairperson Richards?

Commissioner Silver: Can you please repeat what the motion is Marilyn?

Chairperson Richards: Sure, the motion is to authorize the Executive Director to enter into a management contract to oversee the Hampshire County Regional Housing Authority as requested by DHCD, and accepted by the HCRHA Board of Directors.

Chairperson Richards: Can I have a second?

Vice-Chairperson Brooks: Second

Chairperson Richards: O.K., all in favor?

Commissioner Silver: We need to have the roll call.

Chairperson Richards: We're going to have the roll call.

Roll Call Vote

Cara Leiper: Chairperson Richards, Aye
Vice-Chairperson Brooks, Aye
Commissioner Jones, Aye
Commissioner Silver, Aye
Commissioner Laufer, Absent

Chairperson Richards: And with that the motion carries, and we will proceed with the management contract. Cara, please keep us up to date on what happens, and any problems.

COMMISSIONER SILVER: MOTION TO ADJOURN?

Roll Call Vote

Cara Leiper: Chairperson Richards, Aye
Vice-Chairperson Brooks, Aye
Commissioner Jones, Aye
Commissioner Silver, Aye
Commissioner Laufer, Absent

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

VOTING NAY: None

Whereupon Chairperson Richards ended the meeting.