



# NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

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JULY 2021 MINUTES - JULY 19, 2021  
APPROVED: August 16, 2021

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, July 19, 2021 at 5:30 P.M.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.  
Upon Roll Call, those present and absent were as follows:

**PRESENT:** Chairperson Richards; Vice Chairperson Brooks; Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Cancel; Commissioner Laufer & Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Cara Leiper; Jack Redman; Sharon Kimble; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Heather Maxwell; Lisa Donoghue; Kaitlin Hanning; Donyael Galland; Gwenerva Nabad; K Chapman & Roy Martin

## TENANT COMMENTS

K. Chapman – McDonald – there have been violent crimes here and I am a victim of those crimes. I had an awful reaction and a seizure. I didn't know how to help stop the crime. Police & Housing were aware of the situation. Why is there no social worker available for the tenants? I checked and per the HUD guideline the Housing Authority is to provide emotional and physical support to tenants. Has NHA considered making it available to tenants? We need someone to go and talk to about events that are going down here. Also, Cara talked about kids at the Family housing connecting with NHA internet. There is no hooking into NHA connection here – we have to pay a lot of money for internet. Would NHA consider making it available to the tenants.

Roy Martin – Salvo – glad to see the TV room open and getting quite a bit of use. Less traffic here lately. A lot of people say they don't know how to get a hold of the Neighborhood watch – can there be a flyer? Carpets are clean – the little rugs by the front door are getting moved around by the wheelchairs. Can something be done with that. Can we also have a few more carriages – when people come back from the grocery store and have paper bags and it is raining, they get wet and the stuff falls out. We were told that Cara had the carriages removed. Patios – can they have a table and chairs? They assume they can have nothing. Heavy articles used to be able to be put in the Hallway and Maintenance would take care of hauling it away. Do we now have to get someone to come remove it and take it to the dump? Let us know tonight if possible if not in a letter to people to explain why they can't leave stuff in the hallway. And yes, I am running for the Mayor of Northampton.

Gwenerva Nabad – Hamp Hts – I have been living in Hampshire Heights since 2019. I have trouble getting support. There was a lot of confusion about who is who when I moved here. Who gets elected to the Board, who gets elected into positions. I feel more transparency is needed with NHA. The first day NHA was back in the office - we tenants have stuck it out and went through a lot during COVID. Confusing as to - are we open, closed, how to get funding, don't worry about the rent. NHA needs to honor disabilities whether they are visible or not. If we have Doctors notes and recommendations that should be sufficient enough to at least line up a meeting with tenants, some of which pays full market rent and some do not. I as a human being have a right to practice my culture and religious beliefs and to be my creative self and not have my artwork that looks just as beautiful as those in downtown

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Northampton, but because it's here in the "ghetto" it is called graffiti. But I've taken a lot of photos of real graffiti here. When getting back into the office, it should have been "how are you guys doing, how can we help you?". Instead it was a big shake down, unexpected banging on doors, ordering elderly people who are not very mobile to clean up their stuff, yelling and screaming about things looking unsightly. Very abusive and triggering. It puts me in a bad position and anyone else when they don't feel emotionally safe where they live. The only person we can talk to is the people we rent from. That's a very powerful position for someone to be in and then to turn around and treat them abusively with no regard for disability or any kind of unique anything, to just pass judgement. Also, the basements are flooding. A lot of what you see that looks unsightly is a response to what is going on in the environment. People need to get over here and look and watch the u-tube videos and to crack the whip on getting the basements safe and mold removed. There are entire families who suffer with breathing problems. Places are flooded. I would like to see a shakedown on those kinds of things rather than garden growing tenants who are artsy or elderly people who are in no position whatsoever to move their things. A lot of things going on here are tenant lead. A lot of us have rejected any kind of controls over the gardens. I am very insulted about the numbers on the garden boxes – we have names. Chairperson Richards – we take those comments seriously and we will get back to each person who makes a comment with hopefully an understanding of what you are looking for.

#### STAFF COMMENT – NONE

#### PUBLIC COMMENT –NONE

Cara – I have received the summary of the review and thank you all who took the time to complete the summary and provide feedback. You can do wonders with information. I look forward to the goals of the coming year. Just wanted to thank you all very much for recognizing the hard work that has happened over the last year during this really troubling time. I wanted to thank you all individually. Also, I wanted to give you a heads up on something. We are changing the locks on every unit and every door and it begins next week. In the past before I came here and after, they gave out a plethora of keys. When they made keys they automatically gave out two even if only one leaseholder. After consulting with our Attorney we are giving out (1) key to every leaseholder 18 years or older. This is to have more control over who is entering the buildings. Pursuant to the lease, with our Attorney's blessing, I am letting you know in advance in case you get any calls or pushback from this. Chairperson Richards – I want to thank everyone for taking the time to submit the reviews and taking time for your comments. Even the new folks submitted comments.

#### APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 2021 MINUTES

Vice Chairperson Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield. .

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Richards, Vice Chairperson Brooks, Commissioner Jones, Commissioner Laufer, Commissioner Cancel and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the June minutes.

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### DISCUSSION

##### May 2021 Financials

Cara stated that as of 5/31/21 we are at 92% of the budget for the fiscal year. The expenses right now are at 81.65% which is under budget. The only line item that is over is the audit cost which is an accrued

expense and will even out at year end. The budget looks great, we are below target but we are doing very well even though the pandemic has been happening.

Chairperson Richards – We will come out under budget?

Cara – we have one more month, typically I come in really close to the budget. I haven't gone over the budget in the six years I have been here. I am now in my 7<sup>th</sup> year here!

Commissioner Jones – the NOW Account went from 436 then dropped down to 165 what was going on?

Cara - Sharon? In April we had \$438,242.84 and it is down to \$165,498.86 can you explain?

Sharon – we had end of year payouts – retirement and benefits.

## DISCUSSION:

### Small Area Fair Market Rents

Cara – Commissioner Cancel had sent me questions – do you want me to read and respond to those?

Right now it is not viable to implement the small market rents.

Chairperson Richards – can you tell us what it is. I know that the housing partnership is interested in this and why aren't we doing it and the reasons.

Cara – The Fair Market Rents are what is determined for voucher holders and what we pay the landlords. HUD determines this based on the area you fall within – it becomes your payment standards.

Our standards that we pay for example, an efficiency starts at \$819.00 all the way to a 4 bedroom of \$1812.00. Your funding for vouchers is based upon a pool of money rather than, in my opinion as it should be, if they say you have 800 vouchers, they should fund 800 vouchers. But they give you a pool of money and you keep using a “2 year tool” to make sure your pool of money isn't going to run out based upon how much you are paying the landlord vs what the resident is paying the landlord. The Small Area Fair Market Rents are different – i.e. an efficiency – our current standard is \$819, if we used the Fair Market Rent it would be \$980.00. That range goes from \$819.00 to \$1820.00 which is what we are currently using. Fair Market rents goes from \$980.00 to \$2170.00. The problem is, that would end up running out of money for our current voucher holders if we would increase the rents per the Fair Market Rents. We are in the process of going through a financial analysis feasibility study with HUD. We are working with Heather on this for quite some time. The initial analysis shows we have enough HAB dollars to maintain our current vouchers and lease up another 10 – 15 this year in addition to the new programs. It is unclear right now if we can maintain the existing vouchers with the Fair Market Rents, but our initial analysis is that we won't be able to continue new lease ups because all funds will go to payment change standards at the renewal with the landlords.

One question Commissioner Cancel brought up is this – Given the importance of better understanding why only around 33% of people who leased up with a Section 8 were successful in

Northampton/Florence/Leeds, can we in the future ask participants if they wanted to and tried to lease up in our City but couldn't find an apartment or the subsidy wasn't high enough to afford?

Cara – our survey of the VASH vouchers found it is more availability than affordability, but we hope to gain further insight as our emergency vouchers and new lease ups happen this year. It would be great if the Commissioners could spread the word about our Emergency Housing Landlord Incentive and encourage folks to take a look at the portal. A lot of perks are being offered if they become our landlord. That's where you could be most helpful to us in this situation.

Commissioner Cancel – We have talked a lot about this at the Housing Partnership and to other Housing Authorities to find out how we can work together to possibly make this happen in the future. We totally understand the position we are in as a Housing Authority and how to navigate that and how to balance the need for more small area fair market rents and what we can actually do given what we are getting for vouchers. Thank you Cara for providing answers to that, I just gave you these questions about an hour ago.

Cara – Thanks to the staff for helping with this information also.

Chairperson Richards – Commissioner Cancel, is this something we could work on with the Partnership – the emergency vouchers?

Cara – They can't do anything for emergency vouchers but what they can do for us would be to encourage and direct landlords to visit our website and portal as there are a lot of incentives for them.

## DISCUSSION

### Corticelli Street Update

Chairperson Richards – there are two people on the Board that have a good solid history with this – Jeff and Jim. Cara can you give us the background for the new members and the goal for this year?

Cara – The property was built in 1879 so it triggers a Historical Commission review. The property has been vacant for over 20 years. In past meetings we wanted to keep the property as viable low income housing. DHCD requires that if you sell a property you must buy another property that is equal or better, to keep in the stock. Or, you can find funds to demolish and rebuild. We currently are waiting for a response from DHCD regarding funding. An email just came in today that they thought it was a total loss. It now goes to another person at DHCD- Paul McPartland - we hope to have more information by the next meeting. We can't just sell the property, we are required to keep housing stock.

Cara also went over different dates from 8/2018 through March of 2021 regarding meetings, requests and people interested in purchasing the property.

Chairperson Richards – thank you for your thorough history.

Commissioner Jones – this has been going on forever, it was brought up by former Commissioner Budgar. It is an eyesore and that's mild. The neighbors have real everyday issues and we as an Authority haven't been able to get this done. A lot of issues and a process that has to be followed which is causing a delay. I think we just transferred a property off of Burts Pit Road via the state legislature that perhaps habitat can get 2 or 3 houses on that land, should they go ahead and follow through on it and I think that is great. I am just frustrated that we can't get this done yesterday. Not sure on this report you are waiting for Cara from Paul – what he is going to tell you next week. But I would share the appraisal that it is a total loss. I don't think it can be rehabbed and occupied by other NHA tenants. I really don't know what our options are, I thought we were hampered in large part by the removal process for the contamination there.

Cara – correct – the asbestos and lead. \$600,000.00 estimate would cover a rebuild or a complete renovation. Paul McPartland will let us know what the next steps are. Linda Katsudas is the construction person at DHCD and she is trying to see if we can get it as part of our capital fund plan to fund the \$600,000.00 rather than letting the property sit there doing nothing. Paul is the person who will give us guidance and any funding. We were there today and the neighbors came out and voiced their concerns and so it was helpful that Tom Boyer was able to see that – he went back to his office and sent his response.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – is it possible that a private person could offer to buy this property? Then it is not NHA's problem anymore or is that irresponsible to the neighbors?

Cara – If sold, we would have to have a like unit in stock. So we would have to buy a 3 bedroom single family home right away to keep in housing stock. So you can't just get rid of it because it is a problem. I think that is largely why it has sat there empty for 20 years.

Chairperson Richards – Vice Chairperson Brooks do you have anything to add?

Vice Chairperson Brooks – I have been by there a few times. 15 years ago it was an eyesore then. Over the years it has become even more undervalued. I would wait for DHCD to give us some guidance.

Chairperson Richards – it almost seems like we can't get rid of it unless we do something about the issues, or provide equal housing.

Cara – even if we come up with a viable plan it is going to take a minimum of 1 year to do anything with it but at least something is going to happen. Jack and I walked the property with Tom Boyer and also spent a lot of time talking to neighbors to let them know we are working on doing something.

Chairperson Richards – how much to get rid of the lead, etc.?

Cara – \$600,000.00 for the renovation or rebuild, one way or another.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – lead paint removal, etc.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – are there bats there?

Cara – the roof is gone, asbestos roof shingles, lead paint, no working furnace. It is my understanding it was condemned 15 years ago.

Chairperson Richards – we had a proposal to seek CPA funds for this?

Cara – we initially started that but then realized how much it would cost but thought it was going to be a waste of money and it wouldn't be enough to make it habitable. We changed direction to do the Hampshire Heights playground.

Chairperson Richards – Do you know how many square feet?

Cara – I am not sure, I will have to get back to you.

Commissioner Jones – CPC won't fund a demolition project or \$600,000.00 for a renovation. We don't have that kind of money. They can only be a small part of an overall plan with grants, state and federal aid. We are in no position to tackle that ourselves.

Cara – knowing that, we changed direction then COVID hit. \$600,000.00 is a lot of money and I have now asked DHCD what say you? It is a prime location for possible disability housing. There may be funding there too. Let's see what we can find out, if I have to I will call Chairperson Richards for a special meeting.

Commissioner Jones – can we at least get an update at the next meeting?

Cara – absolutely.

Chairperson Richards – I think it should be on the agenda until it is done. I feel bad for the neighbors.

Commissioner Jones – it is a nice neighborhood and that house is right in the middle of it.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield- I remember the meeting with the neighbors and they were pleading with us to do something about it. I wish I could say you could buy it for \$1.00. I wish there was some solution, but I know it is not easy.

**Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield put forth the motion to adjourn the July meeting at 6:25 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Jones.**