



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

BOARD APPROVED AUGUST 2021 MINUTES AUGUST 16, 2021

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, August 16, 2021 at 5:30 P.M.

Before the start of the meeting Chairperson Richards introduced the newest Board Member, Maureen Carney. Ms. Carney was previously a member of the Northampton Housing Board and was also a member of the Housing Partnership as well as serving on the Northampton City Council. We are so honored to have her join us. We are both violinists and play on the Pioneer Symphony together. Ms. Carney – thank you for that gracious introduction. I served more than a dozen years ago and will look forward to working with everyone and I hope to be useful. Chairperson Richards – you are in great company.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 5:33 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 & Commissioner Carney.

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Jack Redman; Sharon Kimble; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Heather Maxwell; Lisa Donoghue; Kaitlin Hanning; Donyaell Galland; Jose Cruz; Angel Sadlowski; Keith Walsh; Gary DePace; Gwenerva Nabad; K Chapman; Angela Santaniello & Roy Martin.

PRESENTATION OF THE FY 21 YEAR END FINANCIALS

Gary Depace, Fee Accountant, spoke about the year-end FY21 certification form to be signed by the Board. This is a major thing to be signed by the Board to the Commonwealth. We ended the year very close to Budget, nothing very extraordinary. Cash reserves look good. We have \$691,945.60 owed from DHCD which is subsidy money, we should receive this in the next 2-3 months. We had two line items that were over – the Audit cost increased and employee benefits were over by 2.9%. Need to budget more for these line items next year, otherwise we underspent in other areas.

Chairperson Richards – on the Retirement unfunded liability – is it that we aren't paying right now but are accruing?

Gary – this includes two parts – the number we get comes from the City Retirement Board from their audit. OPEB hires actuaries to get those numbers – the value of what we should have in a given time to have for future benefits. The State will eventually have us start funding it. We are accruing but not funding it.

Chairperson Richards – DHCD money – is that handicapping us?

Gary – it is affecting our cash flow and investments. We would invest the money into MMDT, we are not losing any interest. It will get straightened out.

Commissioner Carney – Housing Authority Retirees – are full participants of the Northampton Retirement system?

Gary – all NHA employees are participants in the Northampton Retirement System.

MOTION

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I bring before you a motion to approve the EOY Financials for FY21 as presented by fee accountant Gary DePace, which includes the Certification of year-end Financial Statements, Tenants Accounts Receivables Data, the Certification of Top 5 Compensation Form and the Compliance with Notification for Federal and State Lead Paint Laws.

This was seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

TENANT COMMENTS

Roy Martin – Salvo – welcome aboard Maureen – us old politicians don't die – we keep on going! The washers and dryers are old and outdated and are causing trouble. Buy (3) new washers and dryers for each floor. Maybe the electric company can help take the old machines. Corticelli – do we still have the property? The kids from Smith Vocational re-built a house and now rents it – maybe they can work on the Corticelli property. Tomorrow at 7:00 a.m. the driveway is getting fixed here at Salvo. Also, there was an electric bike chained up to a bench all day in front of Salvo, people shouldn't be doing that.

Gwenerva Nabad – Hampshire Heights – regarding the construction on King Street and Damon Road - hoping they don't cut down the oak tree. I called the DPW and the tree warden is on vacation. Also I have a concern with the humidity and mold in my basement. I've gotten very sick from mold in other apartments. Another issue here – I am advocating for no mosquito spraying in Northampton and have found a way to cope that is natural, be we have a puddling problem at Hamp Heights that is drawing mosquitos.

K Chapman – McDonald – the past 4 months I have been a victim of crime and witnessed another one. I do have a meeting scheduled but NHA needs to be more proactive. We have a diverse community here at McDonald. Regarding the internet – can we tap into the Housing Internet? It is a necessary utility but expensive. NHA needs to address our particular needs – take them into consideration. Let us know how different issues are going.

STAFF COMMENT – NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT –NONE

APPROVAL OF THE JULY 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

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Carney

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the July minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Corticelli Street Update and Next Steps

Cara stated that she had a conversation with Paul McPartland from DHCD and NHA is eligible to sell the property without replacement because it has been vacant since 2012. This is according to statute MGL c 121B, sec.26. Cara then went over the different Options outlined.

Commissioner Laufer – what is the tearing down and replacing option?

Cara then went over the list of options available for the sale of the property.

Commissioner Laufer – I am comfortable with moving forward, but we also need to figure out a way to keep this as affordable housing. Maybe Habitat for Humanity. This is my strongest opinion – won't vote yes to anything other than that.

Cara – whoever purchases the property will keep it as affordable housing, even if they buy it for \$1.00.

Commissioner Laufer – but it won't be NHA Housing, but whoever buys it.

Cara – the purchaser will develop it into affordable housing in perpetuity.

Commissioner Carney – once the property sells, the future owner is then required by EOHCD.

Cara – yes, it states that it will not be NHA responsibility.

Commissioner Cancel – I agree with Commissioner Laufer. Have we reached out to other affordable housing agencies?

Cara – the RFP would go out to all those places. Had talked to Habitat a few years ago, but they found something on Burts Pit Road where they are building units.

Commissioner Laufer – what if no one purchases the property?

Cara – someone will. The RFP talks about that. Option B- they have a \$500.00 deposit and the property is not subject to any restrictions. Can be sold to a flipper if no one wants to make it affordable housing.

Commissioner Laufer – that would be dangerous. If the property is expensive to fix, why would another agency buy it?

Commissioner Jones – didn't we do something like this on Burts Pit Road? Habitat for Humanity is building units? Cara – yes.

Commissioner Jones – Corticelli St. is a nice neighborhood and this has been going on for decades, it was also an issue for Jon Hite. Maureen, perhaps you dealt with it before I came on. Option # 1 is the best solution. We have been through all the costs. Perhaps Habitat can work on this as well.

Commissioner Brooks – I agree with Jeff. Option #1 is the fastest solution. It is an eyesore – our best out as presented.

Cara – it is important that everyone realizes that we are usually required to sell a property and then replace it. We have a loophole here.

Commissioner Laufer – but it is important to stay as affordable housing, it is not OK to lose a property. We need to do whatever we can to keep housing.

Cara – we can look at offering it to a Section 8 voucher.

Commissioner Laufer – this is Northampton, I don't think someone will invest \$200 - \$300,000.00 on this property.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I am leaning towards what Commissioner Jones is saying. I've been to that neighborhood. What if someone has a chance to buy this property for \$1.00 and gets some resources to fix it? That would be a good thing.

Commissioner Carney – this would not be the first time Housing has to do this and worked with Valley CDC. Smith Vocational has used properties that were bought. I am optimistic that an agency would take advantage and that it would stay affordable. I am comfortable with Option #1.

Chairperson Richards – can we back out?

Cara – No, the RFP spells out the details – either A or B – It is about 15 pages.

Commissioner Cancel – can we table this to next month so that a couple of us can try to figure out what we may do. I am worried about not keeping it as affordable housing.

Cara – our only option now is to sell it and there are three different ways. (Cara went through the options.) Option #1 is the best bet to keep it as affordable housing.

Chairperson Richards – we have no other option but to sell. Option # 1 is the best plan. Commissioner Cancel wants to form a committee and it would have to be a small committee.

Commissioner Carney – regarding the motion to table – details of the RFP are being questioned. Would it be appropriate to say that this motion allows Cara to start the process of writing up the RFP and working with a committee to try to address those details to make the property stay affordable?

Chairperson Richards – good comment. I think that is exactly what we are voting on - the next steps. Suggest we give the details to Cara, Sharon, Jack, whoever, and bring it back to the full Board to avoid any appearance of Open Meeting Violation.

Cara – the RFP attached is what we would use - i.e. the one from Leominster. Do you want me to start the process and which one? It doesn't mean in the future we can't ask to buy another House or property, when the market is a buyer's market.

Commissioner Cancel – I don't like the idea of no options other than selling. What lead to the decision of not rehabbing as a viable option? We have a huge need for affordable housing in the City, all the advocates we have in the state and federal level for funding to assist with that and a rescue plan as well.

Cara – Jack and I went to the house with DHCD and it will be over \$600,000.00 to rehab or tear down and rebuild. They have deemed that is not a viable option last month. I have had meetings over the last month to see what the viable options are. DHCD's decision – the only option is to sell. The RFP like the one used in Leominster is recommended.

Commissioner Cancel – what type of funding besides DHCD can we look into to keep it in NHA. DHCD doesn't have the power to tell us to sell and not rehab.

Cara – we can go to the CDC and ask for funds, but we will never get enough funding in order to be habitable.

Chairperson Richards – did Habitat say they didn't want it?

Jack – they couldn't take it on at the time – it is a complex property. It is historic and there are new zoning laws. It is not feasible for a tear down and keeping the foundation in order to keep the existing zoning. It is a difficult and hard situation.

Commissioner Laufer – can we reach out to organizations for interest? I might feel better as a guarantee that it remains affordable, subsidized.

Cara – it has to go through legislation with the RFP and that is a lot of work. The ball needs to keep rolling. The neighbors are getting upset as the house just sits there.

Chairperson Richards – the neighbors have been more than patient. I think we owe it to them to at least proceed forward.

MOTION

Proceed forward with legislation as written to sell the property without finding a replacement – Option #1.

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

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

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Laufer, Commissioner Cancel.

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

MOTION

Authorize the Executive Director Remote Operations as necessary due to COVID-19 case increases.

Cara stated that the staff has concerns with the Delta variant. I would rotate the staff in the office. DHCD does not require Board approval for the staff being remote, but for the ED to be remote. PHN2021-11 requires a Board vote. Easthampton is in the red zone, and the city of Northampton is mandating masks.

Chairperson Richards – we spoke about this a few weeks ago, and I approve the plan.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Cancel.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.

Commissioner Brooks – what are the parameters of the increase? Just in Northampton, Western Mass, the State, or Country?

Cara – I have been monitoring the numbers with our executive team and watching local numbers. Easthampton is in the red zone, and the city of Northampton is mandating masks. Everyone in the office is wearing masks and this week I was going to rotate employees to minimize the number of people in the office where there is no ventilation, and only the use of one bathroom. Sharon, Jack and I will rotate days, I will work remote two days a week. It will fluctuate based on the numbers and DHCD guidance.

Commissioner Cancel – part of the reason why Mass. has lower COVID rates is because of these kinds of measures. We shouldn't have to go to DHCD for approval. I am on board with this, the more careful we can be the better. It doesn't make it any easier for you folks; I respect what you are doing and I hope everyone stays safe.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I echo Commissioner Cancels comments. I went to Texas and there is a difference between the North and the South. I am for it – it is a scary time.

Chairperson Richards – Cooley Dickinson Hospital is going remote and hybrid for those who can as well.

DISCUSSION:

McDonald House Elevator Update

Cara – as of last Friday I listed what we have done for the Elevator Replacement to date. A resident was trapped in the elevator and the Fire Department had to use the Jaws of Life to open the elevator.

Commissioner Brooks – I have lived at McDonald for 21 years and have been trapped in the elevator 4 times – the last time for 4 ½ hours. The Fire Department could not open the doors we had to wait for the elevator company. As a resident it is a question of safety and security. I could hear the woman in the elevator and I thought she was going to have a nervous breakdown. NHA needs to inform the tenants of this process. It should be presented by Cara or Donyael.

Chairperson Richards – thank you Commissioner Brooks for bringing it forward. Cara, if anything different crops up other than what is listed, can you let us know?

Cara – yes.

Chairperson Richards – Thanks to the staff and to everyone, it is good to hear your thoughts and that we are not always on the same page.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to adjourn the August meeting at 7:00 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.