



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

SEPTEMBER 2021 MINUTES - SEPTEMBER 20, 2021 APPROVED NOVEMBER 1, 2021

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, September 20, 2021 at 5:30 P.M.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 5:31 P.M.
Upon Roll Call, those present and absent were as follows:

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Laufer

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Jack Redman; Sharon Kimble; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Heather Maxwell; Lisa Donoghue; Kaitlin Hanning; Donyael Galland; Jose Cruz; Keith Walsh; Gwenerva Nabad; Angela & Joe Santaniello.

TENANT COMMENTS

Joe & Angela Santaniello – Salvo – it was wonderful meeting with the mayoral candidates. We had an ice cream social and the Neighborhood Watch helped with that. On 9/27 there will be another mayoral candidate forum. Thursday from 6:00 – 8:00 P.M. Captain Caputo from the NPD will meet with the Neighborhood Watch to answer questions. Everything is going well – some negative complaints and feedback on key fobs. Things are starting to settle down in this building. NHA has been working hand in hand with the neighborhood watch and a lot of problems have been eliminated. There are still a lot of people going into the community room not wearing masks even though there are signs. Concern for compliance. Even with the vaccine you can get the variant.

Chairperson Richards – thank you Joe & Angela for your updates – it is nice to hear the good work you have done.

Gwenerva Nabad – Hampshire Heights – are there any updates on the mold and basement remediation?

Chairperson Richards – as Commissioners this is our opportunity to listen to you and we don't respond, but we will get back to you on the issues you bring up. Thank you for attending and participating in the tenant comment.

STAFF COMMENT – NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT –NONE

APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 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 Cancel; Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield and Commissioner Carney.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the August minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

49 Old South Street, Suite 1 • Northampton, MA • 01060

T 413-584-4030 • F 413-582-1350 • TDD 711 • 

Corticelli Street Update

Cara – on August 16, 2021 the Board voted to proceed with the sale. Cara went over the Corticelli Street background to have the new Commissioners up to date. DHCD says if you sell one building you have to buy one to replace it, but we are grandfathered in to just sell the property. The proceeds will go into the DHCD account – 705 program – they will allow Housing to get it back, but it is not guaranteed.

Chairperson Richards – at the last meeting we discussed and voted and some of the folks felt strongly that it should stay as affordable housing for local neighbors but the vote was for the option to sell.

Cara - Now we will obtain an appraisal and solicit for a broker. Then do an RFP and send to DHCD for their approval.

Chairperson Richards – proceeding consistent with our vote and we are making progress. For the new members how did we get this property and will you give us an overview.

Attorney O'Connor – this property has been in NHA for decades. Cara gave the history over the last few decades. It has fallen into a state of disrepair since 2012 and has become an albatross and we are proceeding appropriately to try and create a conveyance so we can sell.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – Is the date for the contract for Marketing Services on 10/18 or 10/15?

Cara –October 15th.

Chairperson Richards – are we keeping the neighbors up to date?

Cara – when we are there they come out and ask questions and we keep them apprised of what is going on.

Chairperson Richards – the last time they were here I felt their pain. I am glad they are hopeful we are doing something.

Attorney O'Connor – I looked up the deed to the property and NHA purchased it on 8/15/1993.

DISCUSSION AND VOTE – MCDONALD ELEVATOR UPDATE AND SPECIAL MEETING DATE VOTE

Cara went over the McDonald elevator work to date and the next steps/timeline. She stated that the Board needs to have a special meeting to get the bid awarded. She gave two dates for the Board to choose. They chose Wednesday 9/29/21 at 12:00 P.M.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, the Board approved the vote date of 9/29/21.

Commissioner Carney – regarding the bid opening on 9/23. Is this job subject to the prevailing wage?

Cara – yes.

Commissioner Carney – do we also need to comply with the City Council's fair employment resolution? Employers submit certification that they are in compliance with the labor laws. Does Housing fall under that?

Cara – DHCD and the Federal government require certain documentation and I do believe that is one of the documents they require, to certify labor practices. I know they do certified payroll.

Jack – this is a federal project under Davis Bacon – we are required to submit all local practices as well, upon execution of the contract.

Commissioner Carney – prevailing wage. Curious as the City's requirement applied to Housing Authority – can do offline.

Chairperson Richards – Commissioner Carney that is helpful, I appreciate that, thank you.

NEW BUSINESS

DISCUSSION AND MOTION RESOLUTION #1191 – KEY CONTROL POLICIES (KEY MANAGEMENT, ENTERING APARTMENTS, LOCK OUTS, & MAKE READY LOCKS)

Cara – we are in the process of re-keying all locks and agencies properties – resident and common areas. The key controls that have been in place over the years weren't very stringent. I spoke with Attorney O'Connor and we agree that only keys go to the people on the lease that are 18 or older. We will provide lock out service. All emergency agencies have access to a Knox box. There is no need for extra keys that are out there causing unwanted people in the building and having no control. There was a problem with the Fire Department and EMS leaving a stuck key in a door at Salvo which we were able to get back. I am de-mastering the agency. A master key is a single key that opens every door and I don't think the liability of that is worth it. This key is different than the front door key. We have boxes in each office and it contains a key to each apartment and is coded by a random number generated; each employee was issued a fob and they have to have the passcode to open the master box. When they open the box they have to put the fob in place to remove the key to the apartment they gain access to – the fob remains until they return the apartment key. It allows us to know who is going into what units and when. As a base I used what I had done before coming to NHA and tweaked it to be more appropriate to public housing and your agencies. It means it is telling the staff how to manage the keys and having a policy about it then having a procedure with regards to resident keys, common keys and apartment keys. It is then a policy and procedure re-entering apartments – not to be confused with allowing law enforcement into apartments which is a separate issue. Then do a policy and procedure re: lock outs, and also a make ready lock. One key will open all vacant units - so that contractors, etc., don't have to go running around looking for keys. I created a policy and procedure for this as well. Those make ready locks will stay on vacant until 24 hours before a new move in occurs at which time Mike or Pete – Senior Service Techs – will re-core it to a key block and give the key to the respective manager for the new move in. I brought the forms in - the Permission To Enter Forms and Emergency Call Forms, but I wanted to incorporate them and I had attached them into the policies so that they were officially part of the package. We ask the residents to fill out the permission to enter form so that we know when they call work orders in, whether or not we can enter the apartment. Regarding the Emergency Call Log – I asked the guys to complete this as a way to track Overtime and also who is in a unit at any given time. Currently lock outs are charged an antiquated fee and it doesn't cover your lowest member of the collective bargaining agreement to go on a call – which is a Porter. All maintenance as long as the positions are 100% full which is 14 members. The lowest rate is \$14.82 – rate of time and a half is \$22.23. There are 365 days in a year and if a lowest paid person was on call a minimum of 1 hour you would still be paying more. The average rate is \$36.55 based upon what all maintenance makes. I came up with a \$30.00 lock out fee. However, it is my opinion that we are in the customer service industry and if a resident gets locked out during regular business hours that the management staff is perfectly capable of taking the key and going for free to let the resident into their apartment. That is something that has been changed as well as they will no longer pay a lock out fee during regular business hours, but the fee will be \$30.00 for after hours.

The next change is re-keying. This does not apply if the locks have to be changed due to a domestic violence incident and there is a police report. We are not allowed to charge a fee for that. This would apply if someone loses their keys and we have to change the lock or someone wants their locks changed. We currently charge \$40.00 which does not even cover the cost of the man hours to do so. If it takes 1 ½ hours the total cost for us is \$141.78 for parts and labor. \$100.00 might be a good number to bill residents and ask that people be a little more careful with their keys. If someone doesn't have the money we will bill them and they can do a payment plan. A resident wanted to see a key policy and I could not find one. Residents with PCA's – I am following the 504 reasonable accommodation plan and I am installing a mini safe outside the door and discuss with the resident what key combo they would like. Their PCA can use the code and get the key from the safe. This is effective and helpful so far with PCA's.

Chairperson Richards – our mission is to provide affordable housing that is safe and user friendly. Sometimes safe and user friendly conflict with one another. Are you feeling that this policy is as user friendly as we can get and really adds to the safety of the tenants and that Fire and Police can get in if they need to?

Cara – yes, each property has a Knox box with a master key – we don't have keys to the Knox boxes. No staff has master keys anymore. I think that what I have seen in our industry is that the policy of master keys went by the wayside about 20 years ago and we were behind the times. I hear from people that they are used to having as many keys as they like but these new keys are like a Medco/Arrow security key so they can't get copied at a hardware store. Latch key kids are also addressed – they should not be let in but we should be calling the emergency contact person so they aren't home alone. I have tried to cover all the bases. We provide emergency lock out 24 hours a day 365 days a year. The first one is free and if it occurs during the day, it is also free.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – a resident with a brain injury is always forgetting their keys – would that person have a lock box at their door?

Cara – it depends on how the request form comes in. If it is a disability I will handle it according to the disability. We have already been installing them for PCA's. At Salvo – now that we have the Fob on the front door the Fob usage is monitored by the computer program. We can have PCA's come to the office with the resident, show their license and we take a copy of that license and then issue them a Fob. We will install one of the mini safes at the door and they are able to utilize it. If the PCA is fired or is no longer there, we go into the system, turn the Fob off and it doesn't work anymore. No more keys floating around.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – what about Richard at McDonald?

Cara – I can't talk specifics, but the resident with several PCA's would put in their request. I haven't done McDonald yet. The notice that goes out talks about the keys and all these things and it is very clear. The property managers are going around with Mike and Pete when they are doing the key change to give the issuance of the new key and having the resident sign for it. Then at that time if there is a question about whether or not they need something extra, they tell them what needs to be done and they will come directly to me.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – Richard is going to have a problem – he pounds on the back door when he doesn't have a key.

Cara – McDonald doesn't have a key Fob so that is not going to change him doing that. Maybe we should do a referral to the Resident Services Coordinator. You should start reporting this to the property manager so we can get him some help.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – question – A person at Salvo who said that his PCA was his cousin – the PCA will give a copy of their driver's license but they also may be bringing in alcohol. Are you talking about the process that they have to have a legitimate PCA not just a drinking buddy?

Cara – Salvo is the only property that has a managed entry with FOBS. The property manager is checking for ID or license and making sure they are in fact a PCA.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – have we had problems yet where people were filling out applications saying the family member is a PCA and not a PCA?

Cara – we do have a resident whose son is her PCA.

Chairperson Richards – you are right, they could be family but be a legal PCA.

Cara – let's say somebody, Commissioner Tarbutton, pulls something over a property manager and they happen to get a FOB and we see shenanigans going on and we catch them. We can just go in and shut the Fob off and they will come into the office and we can address the situation then.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – when people with disabilities now opens the door, it stays open for about 30 seconds and other people are getting in. This may happen with a Fob. I have heard people talk about it.

Cara – barring having a guard standing at the door you can't stop that. I think we have curtailed a lot of it with the new cameras and FOBs and now with changing the locks. We have had a lot of success with it and it has not been an issue as of late.

Chairperson Richards – it is a comprehensive policy – Director Leiper I am sure it took you a long time to do this and to think this all out because it is very complicated. I am sure it could be amended if need be – tweaked so to speak.

Cara – yes, if I find that it is hindering operations or there are issues, as the Executive Director I can make exceptions but it hones it down so that staff knows what to do with keys, residents know how many keys they get at move in as opposed to willy nilly. At any time I can bring it before the Board and ask for modification should it be necessary.

Chairperson Richards – thank you, it is a big job I am sure.

Cara – I did have the Attorneys look it over and also Attorney O'Connor and the Executive team reviewed it as well.

Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to approve seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the motion.

DISCUSSION AND MOTION

2022 PAYMENT STANDARDS AND EXCEPTION

This is to authorize the Executive Director to submit a formal request to HUD to use the payment standard exception of 115%. Once approved by HUD, to adopt the payment standards.

Cara went over the information – on 8/6/21 HUD released the Fair Market Rents. Housing Partnership really wanted us to look at taking small area fair market rents. It is good we did not at that time because these new rents that were released by HUD reduced all rents across the board. Our team completed an analysis and discussed with HUD the benefits of switching to the Small Area Fair Markets Rents (SAFMR) due to this decrease. Although there are some advantages going to SAFMR, 11 of the 20 zip codes we use require an exception by HUD. Having 11 exceptions is not feasible. We are requesting to use the 115% of the FMR for the payment standards. This is financially feasible and keeps the agency from reducing payment standards for participants. I need the Board's permission to ask HUD for an exception and once they accept, to be able to implement the payment standard exception of 115% to adopt the payment standards.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I am confused.

Cara – This is a Section 8 program and the amount of rent that we are allowed to pay for a certain size apartment. HUD determines those amounts every year and the Board has to adopt the payment standards which is what we are going to pay for a certain size, but this time they went down. I want to ask for an exception and adopt it when we get the exception.

Chairperson Richards – why did they go down?

Cara – HUD does a calculation based upon rents, etc. Fair market calculation is done. We serve clients all over the country – 11 areas would take a huge hit and the increase would go to the resident. If the resident couldn't afford the increase it would go to us and we would run out of money.

Chairperson Richards – the vote is to ask for an exception which is good for us.

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

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the motion.

Chairperson Richards – Commissioner Cancel you are the appointee from the Housing Partnership. Please let them know we are doing everything we can including approving this to make sure that we can do the very best we can. So if you have any questions, please contact Cara for more details. I want to make sure that you have the information you need.

Cara – one thing I want to mention, now that the Board has approved the Key Control Policies, I will send it out to the residents and implementing the changes for charges in the next 30 days.

Commissioner Carney put forth the motion to adjourn the September meeting at 6:30 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Brooks.

Chairperson Richards – I went to the City Services Committee- they appoint particularly the mayoral candidates, everything other than the governor's appointee. I let them know what we do and how we do it. I think they were very pleased to know I gave the staff a lot of accolades really for work that we have done during COVID. I hope that we work every day to make our Housing Authority safer and more community oriented and user friendly. They were I think, thrilled to have us and happy with our report.

Commissioner Cancel – I am really pleased with the work of the staff and the policy with the keys is another way in which we are really growing and moving into the new century and we are doing it with our tenants and customers in mind. Every policy we make, we are keeping people in mind, we are being considerate and I am really proud of the work we are doing here. There was an event this past weekend at Florence Heights thanks to Netanya Ortiz. The Police participated, there was a fix a bike day by the Pedal People, and there was handball. It was really nice and I was really happy to participate. Great work to our staff. We have very competent property managers and staff and I am really proud to be part of this organization.

Chairperson Richards – thank you so much, I am too.