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APPROVED DECEMBER MINUTES - DECEMBER 20, 2021  
Approved by Board of Commissioners 01/31/2022

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, December 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 Laufer & Commissioner Carney.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Cara Leiper; Jack Redman; Sharon Kimble; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Heather Maxwell; Lisa Donoghue; Kaitlin Hanning; Jose Cruz; Keith Walsh; Angel Sadlowski; Angela & Joe Santaniello; Rick Paiva; Roy Martin; Helen Fitzgerald; John Wyda; Rick Peterson; K. Chapman & Cheryl Cardinale.

**Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield joined the meeting at 5:36 p.m.**

**TENANT COMMENTS**

K. Chapman – McDonald – I have lived at McDonald for 2 ½ years and the internet is a necessary utility. People are not interested in participating in activities offered in and out of the building. Community Room is not a welcome place to many of us or the gardens. One person has appointed himself the go to as far as anything. I had to ask just to plant a few things and they got pulled up. HUD & NHA states quality of life being a key goal for tenants of public housing. I want to address security, leisure and recreation time, safety and a feeling of social belonging - these issues as it affects possible gardening. People should not have to leave home to get their fill of these things.

Salvo #425 – Angela Santaniello – I want to thank Housing for holding residents accountable. Tenants are receiving letters and notifications because they need to do certain things. Applaud you for stepping in and trying to make this a better place. There is a man sleeping in the building – sleeps in the bathroom, tried to force his way into a woman’s apartment. Last week we saw him come into the building and he went to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor and then went into the bathroom. We called the police who detained him and he was arrested as he has outstanding warrants. The safety of our residents is paramount and the many single women here need to know it’s a safe place. The key fob leaves the door open too long so people can sneak in. Women would probably prefer a key rather than the fob so they can sneak right into the building rather than the fob where the door stays open. Maybe tweak the fob system to make getting in and out of the building a little safer.

Joe Santaniello - Salvo #425 – Police calls have been reduced significantly. As of last week they were down 82%. We are very happy with that.

Cheryl Cardinale – Salvo #623 – there is a new resident that has a dog who we believe is a pit bull. Weighs about 60 pounds and is not a service dog. Doesn’t like other dogs. I stepped off the elevator and he growled at my dog. Saturday night he lunged at us and the woman could barely control him. I called the police and the animal control twice and I did a concern form which I gave to Jose. I am not the only resident who has encountered this dog.

Rick Paiva – Salvo # 710 – I put a table in the front lobby with a chair. People coming in and out of the building asked me what it’s for and I tell them I can’t answer that question because I just sit out here like a watchman. It’s been doing pretty well. I wanted to let Cara know that I am making this my initiative from around 6:30 P.M. to around 2:30 A.M. Some people don’t like it – I am concerned with people coming into the building.

Roy Martin – Salvo # 529 – I was on the elevator the day the dog got aggressive with Cheryl and her dog. The dog is definitely a pit bull. I left my door unlocked and someone went in and stole my wallet. They also used my card the other day. Also you can't be asking people where they are going, what their name is and what apartment number you are going to. People are getting upset. Why is he asking? I tell them he thinks he is a security guard. If he gets hurt while doing this, he will have to pay his own medical bills – something Cara will have to take care of.

Helen Fitzgerald – Salvo # 713 – I also encountered the large black dog and I have a little dog. We came around the corner and he growled at us and was very aggressive – I picked up my dog and ran. Are there services in place for chronic hoarders who live in the building? I believe that many of them can't help themselves. I feel sad they aren't receiving help. Since I moved in it has been going on a lot and it causes infestation of mice and roaches.

John Wyda – Salvo # 420 – before the building manager was hired he promised he would have monthly meeting with the tenants – so far nothing. People want to know what is going on. If you want to see him you have to make an appointment which a lot of people won't do. Lots of new tenants in Salvo using handicap spaces. Several tenants have had to park way in the back and it takes a while to get to the front door as the side doors are locked. State says with the size of the building we do qualify for the number of handicap spaces we have. Do you want to go by the State or do you care about the people who need handicap spaces? There are holes in the driveway that need to be repaired before someone falls. Mask mandate – people in the building who refuse to wear the mask and the building manager won't say anything about it. This would be presented to him at a monthly meeting.

Cheryl Cardinale – Salvo #623 – I have information on the woman with the dog and her apartment number. This is a serious issue. Violation of Department of Housing and Community Development of their pet policy. Something has to be done about this dog before someone gets mauled or a dog gets killed. I am afraid to step into the lobby with my dog.

Chairperson Richards – thank you, if you can pass that information along that would be great.

Rick Peterson - Salvo # 518 – I have a concern – the building manager was hired and he is not required to come to meetings? It should be part of his job. He should be required to come to various meetings we have instead of making appointments to see him. He can be here to answer questions and hear our concerns.

#### STAFF COMMENT

Jack Redman – the pandemic has been extremely hard for NHA and many staff. I just wanted the Board to understand that when we have an employee who has to self- quarantine because a resident has left our office or we are reported that someone has tested positive it really puts a lot of extra work on other staff members. Today the Executive Director held a zoom meeting with all the staff and actually provided a gift card to each employee. As an employee I wanted to thank the Executive Director and have the Board be aware this occurred today.

Chairperson Richards – thank you and just to echo that we do appreciate your staff.

Sharon Kimble – I second what Jack says – we so appreciate what Cara did today – we were all so surprised and it was such a great thing that she did. I think everybody walked out of work today feeling that. So thank you!

Angel Sadlowski – thank you Cara, we all definitely appreciated it – it was heartfelt.

Chairperson Richards – Thank you, thank you, and thank you staff!

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Jim Nash – City Councilor for the City of Northampton – I have had meetings with people at Salvo and I want to echo pretty much what they have been saying here. The measures taken over the last few years

around security have resulted in improvement but there are still some continued concerns of people. People still getting into the building and the issue of disappearing packages. I appreciate the efforts of the Neighborhood Watch and the people in the building to monitor things, but I worry that it is getting beyond what a Neighborhood Watch and what neighbors should be doing to stem this issue. I am not here to pressure the NHA to take action without partnering up with you guys. I am happy to reach out to State officials to see if there are ways that we can possibly address the security issue through funding, maybe some staff positions or anything like that. We all know there is a lot of recovery money out there, possibility of infrastructure money and money for chronic homeless, which are all things prevalent. Hopefully not just for Salvo House but for all of properties that you work with. I am more than happy to help and make connections around that and help do some advocacy. I support the Tenant Association and anything I can do to help around that I am completely on Board. Also, Cara thanks for your help with Republic Recycling on Bridge Street – they always seem to come back around 6:00 a.m. but I appreciate you making those calls for us.

Cara – my staff will be meeting with them tomorrow but they had several not very nice calls from me today because they did it again. Know that I am on top of it and they are coming out to meet with Jack and I tomorrow.

Jim Nash – thank you, we are a team here Cara, thank you for listening.

Chairperson Richards – Thank you Jim, we appreciate your involvement.

#### APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 2021 MINUTES

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

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

**VOTING NAY:** NONE

**ABSTAIN:** Commissioner Laufer

Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the November minutes.

#### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

##### Corticelli Street Update

Cara – we are currently awaiting the Marketing Services with real estate broker bids. The estimated completion we are hoping would be January 14<sup>th</sup>. Proposals will be solicited and priority given to the broker who: Has a current broker's license and in good standing with the Commonwealth of Mass; Has at least five (5) years' experience with residential real estate and knowledgeable of the local real estate market; Successful completion of the sales in Northampton of at least 10+ similar properties (rehab/condemned) in the past 5 years; Knowledgeable of the use of all public real estate records. We will then submit request for proposal for the sale to DHCD based for approval. Estimated completion date of 1/31/22.

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### DISCUSSION – GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Cara – There is a State and Federal grievance procedure. What the Board should understand is that a grievance is filed regarding when good cause exists for terminating a lease and it shall be initiated by a tenant in writing and shall be mailed or delivered to the NHA at its main office within seven (7) days after a notice of lease termination has been given to the tenant by the NHA. So the actual grievance process is to deal with lease termination. Maybe I am wrong but I think I understand what the Commissioner who asked to have it on the agenda was looking for and that is the process when someone is not happy. A grievance would be when the lease is being terminated but you can have a conference at any time with regards to rent or maintenance repair or questions. Those steps go through the process of –

contacting the Property Manager, having a meeting with the Property Manager. If you don't get what you need there, you would go to the Senior Property Manager, and then if you don't get what you need, you would come meet with me. If the issue is still unable to be resolved, if there is a lease termination they could file a request for a grievance. The grievance process doesn't come into play until it is going to be a termination of the lease. We have a form "Request for Conference" which is available at our offices, it is also on our website and anyone can fill out a request and can meet with us at any time.

Commissioner Laufer – don't we have a Grievance Committee that I think I am on?

Cara – there is a Grievance Committee and if it has gone through the process where they have met with me and the Grievance Committee needs to be called in, we would send out a request and schedule it.

Chairperson Richards – hopefully that clarifies things to let people know that there is a process and what it is. Always knock on our door and let us know, fill out the form and go through the process if there is something you need done.

### DISCUSSION – TENANT ASSOCIATIONS

Chairperson Richards – this is an informational item and I know Cara that you sent out something a couple of months ago on Tenant Associations but I think it requires some explanation to the public and to the rest of the Commissioners as to what we can do, what we should do and what we want to do and so forth.

Commissioner Cancel – Question on the request for conference form. How many people this past year requested a conference?

Cara – I can't tell you how many meetings the staff has held off the top of my head, we have tons of meetings with residents. Some meetings via zoom and some in person. We meet with people on a daily basis Commissioner Cancel.

Commissioner Cancel – do they usually get resolved at the Property Manager level?

Cara – most things are able to get resolved at the Property Manager level, we have in the last few months had a couple that went up to Jack and we did in fact have one that made its way up to me and we were able to resolve it through the process of Chain of Command.

Commissioner Cancel – thank you for mentioning the chain of command. In the past year I have had a few emails and I am not sure how to handle it and who to forward them to. I've never actually replied but I don't want to ignore people. I just want to make sure I am doing the right thing.

Cara – On most of those emails I was copied in, if I wasn't copied in, you could forward them to me and then I will forward them to the proper staff member to handle it or handle it myself. But I think I was copied on them.

Chairperson Richards – thank you Commissioner Cancel for bringing that forward. I think occasionally we do get emails from residents and what I always tell people is we are not here to actually solve your problem, we are here to see that your problem gets solved and that happens through the Chain of Command. I appreciate you asking for clarification on that so thank you a lot.

Commissioner Jones – There are 3 people on the Grievance Committee – can we go over who they are and how they are chosen. One way is through the Tenant Association and they basically don't exist right now to have feedback so what exactly are we dealing with right now?

Cara – there are some that are appointed I don't have the list with me, I apologize and the law that dictates how you form a grievance panel. I didn't print that either because I didn't know I needed to go over it but I would be happy to bring it to the next meeting if you would like. On 8/25/21 I sent out a letter to every resident including the Hilltowns which we manage, with a questionnaire explaining what a Tenant Association is and how it can help and asking if people would be interested. Also informative information so that we could try to organize some Tenants Associations because some of them have become defunct. There has been a Tenants Association formed at Forsander since our last meeting although they have not involved us in any of that process nor asked for recognition yet, but I assume that

will happen soon. I asked to have forms returned by 9/15/21 and they were. In October there was a spike in the pandemic numbers so we have tried not to meet with groups of people so it has been put on hold. I am hoping to pick that up again and with the forms I did get back we can help each property that doesn't have a Tenants Association to have a recognized Tenants Association. I feel very strongly that we are on our way to being able to do that based on responses I got from residents. So Commissioner Jones, is that okay with you that I bring that information to the next meeting?

Commissioner Jones – I think that is fine, there is a little bit of a description of it in the material provided to the Board before this meeting. Back in the day when I joined the Board there was a grievance procedure for non-union bargaining personnel and we had a personnel sub-committee and I remember serving on a couple of those through the years, but not a formal grievance committee. I don't think I was ever on that one, to deal with tenants issues.

Vice Chairperson Brooks – Jeff, I have been on the Grievance Committee since 2005, first as the Federal Representative for McDonald, then as Chair of the Tenants Committee that we have on our Board which was decided at last March's meeting along with Sydney MacKay and Emily Laufer. It is a formal committee.

Chairperson Richards – we will have more information on that at our next meeting. It is a very important topic and I think, I don't want to speak for every Commissioner, but I think I can safely say, let me know if I am wrong, that we would love to have Tenant Associations at every site, so we will move forward.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – This weekend I was exposed to Covid by a resident The Senior Center got something that said there was an exposure. I don't think any of our residents told anyone or took any precaution. I am concerned – this person is frequenting the common areas and is not wearing their mask appropriately. I don't think people (tenants) know what to do – I don't know who the group was, but it is a big concern.

Commissioner Cancel - regarding Tenants Associations – I can see how Covid has made it tough for tenants to get together and organize themselves and I am wondering about zoom meetings. There was interest at Hampshire Heights and I am wondering what the status is and if there is any support Board members can give them so they can organize themselves. We were successful at organizing a Tenant Association a few years ago but people didn't show up after a while for many different reasons. What can we do about that, I know folks want to get themselves organized and are wanting to work along with Housing to make their communities better.

Cara – At Hampshire Heights we had several vacant units and when we went there we saw a resident had sent out a flyer trying to get residents together. So I sent a copy of a sheet on what a Tenant Association was and then a CMR 6.09 sheet and had the property manager give it to the tenants and it was taken as you saw in the email, that we were attacking them to come together. That certainly wasn't the intent and I have started reaching out to every resident to get Tenant Associations going and I will pick it back up in the new year.

Commissioner Brooks – since Cara started at NHA as Executive Director, the amount of grievances we had previous to her directorship probably averaged 3 to 6 a year. Since Cara has been here we haven't had one since 2016. The amount of work that Cara does within the organization – talking to people and going through the chain of command, actually works pretty well.

Chairperson Richards – we all strive to make our residents feel safe and secure in their housing and it is not always easy. Hats off to Cara and staff who have worked so hard and continue to do so and let the tenants be heard. Thank you so much.

Cara – I did hear the Board when it came to listening to residents and their input. Parking has been a nightmare at some of the properties and we have ordered new parking stickers and signs and I have sent a survey out to residents at one of the properties who will be getting new stickers, to get their input on parking. Just so you know as Commissioners it is a hot topic because people have illegal vehicles and unauthorized guests. We will only be issuing stickers to people who live there, are on the lease and who

the vehicle is registered and insured to, and who can provide proof of that. We will be setting it up so there is towing in place and random sweeps of towing, but I did get input from residents before we implemented this, that is why it is taking so long to implement. I wanted you as a Board to know I heard you when you said you wanted us doing that.

Chairperson Richards – thank you so much for paying attention to that issue.

#### DISCUSSION – UPDATE ON HUD PAYMENT STANDARD EXCEPTION APPROVAL FROM HUD AND PIH NOTICE 2021-34 EXPEDITED REGULATORY WAIVERS

Cara – Payment standards for fiscal year 2022 – On 8/6/21 Fair Market Rents decreased significantly rents across the board. These are only for Section 8 tenants voucher program. It has nothing to do with Public Housing or bricks and mortar buildings that we have. Our team completed an analysis and discussed with HUD the benefits of switching to Small Area Fair Market Rents due to the decrease. There were some advantages to going to SAFMR- 11 of the 20 zip codes we use would require an exception by HUD which would create 11 exceptions which is not feasible. The towns with lower than 110% of SAFMR are Chester, Easthampton, Huntington, North Hatfield, Northampton, Southampton, West Hatfield and West Chesterfield. I sent a letter to HUD requesting an exemption to payment standards to be 115% of FY 22's. When they came back they only approved some. Approved several zip codes to be at SAFMR at the 115% request but left many still utilizing the non SAFMR to 110% max. They responded on 12/1/21 and on 12/9/21 released a new notice that allows for Public Housing Authorities to approve from 110-120% of fair market rents for 1 year. After complete analysis I will be submitting to HUD a formal request waiver of what we can afford. I don't think we can afford the full 120% based on the number of vouchers we have issued – I think we can go to 118% which will put rents from \$857.00 - \$1,915.00. Once approved by HUD I will then move forward with the retro to January 1, 2021 effective date as required. I just have to re-do the letter to request 118%.

Chairperson Richards – thank you, I know we were very concerned about that. Thank you so much for being on top of the situation. It is important for people in our community.

#### MOTION

#### ACCEPT LOW BIDDER SOMMER ELECTRIC FOR FISH PROJECT # 214121: WALTER SALVO HOUSE 24 INCH ELECTRIC STOVE REPLACEMENT PHASES 2 & 3

Chairperson Brooks 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 Laufer & Commissioner Cancel.

**VOTING NAY:** NONE

**Therefore, Chairperson Richards approved the Motion.**

Cara – the original project included 100 apartments to complete the electrical work and the appliance replacement. We are now doing the remaining 90 apartments. Replacement of the existing electric stoves including electrical and other modifications as required to accommodate this replacement. Kitchen and bath GFI receptacles and appliance (refrigerator) receptacles upgrades to current code. Five bids were received and they range from \$172,000.00 to \$227,800.00. The total budget was \$213,000.00. I move that the Board approves the lowest bid from Sommer Electric from Adams, MA. For FISH # 214121 in the amount of \$172,000.00 which was obtained by Tighe and Bond and that the Board authorizes the Executive Director to take all actions necessary and proper to award the contract.

Commissioner Carney – phase 2 & 3 – what was phase 1 and is it the same contractor that performed phase 1?

Cara – it is not the same contractor. That contractor did not bid this time.

Commissioner Carney – okay and this is kind of a continuation from that?

Cara – yes, the complete project was for all 190 apartments, there was not enough funding to do them all at once. Jon Hite had put in the 5 year Capital Plan Project to be a three year phase in project to do so many per year. So the numbers came in this time so we could actually complete phase 2 & 3 and not put it off for another year.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – could the stoves be a little larger?

Cara – 24 inches I what fits in the space and so without cutting into cabinets and increasing the cost, Commissioner Tarbutton, we have to go with what fits in the space that is already there.

### MOTION

#### APPROVE SUBSTANTIAL AND FINAL COMPLETION FOR FISH PROJECT #214110 FOR REPLACEMENT OF SOFFITS AT BRIDGE STREET.

Cara – this project was completed in April of 2021 after several changes to contractors due to staffing shortage and COVID-19. We did the submission to DHCD in their new software system but it was later flagged for missing certificates of completion. I ask the Board to approve this certificate of substantial and final completion for Bridge Street soffits replacement project that was approved by the Board in the Capital Improvement Plan and to further authorize the Executive Director to take all actions necessary and proper to execute such certificate for final completion for FISH # 214110.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – what is a soffit?

Cara- it is part of the roof structure. There is a fascia and a soffit which attaches to the bottom of the roof.

Chairperson Richards – this is for good drainage right?

Cara – yes.

Commissioner Cancel – why was it stalled?

Cara – work was completed in April 2021 – we had originally contracted with someone and their whole staff got COVID causing a delay. Then we contracted with someone else and some of their staff got COVID and there were a lot of problems. DHCD has a new software system and it got flagged because we did not have the Certificate of Completion put in. We could have just put them in because it was a self-managed project but I really wanted to put it before the Board and have the Board put it through the normal motions as they would everything else.

Commissioner Cancel – The Certificate of Completion will be sent to DHCD?

Cara – yes, this is just to approve the Certificate of Substantial and Final Completion which is two certificates for FISH # 214110. I will execute the two certificates and submit to DHCD into the system.

Commissioner Cancel – this is more a formality then.

Chairperson Richards – it means it won't come before us again right?

Cara – correct.

**Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield 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.**

Chairperson Richards – thank you so much to the staff and I am glad the staff was able to leave the building today with a little extra, thank you. We certainly do understand what you have been through these last maybe 2 years and appreciate you every day as do the residents. So thank you and thank you Commissioners for all you do too.

Commissioner Laufer – they did a really cute toy drive at Hampshire Heights. I picked up my presents Monday. The staff was on point and called the residents the night before to let us know what time to

pick up the presents. The room was really full with nice presents. And there is a playground in my backyard and it looks really good!

Cara- we are going to be doing some big things at that property very soon.

Chairperson Richards – thank you for calling attention to that, Emily it is so nice to hear good things because I think we all care.

Commissioner Carney put forth the motion to adjourn the December meeting at 6:35 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Laufer.