



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

DRAFT – DECEMBER 18, 2023 DECEMBER MINUTES

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, December 18, 2023 at 5:30 P.M.

Chairperson Carney called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

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

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

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Sharon Kimble; Jack Redman; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Amanda Huertas; Danielle McColgan; Jose Cruz; Aime Matos; Angela Santaniello; Mary Chapman; Alfred Chagnon; David Edwards; Roy Martin; Sandra Torrence; Lisa Sargent; Gwen Nabad; Ricky Peterson; Doug Kierdorf; Pamela Goodwin; Jerry Halberstadt and Judi Roncalli.

TENANT COMMENT

Two Salvo residents from the LTO stated they are concerned about the safety, health and quality of life for the tenants.

Salvo resident – When are the laundry rooms going to be opened? Braman is not wearing protective gear when they come to do bed bugs. We need the Community Room and Laundry rooms opened. A class action suit against NHA.

Salvo resident – Happy Holidays. Been here for 3 years, I don't feel safe here- why do people have to be a target here in this building. What kind of help are you giving us with the laundry? Let's work together.

Salvo resident – Regarding the bed bugs I cannot afford to do my laundry in a laundromat it costs \$40 to \$50.00 a month. If you can't make the laundry room available then take some money off of my rent. If it continues I will withhold my rent.

Salvo resident – regarding the laundry rooms being closed. I can't have my laundry come in to the building spending \$11.00 or so a week. I have a bunch of laundry in my apartment, I am overloaded. We have to have access to the laundry rooms. I also will withhold my rent.

Salvo resident – I wish the laundry rooms could be opened, it is a hardship for us. The bed bug situation got out of hand because of management. It is the responsibility of management to control these things and do an inspection once a year and that was not done. It shows a little disrespect to the residents.

Salvo resident – the bed bug situation has dragged on. I don't see how the bed bugs will be rid of because you are not on top of it right away. We need the laundry rooms open, the holidays are here and people need help. The Community room is open for special events but not for residents.

Salvo resident – the complaints I have received are similar to the ones you just heard, we do have an individual on the second floor we are having trouble with and I will be forwarding a lot of documents to management about the situation.

Forsander resident – VP of Tenants Association. I have multiple times requested information which is what percentage of tenants at Forsander are elderly and what percentage are handicapped? The Board has consistently refused to give us this information. The number of tenants at Forsander should only be 13 % handicapped in an elderly senior project and there are far more handicapped here than that.

Hampshire Heights resident – the annual plan and the budget should be posted in January so residents have enough time before April so that the residents and the LTO's can review them. There is water in



front of my unit and inside. There was never a sump pump put into the new job that was done. I don't know if this was an oversight but there is mud washing into my basement and I don't think that is very good.

McDonald resident – have you scheduled anything to figure out what to do about the bed bugs – consultants, listing sessions. It is painful for people and for the people watching. It is not safe or healthy. I would like help in attending Union training. Think about a plan C, people are concerned at this point and want to help.

JoElla Tarbutton-Springfield - Salvo – it is nice to sleep through the night without having to wake up every 15 to 30 minutes to capture bed bugs. I hope the six week chemical treatment is effective. Ms. Tarbutton-Springfield then read a statement to the Board.

STAFF COMMENT

NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pamela Goodwin – I was with Margarita Morales the Union organizer. Pleased to hear you do have tenant Union. I was on the State board setting up State unions. As far as having rights and working alongside of management I have heard that is not happening all that well. I can tell just by tonight. A long time ago only one person was allowed the key to the Community Room for meetings. Being in the room to attend this meeting is a plus but I heard them say they aren't allowed in there for any other things. There are other people who I know who are unable to attend or are scared to attend. I am a consultant with the Stop Bullying organization, it is a coalition. I also know there can be a bed bug situation where I currently live but it has to be nipped in the bud very quickly. I think when people get to the point of this exasperation I hope that people know if you are going to withhold your rent for just cause you put it into escrow so you are not evicted. You can consult a lawyer, you don't just not pay your rent because they will give you an NTQ. You are breaking your lease if you do not pay the required amount of monthly rent. There is a proper way to do it, consult with somebody who knows how to do it or you will get an NTQ and you will be evicted and thrown out on the streets in the middle of winter. Across the State there is a ton of issues with residents not having a say in the annual plan not working in collusion to the success of the tenants. Management doesn't have a job except that you are to take care of the elderly and disabled. It is an uphill battle to be able to have good Board of Directors and good landlords or managers and I see an RSC – she should be working very closely on behalf of those residents. She has a part of a management hat on but for the most part she is to help residents with these major problems. If you can't afford it you are asking for all kinds of other problems including a class action suit which we certainly hope it doesn't come to that.

Jerry Halberstadt – I live in Peabody in subsidized housing and am the coordinator of the Stop Bullying Coalition. I help run our tenant organization until it became too difficult because of bullying. We set out as an organization to try to protect people from bullying. What we learned from the committee on bullying back in 2017 was the real problem is mobbing and hostile environment harassment and that puts people in a situation that they are not safe where they live, where they are not comfortable. We are now working on legislation on Beacon Hill to create a way for tenants to have protection for their rights and it would be the tenant advocate in the office of the Attorney General, that office would be able to step in and help resolve situations and if necessary hold landlords accountable. These problems I am hearing about, they are on the Board, you are the landlord. You are in charge, you are responsible, put your heads together and if you need to, find a consultant. If you are serving on this Board you are doing it out of concern, out of empathy and decency, you want to serve your community and you have earned that. I have hope and confidence if you work together with the tenants you will find a solution. People can go to

stopbullyingcoalition.org, find out about the legislation and it would be great if you wrote to the committee or to your State Senator or Representative. We are trying to find a way to protect the basic rights of tenants so they can be safe and have peaceful enjoyment at home. If I spoke inappropriately please forgive me, I am just trying to be helpful. I wish you every success in your responsibilities. I say this also to the tenants, step up and work together. Thank you for your courtesy.

Judi Roncalli – I am shocked at the similarity of public housing managers. I live in public housing in Hadley and this is all too familiar to me. I can't believe that people can't do their laundry or use the community room. The similarity in management is scary. The lack of respect to tenants and that is where the similarity comes in from management here in the area. A class action lawsuit sounds good to me and I hope the tenants don't wait to do something like that because management is not doing their job.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Cara read the report and gave updates.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I don't see where a month or two of free laundry will suffice. You hear people paying \$60 to \$80.00. This needs to be re-evaluated, I don't think it is fair to them. Our rent pays for administration to have cars, pays for their gas – that is pennies, they should bring in their receipts for reimbursement. Also, I think we need to watch the exterminating company, my neighbor cried for a weekend by him yelling in her face. He did the same thing to me. On some levels people have reported him being very considerate. If this is our lowest bidder sometimes you get what you pay for. I think we need to do more than just put a band aid on a surgical wound.

Commissioner Richards – I too am concerned about bed bugs and the laundry situation and I applaud the administration for offering some subsidies for laundry. What I understand is there are some people who haven't been able to be prepared for the heat treatment and that creates a problem and an everlasting extension of all those problems. Thank you to the administration who is offering that up. As a Board member I commit myself to the safety and well-being of residents. So thank you and thank you, Cara.

Commissioner Brooks – I think we should evaluate each person who lives at Salvo who has been put through this the last three months to prepare whatever money they spent or time they lost or whatever inconvenience and extend it to the Director and the Director should alert the Board of these payments. I think we should pay them.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – we have to do better than this it is like giving someone crumbs. Let's get some groups here some 12 steps to try to help people.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – I am really disturbed and discouraged that we have closed down the laundry facilities for Salvo residents. That is probably the number one tool to eradicate bed bug issues, and the fact that we cut the access to those to our residents is really mind boggling to me. I call for these facilities to be re-opened immediately! Whoever suggested that this would be a good idea to eradicate the problem really needs to understand what it is like to go through this problem. To make residents go off site to do laundry, residents that may have disabilities or limitations whether physical or financial not only is it disrespectful it is inconsiderate. Cutting access to community rooms is one thing that is when you want to open more access for residents to get together and figure out how to work things out. I am really disturbed with the fact that those laundry facilities have been closed this long, it makes no sense. That is what is going to help eradicate the problem. Heat will kill those bugs. Please open those laundry facilities up, I don't understand why anybody would suggest to do that. It seems like punishment. We need to do a better job with this.

Cara – at this time gave clarification around the process and how the Northampton Board of Health was involved in the situation.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – point of information. Any information from the Attorney who is not on the Board should go through the Chair – sidebar conversations going on between the Executive Director and the Attorney that should be something we should talk about. I think it is unfair and I think I will report it to the Attorney General that should not be going on. Chair, you have way more power than you are utilizing. The lawyer doesn't tell us what we are doing, you are the Chair. We oversee the Executive Director. I don't want NHA to be considered to be more transactional than compassionate. I would like to donate my salary on this Board to the residents so they can be reimbursed for what they spent.

Commissioner Richards – I count on our Attorney to help keep us on track. So thank you Attorney O'Connor and I appreciate you as always. I am so happy to hear Cara's report and I understand the difficult position you are in about having people who don't comply to have to do all you can to help them and take them to court for the good of the whole. I know that you are looking out for the good of the whole and I appreciate that. Thank you.

Commissioner Cancel – have Director Leiper put together a contingency plan for the future in the case of an outbreak of bugs like this that we have something in place for how to work with it in the future.

Attorney O'Connor – I would urge you to move on Madam Chair, we have discussed things that are way, way, way beyond what was in the ED report. If we want to have an extensive discussion about bed bugs and the laundry room and reimbursement that should be a separate agenda item and we can really get into this in great detail and not be at risk of violating the open meeting law violation because I am very concerned given that for twenty plus minutes we have been talking about the Executive Director report and a whole lot of it is beyond things she talked about. We are in some waters that could be troubling in terms of Open Meeting Law violation. I suggest it is time to move on.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – the last meeting I counted 45 minutes the Chair was talking, 45 minutes I won't get back. You want brevity and Open Meeting Law don't put that in as an excuse because for 45 minutes you sat there quietly while that happened at the last meeting.

APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 2023 MINUTES

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the November 20, 2023 Minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Amendments to Board By-Laws.

MOTION

Correct Proposed Scrivener's Errors in the Board By-Laws.

MOTION

Refer this amendment to the By-Laws to the new Governance and Policy Committee.

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the November 20, 2023 Minutes.

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution 2023-06 Accept FY23 Quarterly/Year End Financials, Certification Top 5 Compensation Document and Certification of Compliance with Lead Paint Notification Laws as prepared and presented by Gary DePace.

Gary DePace presented the financials stating that the documents need to be submitted by August 30, 2023.

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Resolution.

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

Commissioner Cancel asked that there be a correction to the minutes and put forth a suggested Motion.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Jones

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the October 16, 2023 Minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Amendments to Board By-Laws.

MOTION

Correct Proposed Scrivener's Errors in the Board By-Laws.

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

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – page 59 should be article 8 then article 9 – needs to be corrected. Cara – it is correct in the Board packet.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – page 4 article 4 – put an “s” on comments.

Chairperson Carney – stay as comment. Continued to go over the agenda for by-laws.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – seeing more edits to by-laws instead of scrivener's errors. In 2021 when we revised we were shown a document with edits. Edits should be discussed with the entire Board.

Chairperson Carney – Cara, confirm for me that the previous approved rendition of the by-law included a Treasurers Report.

Cara – On page 4 of the April 2021 there does not appear to have anything listed as treasurer's report, however on page 6, Order of business does list it as a topic.

Chairperson Carney suggested to continue the discussion on the Scrivener's errors to the next meeting.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel put forth the motion to continue Scrivener's errors motion to next meeting, seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTION 2023-10 – Accept Quarterly Financials ending September 30, 2023 as prepared by Gary DePace.

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Resolution.

Cara – we are under budget at 17.4% and we should be at 25%. Legal is up at 28.68% slightly elevated due to bill back. Travel is elevated due to bill back from HCRHA. Insurance is up by 1.22% due to increases and should even out at the end of the quarter.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel- question on travel – what does it entail?

Cara – account number 4150 is for travel, which is travel for employees, mileage for training. In this instance we paid an employee a reimbursement and did the bill back, it has just crossed and we will be paid back.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – what is an expense for travel?

Cara – an employee goes to a conference and gets mileage, if an employee goes from one property to another, we reimburse them if they use their own car.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – usage of housing vehicles. Instead of being reimbursed can they use the NHA vehicles to go to these places?

Cara – Where we can do that we do. In some instances we can't. In this particular case we weren't able to do that. This is not an NHA expense, it is paid to a NHA employee but it will be reimbursed from another Housing Authority because it is not really an NHA expense, it is in the middle of that process of reimbursement. That is why you are seeing an overage.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – does mileage include a reimbursement to a tenant who went to a LTO convention in central Mass?

Cara – I can't discuss individual things with you.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I have been begging for reimbursement for training. If you are paying for training for one person and not another.....

Cara – so that the Board is clear – I sent the potential Chair and Vice Chair of the upcoming Tenants Association of Walter Salvo to the National Tenants Association meeting which they found to be very helpful but I can't discuss the specifics of that. We were recognized as were the other Housing Authorities that we oversee by them for sending people to the Mass Union conference.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – it wasn't a national thing it was a bi-annual conference for the Mass Union of public housing tenants. I agree, it is great. I didn't know you were paying some people or whatever the case may be. I am excited other people are doing this.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – on travel, I do see staff that takes vehicles home. I think I have seen someone that I have never met, I don't think they work for NHA, they look a lot like Commissioner Jones. I have seen some employees take vehicles home – is that common practice?

Chairperson Carney – clarified that the use of vehicles, etc. is not part of the ED report. Executive Director Leiper can you clarify the policy on this?

Cara – we are supposed to be talking about the financials only. However, part of the Union contract is anyone on call utilizes a NHA vehicle to be on call as well as the master plumber.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – the travel expenses that Director Leiper mentioned didn't have only to do with the LTO expenses.

Cara – the travel expenses don't have anything to do with the employees using vehicles, it is not even in that line item. Does that clarify it a little better?

Vice-Chairperson Carney – the on call usage of vehicles by staff does not fall under that line item. I will ask you then to clarify what does that line item include beyond what you mentioned?

Sharon Kimble – the 4150 account is mainly for mileage, i.e. the RSC's just went to an event. Travel there would be paid as we don't have enough NHA cars for all three employees to use.

Cara – public housing notice 2021 20 addendum 1 informs all Housing Authorities that the rate of reimbursement for private auto mileage traveled in the course of authorized business increased from .45 cents to 58 ½ cents effective 3/20/22. Cara then explained in detail what consists of line item #4150 according to guidelines.

Vice-Chairperson Cancel – what Cara read is helpful I am okay with her answer.

Cara – when we sent you the budget guidelines you will find the account explanations in the guidelines each year or if you want to talk with me about it feel free to give me a call.

Chairperson Carney – regarding the Board – expenses paid for Board members, etc. those are a whole different world and we typically approve those for Board members.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I took a class and I want reimbursed. I have seen an administrator come to a weekend event with a relative. Things that make you go hmmm,.....

Cara – I do drive a NHA vehicle approved by DHCD and HUD, it is part of my contract, Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield. It is because I am on call 24/7, it is part of the budget and my contract which is approved by the State, Federal and the Board.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – does that include gas and other expenses?

Chairperson Carney – the whole vehicle expense has historically been covered.

Commissioner Jones – I call a question.

MOTION

Proposed Amendment to By-Laws for Governance and Policy Committee

Cara read the language – the 2019 By-Laws and Attorney recommended language.

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

RESOLUTION 2023-08 – Certification of FY2023 Section 8 SEMAP

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Resolution.

MOTION

Allow the Executive Director and Chair to execute Wage Match Form.

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Cancel; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

OPEN MEETING LAW VIOLATION AND RESOLUTION AS RECOMMENDED BY ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE.

MOTION

That the Board requests the Commissioner who violated the OML to attend Open Meeting Law training and provide documentation of attendance;

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Commissioner Richards; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Jones.

VOTING NAY: Vice Chairperson Cancel & Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

AMENDMENTS TO BOARD BY-LAWS

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield put forth a Motion to table this discussion and Motions until the next meeting, seconded by Commissioner Richards.

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

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

Commissioner Jones put forth the motion to adjourn the August meeting at 8:32 P.M., seconded by Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Taken from the transcripts of the Zoom meeting per request of Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield to be added to the December 2023 minutes as a statement to the board.

Time Start 24:21

I typed up something so um um it's emotional I I I hope me being away um that the six week chemical treatment series is effective and finger crossed praying that the building is completely Bed Bug free. The financial and emotional toll on residents their families and helpers and friends is immeasurable.

I hope the NHA and residents are a lot smarter and more preactive because the reactive after the detection response is in my opinion inhumane. Bed Bugs have been around for some time before this Administration and may return unless effective measures are in place. There needs to be a fund for transportation um and for off-site laundry there needs to be an emergency temporary shelter so residents can leave so the professionals can successfully eradicate bed bugs in apartments. Also and I have experienced this personally, blaming tenants for the Bed Bugs Situation, absolutely has to stop. If for example there's a detection of bed bugs in apartments when there is cluttering and or hoarding in NHA which includes myself because I'm part of this. NHA needs to do a better job. A better thorough job doing inspections and to detect residents who may need help with a problem involving cluttering and or hording. Actually, I think it was eight years ago I emailed NHA about having a 12 step group when I was getting my addiction certifications um and I just want to say you know residents tenants citizens deserve better. Northampton deserves BETTER.

Time Stopped reading 26:10
