



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

MARCH MINUTES
MARCH 17, 2025
Approved on April 28, 2025

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, March 17, 2025 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 Carney; Commissioner Brooks; Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Healey; Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield & Commissioner Wood.

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Sharon Kimble; Doug Kierdorf; Al Chagnon; Michael Edwards; Angela Santaniello; Sandra Torrence; Gwen Nabad; John Wyda; Bee Jay Baatz & Mary Chapman.

Chairperson Carney – the public comment was suspended some time ago, this Housing Authority received an anonymous letter that was not addressed to us but they did receive personal information and confidential information of a number of residents at the Northampton Housing Authority. Unfortunately, some of that information was even widely distributed even beyond city limits and even slipped under the door of Housing Authority residents in neighboring towns. In my attempt to kind of quell the damage being done to residents in terms of the violation of their personal information being decimated, I chose at the last meeting to suspend the public comment so that people would not come to this meeting and further damage the interests of those residents. In addition, someone took advantage of their time in LTO comment to not speak to this Board on LTO related matters but instead to challenge the decision of this Chair to suspend the public comment and to characterize that as an illegal act and also as an example of an open meeting law violation because how could one person have ever made such a decision without violating open meeting law and discussing that among other members of the Board, an assumption that was not true. That decision was entirely a decision made by me, the Chair. I did send that resident a letter and that letter was also sent to the LTO's and posted at various properties. To clarify and I do want to apologize because I do understand that people don't realize that where the public is permitted to attend this meeting, an individual cannot just address the public body without the permission of the Chair and although the public participation is entirely within my discretion as the Chair, an individual cannot disrupt our meeting and at the request of the Chair all members of the public shall remain silent. If after a clear warning a person continues to be disruptive then the Chair may order the person to leave the meeting. If the person does not leave, then the Chair may authorize a constable or other officer. Now, because we are meeting on zoom that is not the way this happens and that isn't something that did happen. What I do want to note is that it is entirely within the purview of the Chair to determine whether there is public comment and to what extent. To those of you who follow other city meetings you will note that our other governmental bodies, the City Council from time to time will dispense the public comment and often that is done for a matter as time permits. So as you have seen when you have looked at the agenda tonight at our business meeting we have a serious item of business, the Annual Plan and this is for the State Annual Plan that covers all of our State properties. We operate both the State and Federal properties. You will see a similar meeting in April when we attend to the matter of the Federal Annual Plan. Tonight, while there are about 20 folks here tonight, every one of you, everyone here tonight will have the opportunity to speak although you see that red line that says suspended for public

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comment, we welcome and we need your public comment on the Annual Plan and that will be described. There is a complete procedure for that and the Executive Director and her team will take up that issue and we request that you will reserve your comments for us, the Board, when we take up the matter of the Annual Plan which will be presented to you all. Again, I do apologize because I understand that there are people who do not realize that and feel that maybe their own first amendment rights may have been violated-that is not the case. I am so disappointed myself to have had to make that decision last meeting and for this meeting and that is because as I have said many times in the past, we not only welcome the comments of members of the public but we rely on the eyes and ears, we rely on hearing first hand from residents how our policies, how our decisions are impacting you to whom we really owe safe, healthy, affordable housing and to whom we are responsible for well- being. It looks like we have a slimmer attendance than usual which is also a disappointment to me and maybe I can chalk that up to the fact we will hear later when Director Leiper and our other management team is here because this will not be the first time that we will be hearing from members of the public regarding our annual plan, but it is really basically the final in a series of public comment opportunities. I really appreciate your coming tonight and your interest in the Housing Authority.

LTO COMMENT

Al Chagnon – Salvo – I am here to listen to the Annual Plan, no other comments at this time.
Mr. Edwards VP of Salvo LTO – me and Mr. Chagnon are trying to work continuously with the Housing Authority to better the quality of life, health and safety at the Walter Salvo House and I appreciate working with you.

PUBLIC COMMENT – SUSPENDED

STATE PLAN PUBLIC HEARING - @ 5:43 p.m.

The purpose of the Public Hearing which was posted at the state properties, management office and website on January 24, 2025 so as to provide the public ample opportunity to review the plans as they were being developed and to make suggestions to allow the Board of Commissioners to hear comments from interested parties about the Annual Plan. Meetings were also held with the LTO's at each state property. On February 4, 2025 we met with the Forsander Tenants Association. The only substantive items brought up were the vent replacements which are in the current plan in FY26 and window replacement which is already in the plan in FY28 and FY29. On March 11, 2025 we met with the Walter Salvo LTO and the only substantive items brought up was the replacement of the sliding glass doors and the windows and sidewalk repairs and tree trimming. I have applied for a grant to have those items replaced. If we do not get approved for those grants we would then put them in future plans. The State Annual Plan is a DHCD template which consists of the budget which was previously approved by the Board, maintenance policies and our Capital Improvement Plan.

Public Comment

Bee Jay Baatz – I live in Northampton and am a member of Mothers Out Front a climate organization. I am curious of a plan that was submitted and how this would fit into the upcoming plan by Ben Weil about replacing the fan in the Forsander Apartments and a few other things that would over 5 or 6 years pay for themselves and this plan was submitted a year ago in March and I was wondering if anything has been done on that and whether those ideas were included in the Annual Plan.

Chairperson Carney – I will note that we don't answer these questions now but I think Director Leiper is collecting them all and will address that in the context of this agenda item.

Cara Leiper – we take the public comments and if they are substantive we incorporate them.

Bee Jay Baatz – do you have a copy of that plan?

Chairperson Carney – it is linked in the agenda.

Cara Leiper – it is also on our website Ms. Baatz but if you would like to reach out to me to talk about Forsander we have a lot of stuff going on, a lot of money and grants that we are getting ready to implement there. So if you would like to reach out via email I am happy to answer that. Thank you very much for your comment.

Mary Chapman – McDonald - the first meeting I attended after COVID I mentioned there was going to be a loneliness epidemic sure to follow and was NHA doing anything to be proactive to address it – same question again. I glanced at the plan – are you planning to go on and do this stuff without having completing stuff at other properties – paving at Hampshire Heights, the potholes will swallow your vehicle and I don't know if it is steadily being improved or what. Disability – what would be the process in getting doors that people with different abilities can open – the doors are very heavy and difficult to operate – would like to know how to make that happen. Would love to see a tenant organization here but it is difficult to get people to sign on for it. Annual Plan – you still have money for disability stuff – I would like to submit a request for some doors.

Gwen Nabad – the clarification last month in the meeting and the history of the land at Hampshire Heights was very enlightening and it was helpful to understand the issues. I recognize Hampshire Heights does not have an LTO but it doesn't mean that there shouldn't be tenant participation. I think that should definitely happen. In terms of concerns at Hampshire Heights people are wondering what is going to happen with the windows if they are going to get them. Residents were moving stuff away from the windows in anticipation of what was going to happen and are wondering why the work stopped. Also, the water issue.

John Wyda – Salvo – we discussed the roof and eliminating mini splits in the dining room and in the community room. Also a fob for the back door and speed bumps in the back and new handicapped spots. **Cara Leiper** – those are items that we are already going to take care of that is why they are not part of the Annual Plan.

Sandra Torrance – Salvo – according to open meeting law tenants are supposed to be notified of a meeting for tenants to have input into the Annual Plan. We were not notified by the LTO to have a meeting for input, I don't call a meeting with two people who are officers a chance for LTO input, it is supposed to be general input from members, we have not had that opportunity. I am making a motion that this be postponed until we can have a meeting to involve all the tenants and that all tenants be duly notified of the meeting either through robo call or through flyers so they can participate and give their input as required by law.

Cara Leiper – I am sorry, we posted a notice on 1/24/25 in the newspaper and on our website in regard to the Annual Plan. It has been available for residents to review since January on our website. I am letting you know you are mistaken in that.

Sandra Torrance – we were not notified by the LTO.

Cara Leiper – they are not required to notify you.

Chairperson Carney – Ms. Torrance this is your opportunity now, please, to give us any input you have on the Annual Plan in addition to those previous opportunities mentioned by Director Leiper which has been our practice for many, many years. So I am going to ask Ms. Torrance to please provide your input now for the Annual Plan which you have reviewed and for which I am sure that you have some opinions regarding what is in the Plan, what is not in the Plan or some other things that we may take note of at this moment.

Sandra Torrance – may I respond to that respectfully? I don't represent all of the tenants here so whether I am disappointed or pleased I am only one person of many who live at Salvo. Secondly, the language in the notice is not easily understood by tenants. It is not accessible to people in wheelchairs, it is too high to read it, so it hasn't been read by people at Salvo for those two reasons. It is the

responsibility of the LTO to ensure public comment by notifying the tenants and holding an open meeting so we can all give our input. I am speaking on behalf of all the tenants, I am sure that there is no one who wants to feel that 1 or 2 people can speak for everybody.

Chairperson Carney – I will ask the LTO to please let residents know that while we are taking up the matter of the Annual Plan tonight we welcome them to submit any comment in writing.

Sandra Torrance – I move to postpone the vote until we have an open meeting for tenant's input.

Chairperson Carney – I understand that you make that motion but you are not enabled to make motions at this business meeting, it is only in the purview of those Commissioners here.

Chairperson Carney – with regards to what we have heard tonight we can still receive comments from residents and enter those, am I correct?

Cara Leiper – after it is presented to the Board and voted it is uploaded to the State so the time to submit public comment in writing or in whatever format would have been from January 24th to today. If we get them tonight before I come in the morning when I would upload it, then I would be happy to include them.

Chairperson Carney – I ask members of the LTO if you can circulate that information and let people know that if there are specific comments they would like the State to know as this is a State Plan, please send them to us tonight so that Director Leiper can make sure the State receives those comments and that they are entered into the record.

Cara Leiper – I will now close the State Annual Plan Public hearing and turn the meeting back over to the Chair at 6:01 p.m. and note specifically there were 6 public comments.

Chairperson Carney – that item will again appear on our agenda when I ask for a motion from the floor so that we Commissioners may then deliberate and then vote on moving this Annual Plan forward.

APPROVAL OF THE FEBRUARY 2025 REGULAR MINUTES

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

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

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Wood.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the February 2025 minutes.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I have a correction on page 3 of 6 – I called Diana Dizoglio the State Auditor and I inquired if that office would audit Housing Authorities and I was told that they do.

Chairperson Carney – I did not receive the correction by 3:00 p.m. today.

There was a discussion on the correction and protocol of deletions, additions and to submit in writing what is the correction in the form of a motion and that it would be written in such a way – I move that the minutes be corrected on page 3 of 6 to read _____. Then we compare the transcript with what is written in your motion so that we can adequately address the issue that you would like to bring up. As you know, this is our practice. So I am going to ask you to postpone your discussion on this matter until next business meeting in April where I will allow this to come up once again for you to submit a correction. We are going to move ahead with the minutes but if you need to after the fact, correct the minutes based on the reading of the transcript and on what you say right now and we have had long discussions about this, then I will allow that in April but I won't allow it for tonight because we have no time now to compare what you would like and then for the rest of the Board to consider. I do apologize but we are going to take this up in April.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT

Cara Leiper read the report with updates.

Follow up from February meeting – Forsander LTO asked when the Intercom Project and Ventilation Projects were beginning. The Intercom project just started the design phase with EOHLC this month. The ventilation project is slated to begin in 2026 which has been bumped up a year from the original start year of 2027. These are both listed in our current Capital Improvement Plan.

A Salvo resident who misspoke as an LTO representative was promised a response by the Chair about last month's suspended public comment. On directions of the Chair, a letter was sent to the resident with a copy sent to the LTO's to address the matter.

Update/Events – The Northampton Health Dept. continues to host blood pressure clinics at our sites on a monthly basis. They will be checking blood pressure and also available to answer any health questions. We encourage residents to stop in and meet the nurse as their team is a great resource.

The foot care nurse continues to visit our sites to provide low cost podiatry services to all residents. As a reminder we ask that anyone interested in foot care sign up ahead of time to ensure you will have an appointment.

For Valentine's Day we held arts and crafts events at each of our sites which included DIY crafts, coloring and writing letters to loved ones. Residents were able to exercise their artistic abilities, socialize with their neighbors and enjoyed some snacks.

We hosted Bingo at the senior sites to introduce a beneficial resource to our residents from Trinity Health. Representatives from PACE offered free prizes to winners while providing an info session about their free insurance for those who qualify.

Cara Leiper – note – I was able to complete some applications for funding for Forsander and for all properties we look after – Forsander for mini splits and I am waiting for approval for over 4.5 million dollars and an additional \$380,000.00 for weatherization improvements for them. In addition to that about \$390,000.00 worth of weatherization for all properties, not just Northampton but also Easthampton and Hatfield. The numbers will be more definitive once they come out and do the site inspections but those things will likely begin within the next 30 days.

Bad debt write-off of \$22,667.36 due to move out's and people passing away and some have been referred to a collection agency. Cara explained the procedure to the new Commissioners.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NONE

NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTION # 2025-1 – APPROVAL OF FY2026 STATE ANNUAL PLAN.

The resolution was read by the Executive Director.

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

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Commissioner Brooks; Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Healey & Commissioner Wood.

VOTING NAY: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Resolution.

Chairperson Carney – a lot of work is done by the Director and Sharon – I personally say thank you.

There are many items on the plan that people have been waiting for. Here the Chair asked the Director to note specific items for the public.

Cara Leiper – intercom system is in the design phase with the State. Fan system – we made repairs with a contractor, all but one building was put back on line, but the replacement portion is scheduled for next year. Mr. Weil's report – we had already had a contract with a company and are working on some of the items that Ben had suggested. I signed paperwork for LEAN through Guardian for all of Forsander to get

mini splits and also weatherization for Forsander which will immediately assist with any of the draft issues. We are also looking for grants for windows - Power Options and Guardian that we already have a contract with - we are working with them to deal with all of the things Ben had done that study on.

Chairperson Carney - Hampshire Heights replacement of windows and doors - is there a time frame?

Cara Leiper - I am pretty sure they have completed the window replacement at Hampshire heights, we haven't done the final walk through yet.

Chairperson Carney - there was some references to difficulty opening or closing doors and accessibility and potholes at Hampshire heights. I know the road construction piece is a separate matter.

Cara Leiper - we have been mitigating potholes as well as we can because it is a Capital Improvement project to completely replace all of the roadways there in addition to all the drainage issues and the basement repairs, all the water mitigation. For those of you who are new, we have millions of dollars going into Hampshire Heights coming up. Regarding doors - Ms. Chapman was referring to doors at McDonald House which is not a State property but a Federal property. Hampshire Heights is a family property, not elderly, so we are not looking to replace doors at Hampshire Heights.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield - from trainings with Mass. Union and communicating with other LHA's, this process is usually 6 months, not a one and done meeting. Now that we have an LTO it is to communicate with residents for their input. There are too many things that need to be done at Salvo - washing doors, painting walls, regular cleaning of carpets; this needs to be talked about with the LTO regularly and talk to people and that has not happened. I think that what has been approved is just getting the work done and signing it off as opposed to getting real input from residents. I can't speak for other places, I can only say about what is going on here, so we aren't there yet. We have been doing this for a while and we should know how to get input from residents about the living conditions because they complain all the time. Secondly, I always ask for the ED report which I have not received in four years, the Chair once said I would get it, I would like to see that so I can cross reference it.

Chairperson Carney - the ED report is not part of our discussion tonight, you will see a synopsis of the ED's report in the minutes for this meeting.

Commissioner Wood - I am curious as to what happens next. If we vote to approve the State Plan what is the process from there on out- what happens with the plan? What is the timing of actual investments? Can you give me a good sense of process of what happens from this point forward?

Cara Leiper - once I read the resolution and the Board votes on it I go in tomorrow and upload the comments, the LTO comments and once it is sent through to the State they then fund the plan and once funded, it goes over the 5 years. How it works is they assign FISH numbers to the project (FISH = Financial Information Systems for Housing) and once assigned, it goes to design phase. Over \$10,000.00 the State handles the project, they pick everything and I bring it to the Board who has to vote on it even though it is the State's money. Once a FISH number is assigned it goes to design phase and begins the process which sometimes can take a long time. I am required to do the Annual Plan every year.

Chairperson Carney - I turn back to Commissioner Wood who is our newest Commissioner to introduce himself, he was previously our Health Director when I was on the City Council.

Commissioner Wood - Cara, how the State is judging the information that we are putting forward to them in the State Plan, if you could elaborate on that, it would be great. Commissioner Wood spoke about himself and his family and he has been a Northampton resident since 2003. He has a good deal of experience working with NHA when he was the health department director from 2009 to 2012 and in building a relationship both with staff and residents. I am pleased to be here, it is a critical component of our community to ensure that these places are sound, safe and good places to live.

Chairperson Carney - thank you very much and thank you for joining the Board. The two new members - Commissioners Healey and Wood both have some public health and other expertise which we really value in terms of their ability to add value to this Board.

Commissioner Brooks – welcome Patty and Ben to the Board and good luck.

Commissioner Jones – I read the plan through twice and the public comments and what is done with those kind of speak for themselves. Having done this before I am comfortable with it this time around. Thank you.

Chairperson Carney – the Director made reference to the fact that it is a long capital plan in terms of it being a 5-year plan. Each year when this comes around it does mean a jockeying of some things. When we have a 5 year plan and something comes along that may supersede other needs, we need to be flexible and that is why we are thinking ahead all the time. Some of the work that is slated to begin at Forsander from what I understand, is going to begin a year earlier based on some of our projections and doing the work. Can you elaborate on that Director Leiper?

Cara Leiper – another example is we had originally slated funding for a project but we had an emergency happen where the boilers went down at Cahill. We had to pull the funds meant for another project to take care of the issues with the Cahill boilers although that put off all the projects that were funded, it just wasn't for 1 year but 2 years. The next time the Annual Plan happens we have to re-evaluate everything. With regard to Forsander, it is a pool of money you get every year and when you get the pool of money you have to say ok what are the needs of the properties? You have 10 million worth of capital needs and you only have 5 million dollars. You try to prioritize what you can and then try to get grants for everything else.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I want to say to Patricia Healey and Ben Wood I would like to have coffee with you guys and thanks for introducing yourselves. I did see Commissioner Wood with the Housing Partnership, I did see that with the confirmation but I did not get to do that for Commissioner Healey. I actually thought she was related to the Governor, so I would like to get to know you and I would please ask that you get to know me, probably not by what you hear about me because I am much nicer than probably is presented. Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Jones put forth the motion to adjourn the March 17, 2025 meeting at 6:34 p.m. seconded by Commissioner Brooks. All were in favor except Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.