

Great Barrington Housing Authority meeting in person
At Flag Rock Village Community Room 2 Bernard Gibbons Dr. Housatonic, MA
Wednesday, December 14, 2022

I. Call to Order - Attendance Roll Call - Chairman John Grogan opened the meeting at 12:05pm with a roll call: John Grogan, “aye,” Eileen Mooney, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.” Also in attendance: Executive Director Tina Danzy and staff Rich Phair and Madonna Meagher.

II. GBHA Annual Plan - Public Hearing

J. Grogan made a motion to open the public hearing; E. Mooney seconded. Roll call vote: John Grogan, “aye,” Eileen Mooney, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0

- A. T. Danzy presented stating the Annual Plan has been out for 24 days and Marleen Koloski, LTO President, has met with residents. E. Mooney stated she had not been informed about the meeting. T. Danzy continued stating the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is the biggest piece of the Annual Plan and GBHA uses DHCD’s format. Hugh Mackay, Regional Capital Assistance Area Coordinator for DHCD, introduced himself noting he works with GBHA to help prioritize projects and submit the annual capital plan. He provide the board with a list of active funded projects and proceeded to explain the CIP process and DHCD system for capital project creation, planning and monitoring. He stated the CIP is a five-year plan reviewed annually, with funding secured for two years out and a projected project snapshot for the remaining three years. He noted that the CIP is flexible and funds for projects not yet started can be redirected for urgent/unanticipated needs. He noted the plan is monitored to track project phases and funding distribution – and at times projects can be funded over two years to as a way to manage the expense. He stated GBHA’s total development costs – construction and soft costs - under the current CIP is \$2.291m in projects in the system and \$266,000 in projects pending. He stated funded projects are assigned a FISH number. He also highlighted GBHA’s use of ARPA funds including for fire alarm upgrades.
- B. P. Orenstein asked who decides which projects are included in the CIP – T. Danzy replied it is assessed/decided based on necessary facility upgrades, resident needs and available funding – the list of projects are in the CIP and examples include wifi at all sites and upgrading community spaces. She added that projects are discussed among staff and with the board to get input/approval. The board continued to discuss transparency in prioritization and board involvement as the board is responsible for approving the CIP. It was noted that it would be beneficial for the board to better understand the capital projects.
- C. J. Grogan stated resident input on the CIP is important – H. Mackay replied there is a balance between resident needs and critical facility repairs. E. Mooney asked about repair to the pavement at the entrance of Flag Rock that should be added to the CIP – it was agreed that the broken pavement, elevator upgrades and entrance door would be added.
- D. The board discussed LTO input/involvement in the CIP – T. Danzy stated M. Koloski did her due diligence at each site to get input which they discussed and M. Meagher took notes. She stated there is tenant support for updating community areas. E. Mooney asked that the notes be shared with the board and the board should engage with the LTO during the year.
- E. T. Danzy briefly presented other Annual Plan categories including routine and preventative/emergency maintenance and repairs and inspections – and highlighted the budget, tenant survey and performance review noting there were no findings. There was additional discussion on the significant cost increase for utilities and what is covered by DHCD and other state programs.

- F. The board agreed there should be a 6-month update on the CIP including tracking of project status - what is in progress, delayed, completed, etc. H. Mackay clarified that once the CIP is approved, T. Danzy makes any updates and within 90-days DHCD will send an award letter stating which projects are funded.
- G. P. Orenstein asked about the potential phase two of the security camera project and if that should be in the CIP – it was discussed a large scale project would be part of the CIP and there would be a placeholder for phase two pending completion/assessment of phase one.
- H. P. Orenstein asked about the vacancy rate number – T. Danzy replied DHCD pulls in those numbers and they are not necessarily current. She noted GBHA has a low vacancy rate, but when units are turned over there needs to be updates/repairs, but the goal is to have a quick turnover.
- J. Grogan made a motion to close the public hearing; E. Mooney seconded, J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: John Grogan, “aye,” Eileen Mooney, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0. By unanimous consent the hearing closed at 12:14pm.

III. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT:

- A. Financials, vacancies, maintenance, legal (mold damage, et. al.) and other updates. Potential Board votes.

1. Financial report - T. Danzy reported Sue Honeycutt of Fenton Ewald, has given notice regarding her work with GBHA and thanked her for her service. T. Danzy continued to state operating reserves are low due to unbudgeted additional expenses such as emergency repairs. She noted specific variances for the elevator switch upgrades with is a state requirement and for which funding was provided; Brookside water damage which was not fully covered by insurance and cost GBHA \$5,000; and four current vacancies plus another three expected by the end of the month which will require updating. It was discussed that Construct has a list of people looking for housing, but it was noted there is no link between Construct and GBHA. E. Mooney asked about utilities/fuel electric assistance for residents – T. Danzy replied the office/Karen Lewis, Resident Services Coordinator, are helping people apply for assistance and providing referrals as needed. P. Orenstein asked about last month’s financials and the significant increase in electric in September – it was noted that expense is weather dependent and can vary based on when the bill is paid. He also inquired about the utility/water/sewer bill increase and it was discussed the billing is quarterly for each site.
2. Maintenance - R. Phair reported on projects in progress which at this time are mostly unit turnovers. There was also discussion about plowing and the safety issues presented if snow is not cleared off cars in a timely manner.
3. Legal – T. Danzy reported there is no legal update, but there are several Notices to Quit pending court dates. E. Mooney asked about timing for the court dates - T. Danzy replied there is no new information at this time.
4. T. Danzy provided some general updates - for the unit where Aftermath was used for clean-up, the cost was billed to a project. She also stated there is upcoming training and the office will be closed at that time. She reported there would be an event at Flag Rock for residents co-hosted by GBHA and the LTO on January 21 and M. Koloski had reached out to residents at the other sites. She also noted a craft event would be held for kids, families and seniors.

- IV. Chairperson update - CDC letter. J. Grogan stated he wrote a letter of endorsement for the CDC funds.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Annual Plan. Potential Board vote.

P. Orenstein made a motion to approve the GBHA Annual Plan; E. Mooney seconded. J. Grogan asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: John Grogan, “aye,” Eileen Mooney, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0.

B. Accounting Firm RFP process. Potential Board vote. J. Grogan reported a letter was received from Teresa Ewald, President, Fenton Ewald, stating the firm would not continue to represent GBHA – though he stated the termination date will be confirmed. The board discussed whether DHCD would permit GBHA to hire any accounting firm or if GBHA is required to use only those designated by DHCD unless GBHA is using a different nonapproved company as its AUP provider. T. Danzy stated if the person is not on the list they have to be preapproved by DHCD – and she noted Lisa Fallon is the only person locally who is pre-qualified by DHCD. There was a discussion about how financial transactions are currently handled – it was clarified that M. Meagher inputs invoices, T. Danzy approves payments and M. Meagher processes checks for board signature. S. Honeycutt compiles financial information into state and board reports and ensures regulations are followed. J. Grogan asked if the RFP has to go out to bid and it was decided J. Grogan and T. Danzy would clarify. E. Mooney asked for a separate meeting to discuss the RFP – J. Grogan stated he would clarify the selection process with DHCD and the board would prepare the RFP and meet.

C. Electrical bill concerns. Potential Board vote. – Discussed under other topics.

D. Vacancy turn over plan Potential Board Vote – T. Danzy restated there are four units being turned over and work is in progress - and there are three more units to come. R. Phair explained the challenges of cleaning/updating the units. T. Danzy asked in turning over units should the work be done inhouse or outsourced which would incur a cost. P. Orenstein expressed support for spending money to provide housing sooner. J. Sinico offered to help with cleaning the units.

P. Orenstein made a motion to support/authorize the use of outside contractors to help turnover units; E. Mooney seconded. J. Grogan asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: John Grogan, “aye,” Eileen Mooney, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0.

There was further discussion about Fenton Ewald’s decision to discontinue services with S. Honeycutt expressing personal concerns and difficulties in recent conversations with the board. The board expressed its regard for S. Honeycutt’s work and clarified its motivation/intension in delving into financial information/ processes as among its most critical responsibilities.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. New item – Work Orders. E. Mooney raised that the board is required by DHCD to review work orders with resident information redacted within 14 days – and the GBHA board has not received work orders for review. R. Phair explained the time constraints in preparing works orders for board review and noted most are completed within 24 hours – he added that work orders can be reviewed in the office. He also confirmed inspection lists are attached as back-up to work orders. J. Grogan and P. Orenstein stated they are not interested in seeing work orders and because GBHA is small, there are some administrative procedures that are not appropriate.

B. CHAMPS, Local Preference and Smitty. Follow-up & Potential Board vote. T. Danzy reported a letter was sent on this and there will likely be a harder push this year via the Executive Director group. She clarified that prospective tenant names are pulled from all over the state and the list is prioritized by need with homelessness being the top priority, not location. She stated it takes a lot of time and effort to pull together a list. She noted DHCD is cleaning the list so it may be more useful go forward – but still no local preference.

C. Policy readings - Second Readings - Grievance, Snow Removal. Potential Board vote. J. Grogan stated policy reading will be tabled until the next meeting. There was a discussion about the proposed revised grievance policy which, once edited, will be sent to T. Danzy for input. Getting tenant input on the policy was discussed and P. Orenstein stated it is well-intentioned, but not realistic and would delay the process. Regarding the grievance policy, T. Danzy outlined how the process has been handled in the past using the example of a lease violation where the tenant would have a discussion with her - if not resolved, M. Koloski and potentially an attorney would meet with the tenant, and if necessary, a hearing officer would be brought in – beyond that it would go to the board. She clarified that finding someone to serve as a hearing officer has been difficult, but there have only been a few cases over many years. The board agreed to table the conversation.

VII. LTO REPORT: RIP Joe Merola. M. Koloski expressed concern about increases in utility bills – T. Danzy replied the office and K. Lewis are reaching out to residents and providing referrals to help find financial assistance with these costs. The board expressed its condolences regarding Joe Merola's passing.

VIII. Minute Review/Approval Board Meeting of 11/16/22 – E. Mooney stated she would make edits.

IX. CITIZEN SPEAK: No citizens asked to speak.

X. BOARD COMMENTS – Board members did not offer comments.

X. ADJOURNMENT – P. Orenstein made a motion to adjourn; E. Mooney seconded. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 1:35pm.

Documents reviewed: GBHA Annual Plan

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow