

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

2 Bernard Gibbons Drive

Great Barrington, MA 01230

BOARD MEETING

APPROVED Board Minutes

Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Commissioners

Wednesday, May 22, 2019

Meeting held at Claire Teague Senior Center

Present: James Mercer, Jackie Sinico, Eileen Mooney, Diane Dillon (via phone)

Administration: Tina Danzy

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 2:00PM by Vice-Chairman Mercer.

Vice-Chairman Mercer called for agenda items Approval of Meeting Minutes and Citizen Speak. Mooney stated the first order of business should be re-organization of the Board, election of officers. Mercer stated he would be following the agenda as presented, with re-organization of the Board being listed under New Business items.

Michelle Loubert asked that it be recorded that this violates proper procedure.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES – April 17, 2019

Sinico made a motion, seconded by Dillon to approve the meeting minutes of April 17, 2019 as presented.

Unanimous approval.

CITIZEN SPEAK

- Michelle Loubert stated her concern regarding the consistent use of remote participation by this Board as open meeting law states remote participation should be the exception and not the rule. The practice is not supposed to be a convenience and is used quite often by this Board.
- A tenant of Dewey Way stated she lives in fear of another tenant who follows her whenever she is walking her dog on the property. She has raised her concern to the Executive Director numerous times and is told the situation is being worked on, and has been asked to put her complaint in writing, which she does not want to do. She also expressed her concern that the Executive Director is very rarely at the Dewey Property. Mercer stated he understands her concern, stated notifying the Executive Director is the proper procedure, and encourages her to call the police if she continues to feel she is in danger. Tenant expressed she would be uncomfortable calling the police 3 or 4 times a week as this occurs very often. Mercer also stated the ED's hours have been reduced to 26 hours per week, per the State, for management of all three GBHA properties. A schedule will be worked out that will include time spent by a staff member at Dewey Court.

- Mooney stated according to a field representative for the MA Union of Public Housing, it is a violation of tenant privacy to allow the airing of complaints at a public meeting when it is possible to identify the tenant being criticized. She suggests tenants work through the ED and LTO for a solution to their complaints rather than bringing them to the public meeting and the Board.
- Dewey Court tenant also stated the Executive Director needs to spend some time each week at Dewey Court to be available to speak to tenants. Possibly a few hours per week.
- Flag Rock Tenant – inquired whether it is a conflict of interest for individuals who are also tenants of GBHA to serve on the Board. Mooney stated it is not, according to the Ethics Commission, as long as they do not participate in anything that would benefit themselves.
- Tenant stated (10) years ago when they moved onto the property the Maintenance Department consisted of only Phair, attempting to cover all the building's needs. Now there are (2) who are responsible for (4) building sites. It is felt they deserve more respect for what they do than what they currently receive.
- Dewey Court Tenant – inquired whether a Sheffield tenant will be able to vote for GBHA Board members. Mercer explained when the contract for the merger was done it did not contain a provision for Sheffield residents to vote for GBHA Board members. This is an act of the MA Legislature and is currently in process. Hopefully soon there will be a Sheffield resident included on the GBHA Board.

Mooney suggested the Town of Sheffield may want to create their own Housing Authority, and have the two Housing Authorities work together through some sort of contract, merge Great Barrington and Sheffield into an inter-town Authority. Sheffield could then vote for their Housing Authority members and Great Barrington could vote for their members.

- The issue of dogs at Dewey Way was raised, with mention of one tenant that has (2) dogs. It was explained the former Executive Director had approved the lease for (2) dogs.
- Brief discussion around the need to allocate a portion of the Dewey Court budget to a seasonal maintenance worker. The GBHA Maintenance Department of two full-time individuals finds it very difficult to keep up with the needs of (3) properties. Dillon stated she would support this if there are funds available. Mercer stated it would need to be looked into, but does appear to be necessary. Dillon inquired what next steps may be. It was agreed this would be brought up again during budget discussion.
- Flag Rock Resident – Thanked the office staff for the letters that were sent out to tenants regarding the storing of garbage cans and yard up-keep. There continue to be some tenants with high grass on their lawns, but the appearance is much better.

RESIDENT ADVISORY BOARD/LTO UPDATE – Marlene Koloski

- Koloski stated the protocol for reporting is to report to the Executive Director, and not to the Board. She stated from now on she will not be attending/reporting at every Board meeting unless necessary.
- Koloski inquired whether the new Board will be working together or continue to be in-fighting and not get anything done? Mercer stated he believes all Board members to be committed to working together.
- Koloski stated she has researched the CHAMPS System and it does not seem to be complicated, so is wondering why vacancies are not getting filled in a more timely manner. Danzy stated she will be addressing the time-consuming nature of the CHAMPS System later in the meeting.
- Koloski questioned why the Maintenance Department is required to attend the Board meeting when they give their report to the Executive Director. Attending the meeting takes away from their

available work time and many times keeps them past their workday hours. Mercer stated this is a good point and believes some concerns could be addressed through report to the Executive Director. Danzy stated there should be representation at the meeting by the Maintenance Department to address/explain capital projects, bids for projects, etc. Both maintenance workers would not be required at the meetings. It would also be possible to move the agenda item to the top of the agenda to deal with first.

- Koloski stated the LTO needs a printer, ink and paper to be purchased. This will be done through the Executive Director.

Mooney made a motion, seconded by Mercer to approve the purchase of a printer, ink and paper for use by the LTO,

Unanimous approval via roll call vote.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT – Tina Danzy

- PHA System – Office staff continues to work with and learn the system. Currently focusing on maintenance and accounting features.
- Vendor payments are all now being made from the PHA System. A small GL code problem has been corrected.
- Late rent notices were processed mid-month. Notice to Quit notices will be processed next month for those tenants not in compliance. One unsatisfied Notice to Quit has been sent to the Attorney for processing through Housing Court.
- Vacancies are as follows:

FR Unit 216 – a second pull has been made through the CHAMPS System as the first pull received no response/eligible candidates. The second pull is in the final stages of approval and hopefully will have a tenant selection by the end of next week.

FR Unit 14 – has been vacant for many months due to extensive repair needs. An offer has been accepted. The new tenant will hopefully be moved in the first week of June.

Brookside Unit 5B will be vacant due to the death of a tenant. The unit should be vacant by the end of the month.

Dewey vacancies continue to not be able to be pulled from the CHAMPS System. The State is aware of the problem, which seems to be a software issue. The property needs to be linked to GBHA.

- Training – Danzy attended a training session May 7th in Springfield and just returned from a three-day convention. Western MA Roundtable of Small Housing Authorities will take place June 19th in Holyoke. This is a great opportunity to speak other small housing authorities who deal with the same issues, limited working hours, sparse staffing, etc. It is a great resource. Also will be attending a dwelling unit inspection training with Rich Phair in Chicopee the end of June. Unit inspections will be starting soon, one site per month, identify and draft work orders for necessary repairs, etc. and finish work before moving onto the next property.
- Site Cleanups – There are a handful of residents that need to be spoken to, but otherwise it is looking very nice. Will do property inspections and will deal with each tenant out of compliance individually.

- Brookside stove replacements are complete. Currently working with new ARCET representative to look at and fund other areas of replacement.
- Dewey Way dog walking area. One bid has been received of \$1,500.00 from Berkshire Fence to construct a small fence for a designated dog walking area. Several other companies were contacted, but either received no response or were too busy at this time to quote.
- Concern around major time constraints in inputting applications to the CHAMPS System discussed. Standard time for inputting an application to the system is 15 to 20 minutes. Depending on the number of applications to be entered, this creates a backlog in the normal workload. Each applicant also needs to be verified. Mercer inquired applicants are on file in the system but not credentialed? Danzy stated yes. When an applicant is pulled for possible tenancy all information must be then documented and verified. If they do not become the tenant, they are then released back into the system. If they then come up again for tenancy and their documentation/verifications are more than 90-days old, the process must be repeated. Verifications cannot be shared, so there is no “pre-qualified” candidates. Smaller housing authorities have voiced concern to the State around the length of time this process consumes and is discussing ways of saving time. Mooney suggested there be a discussion had with other smaller Housing Authorities around how they manage this. Danzy stated all small authorities are experiencing these problems and will be discussed at the upcoming roundtable.
- As previously reported, Karen Lewis has given her notice. The position of Office Assistant has been advertised with (7) responses received. Interviews should be starting soon.
- Handicapped doors – Phair stated he is waiting for an estimate to be complete. Mercer asked that this be followed up on.
- Tenant suggestion that when a unit is vacated that an outside service be contracted to come in and clean, paint, etc. to ready the unit for rental. Also, any extensive work needed should also be outsourced. This could alleviate some of the workload on the Maintenance Department and would facilitate quicker turnover of units. Danzy agreed faster unit turnover is in the best interest of the Authority, although the Authority is not penalized by the State and does continue to receive an allotment for vacant units.

FINANCIAL UPDATES

- Sue Honeycutt is in the final stages of closing out last FY, as of March 31, 2019. There will be complete financial reports submitted for review for all three properties at the regular June Board meeting. There had been a 9-month backlog to work through in closing out the FY, but that is now caught up. Mercer asked for P & L statements to be submitted at each monthly Board meeting. Danzy stated since the long-standing backlog has been cleared up, this will now be possible.

The following bank balances were reported:

Berkshire Bank:
\$28,775.52 balance

\$28,474.94 outstanding

Dewey Court Account:
\$2,277.69 balance
\$3,385.45 outstanding

Technology Account:
\$7,000.00

Mooney inquired when work on the next budget will begin. Mercer stated Sue Honeycutt will be presenting the budget to the Board. Mooney stated she thought the Executive Director was responsible for the budget. Mercer stated the Executive Director works with the State Accountant to develop the budget, and then presents the budget to the Board. Budget development is coordinated through the Executive Director and the State Accountant. Mooney asked for a more comprehensive report on budget development at the next meeting. She is disturbed there is no budget in place and the FY ended March 31, 2019. She has never heard of an agency using public funds operating in this fashion and is not comfortable with it at all. Mercer stated her concern was duly noted and recorded. Mooney asked the Vice-Chair to agree there will be a more comprehensive report on the budget at the next Board meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Mercer distributed a copy of Local Housing Authority (LHA) Responsibilities and Functions to all Board members in attendance.

The goal of the Board and staff is to serve the housing needs of the community. There are (3) entities involved in achieving this goal: Board, Executive Director and LHA staff, each with very distinct responsibilities.

Board responsibilities are very broad – setting up and revision of policies, establishing annual capital and operating budgets for the housing authority, insuring the integrity and professionalism of the housing authority and maintaining good community relations.

There is also a very clear structure of how information is passed. Any personal concerns need/must be funneled through the Executive Director. The Board should not be involved in these things.

Assignments for the Executive Director must be made at meetings. No one should be approaching the Executive Director requesting information.

Regarding Board members serving, two resident members are allowed at this time. (30) days from appointment to the Board each member is required to complete an Ethics course, which must be renewed every (2) years.

Tenant inquired if a problem/concern has been reported to the LTO/Executive Director and there has been no response, where does a tenant then go? What is the line of accountability? Mercer stated procedure is to report a problem/concern to the LTO/Executive Director. If any tenant feels threatened or in danger they should call the police. The Executive Director's hours have been cut to 26 hours per week by the State. The Board is looking at how to schedule those hours with the Executive Director to best meet the needs of tenants and workload.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Re-organization of the Board

Chairperson

Sinico nominated Eileen Mooney for the position of Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Directors, seconded by Mooney.

Sinico and Mooney voted approval via roll call vote.

Mercer and Dillon opposed via roll call vote.

Motion failed

Dillon nominated James Mercer for the position of Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Directors, seconded by Mercer.

Mercer and Dillon voted approval via roll call vote.

Sinico and Mooney opposed via roll call vote.

Motion failed

***Additional discussion/vote regarding Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority has been tabled until the next meeting of the Board of Directors.**

Vice-Chairperson

Mercer nominated Eileen Mooney as Vice-Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Directors, seconded by Dillon.

Mercer and Dillon voted approval via roll call vote.

Sinico and Mooney opposed via roll call vote.

Mooney nominated Jackie Sinico as Vice-Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Directors, seconded by Sinico.

Sinico and Mooney voted approval via roll call vote.

Mercer and Dillon opposed via roll call vote.

Additional discussion/vote regarding Vice-Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority has been tabled until the next meeting of the Board of Directors.

b) Job Description for part-Time Office Assistant

Mooney stated she had previously received a copy of the job description for the part-time Office Assistant from Karen Smith, former Chairperson of the GBHA through a Public Records Request. She assumes this is the job description presently in force. She has not yet compared it to the one being presented for approval today. Danzy stated the job description being presented today is more specific as to the functions she would like the Office Assistant to perform, such as QuickBooks, etc. There would also be other duties as assigned, as with any position. Mooney would like time allowed to

compare the two descriptions and discussed at a future meeting before being brought forward for a vote. Danzy expressed concern that she has applicants to interview and would like to hire this position as soon as possible and have time to train that individual. Mercer stated the hiring of the Office Assistant falls under the responsibilities of the Executive Director and understands that by revising the job description she is looking for a specific skill set in that position.

Michelle Loubert also requested a copy of the job description. Danzy stated she would forward one to her.

Danzy stated in a previous distribution of the revised job description via email to the Board, Mooney had expressed she believed the job description to be fine, but questioned the format of the document. Once Danzy explained her reason for the format, then Money did not like it. Mooney stated she does not find the job description to be clear. Danzy stated the job description is very clear, very specific as to the duties/tasks she is proposing this individual perform on a daily basis. The previous job description was very vague. Mercer stated the Executive Director hires, oversees and terminates this position. Mooney stated she has a problem with active verbs in the job description.

There will be an additional meeting of the GBHA Board on Tuesday, May 28, 2019 held at the GBHA office in Housatonic to discuss the Office Assistant job description further.

c) Approval of Executive Director Contract – new format per DHCD

Mooney stated she requires a copy of the material to read. Sinico also stated she requires a copy to read.

The topic of Approval of Executive Director Contract will be added to the agenda for the Tuesday, May 2, 2019 meeting.

d) Review of Part-time Benefits - *Tabled*

e) Pension Contribution Review - *Tabled*

Discussion of this review will be postponed for approximately (3) months when there is a better understanding of the FY closeout

f) Charge Sheet Approval

Danzy stated the Authority will begin unit inspections shortly and would like the Board to approve the Charge Sheet presented today as a means to determine a value for any tenant damage found. It is important to make sure the Authority is not paying out of pocket for chargeable tenant damage. Damages assessed could be paid on a monthly payment plan. The Executive Director has worked with Rich Phair to come up with the basic costs to repair certain areas of tenant damage. This charge sheet gives the authority a clear document to work from. This will also work as a deterrent as tenants are expected to properly maintain their units.

Mooney made a motion, seconded by Mercer to approve the Charge Sheet as presented to be used to determine the costs associated with tenant damage.

Unanimous approval.

g) Roger's Trucking – Trash Removal

Danzy stated the Bear activity has increased to a point where action was necessary regarding trash removal at the family units. The bears have been getting into the totes and strewing garbage every day. It is possible to re-position the bears, but they will migrate back and the problems will reoccur.

She had a discussion with Roger's Trucking and they have agreed to replace the dumpster in the elderly area with a larger dumpster and to increase pickups to twice per week to accommodate the family units. In addition, this arrangement will save the Authority \$1,644.00 per year.

Mooney inquired whether any family units would have difficulty getting their trash to the dumpster area, given it is some distance away. Tenant (Cheryl) stated there are no tenants who are unable to accomplish this, and if there are, she would be willing to bring their trash to the dumpster for them.

Mercer made a motion/seconded by Sinico to approve removal of the family unit totes, and replacement of the current dumpster with a larger dumpster in the enclosure by the elderly section for use by elderly and family units in disposal of garbage.

Unanimous approval via roll call vote.

h) Vote to support Proposed MA Union of Public Housing Tenants law

Mooney made a motion, seconded by Sinico to approve a letter be sent to legislators and the Great Barrington Board of Selectmen to support the proposed Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants' law for a tenant seat on Housing Authorities.

Mooney stated this is before the legislature now and suggests it should be supported. Mercer asked this be tabled until the following Board meeting when a letter could be reviewed by the Board. Mooney to draft letter.

i) Vote to Appoint Public Records Access Officer for GBHA

Mercer stated Sinico has filled this position in the past, but has no interest in doing so in the future.

Mooney stated she would be willing to do so. Mercer stated he will check with legal around this appointment as there are (7) open meeting violation complaints unresolved and still in the investigation phase. He would like counsel to clear Mooney for this position before a vote is taken.

MAINTENANCE REPORT – Rich Phair

- As previously reported, the stove replacement project at Brookside has been completed. There are (6) additional stoves that will be used in other units.
- Broken siding at Brookside has been replaced and he has begun power washing.
- Unit 102 is currently being painted. Unit 5B is being cleared out by family by the end of the month.
- Brookside – new siding replacement, pull off older aluminum siding and replace with new vinyl siding, also re-painting/replacement of posts is being built into the new capital plan with ARCET.
- Brookside drainage project update – this project is in the hands of the engineers – need to submit plan to DHCD for review
- Dewey termite issue – Architect is working with DHCD. Danzy stated she is waiting for approval of this project.

- Gutter cleaning – initial bid vote was for \$862.00, but bidder was unable to produce a valid insurance certificate. Other bids received were \$1,500.00 and \$1,350.00. Phair suggests the Board approve the bid of \$1,350.00 from First Response.

Mooney made a motion, seconded by Sinico to approve the bid for gutter cleaning of \$1,350 from First Response.

Unanimous approval via roll call vote.

- Driveway repair – A decision needs to be made by the Board soon on this. Bids received for \$2,500.00 and \$3,500.00.

Sinico made a motion, seconded by Mooney to approve the bid from Wilkinson for \$2,500.00 for Bernard Gibbons driveway repair.

Unanimous approval via roll call vote.

Additional discussion/vote regarding Chairperson of the Great Barrington Housing Authority has been tabled until the next meeting of the Board of Directors.

- Mooney inquired whose responsibility it is to clean up after dogs. Danzy stated tenants are required to pick up after their dogs. She has been working to resolve the need for a dog walking area at Dewey to make it a better situation for all. It is understood that some dogs may not make it to the area before relieving themselves. Any accidents would need to be picked up by the tenant owner. There had been previous complaints made of a tenant walking their dogs to relieve themselves in an inappropriate area of the property. Mercer inquired how many dogs are in residence at Dewey. The answer was (3). Sinico stated she does not believe a fence is necessary. Mercer stated possibly install a post with “doggie bags” for residents to use. Danzy stated she felt a designated location for this activity would assist in resolving the issues, but if the Board does not feel it is necessary, so be it.
- Mooney inquired whether work will be done to repair the broken fence along the family area at Dewey Court. The answer was yes.
- Livingroom light project – Phair stated the lights have all been purchased, but the project is at a standstill. Due to the type of boxes in the elderly units a licensed electrician is needed to do the change out. Bids for licensed/insured electricians are needed to complete this work.
- Unit # 9 is in need of shower repair due to water leaking behind the wall and loosening the tile. Phair is currently waiting on an estimate to repair the problem.
- Mercer asked for a written report to be submitted at the July Board meeting of maintenance items needed at all three properties – the big picture. Mooney requested that Phair’s Maintenance Report be included in the Board meeting package.
- Phair stated the Authority should begin looking into window replacement in the elderly section of Dewey Court.

BOARD COMMENTS

- Sinico inquired about the installation of speed bumps on Bernard Gibbons Drive. Numerous vehicles are driving too fast up and down the road on a daily basis. Phair stated he would look into purchasing (2) speed bumps for installation on a seasonal basis on Bernard Gibbons Drive.

- Sinico stated she believes designated parking works, although there still seems to be an issue with nighttime guests parking in tenant areas. There are (6) handicapped spots in the front by the sidewalk area. She would like to see unit designated parking signs. Danzy believes if guest parking signs are made clearer it could resolve the problem. It was agreed that most people do not realize they are parking in tenant areas, and if spoken to, move their vehicles immediately to guest parking. The LTO and office staff can assist with enforcement when able, but Danzy stated she would require a clear plan be presented explaining how the designated parking policy would be enforced and what the penalty would be for non-compliance.

Dillon (via phone) excused herself from the meeting. She did not return.

Phair stated there are very clear State guidelines around an official handicapped parking spot. They are wider than the standard parking spot and they need to be striped appropriately. Spots would be lost if these handicapped spots were made to State guidelines.

Mercer made a motion, seconded by Mooney to approve the LTO to canvas tenants of all three properties to gain input regarding designated parking.

Unanimous approval.

- Mooney stated there is supposed to be an approved Memorandum of Understanding between the Board and the LTO. She would like to see that action added to the next meeting agenda.
- Mooney stated she has spoken to Carolyn Gonzalez regarding the depositing of monies with no written description for what they are for. This would be payments made via electronic funds transfer. She has been told that all payments do carry an explanation for what they are being dispersed for, and if the Board have any questions in the future that they contact the State immediately. Danzy stated she is aware that the State website contains a description of what deposits are for and is confused by this statement. She has never not known what a deposit was for, and would be happy to show Mooney the website if interested.
- There was discussion surrounding the concern for the reduction of the Executive Director's hours to 26 hours per week. There is concern the workload will suffer and fall behind. Michelle Loubert stated when she was employed by the Authority this was also an issue and worked many hours unpaid. Mercer stated it is critical to have staff with the proper skill set to perform daily tasks and use time allotted as efficiently as possible.
- Mooney stated she is aware the accounting firm presently working with the Authority does not have a current contract to do so. She would like to have this item included on the next agenda to discuss going out to bid for an accounting firm.

ADJOURNMENT

Sinico made a motion, seconded by Mooney to adjourn the meeting at 4:00PM.

Unanimous approval.

Respectfully submitted by Debra E Brazie