

Great Barrington Housing Authority Minutes
Thursday, October 13, 2022

I. Call to Order - Attendance Roll Call - Chairman John Grogan opened the meeting via Zoom at 11:00am with a roll call: Tom Blauvelt, “aye,” John Grogan, “aye,” Eileen Mooney, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.”

II. Policy Discussion and Revision - Potential Board vote.

A. J. Grogan stated the goal today is to discuss any major changes in existing GBHA policies and to review any DHCD suggested policies that GBHA does not have currently and may want to add or combine with existing GBHA policies or note if the policy is covered in other documents such as a tenant lease.

B. The board reviewed existing GBHA policies:

1. Credit Card – E. Mooney stated the policy confuses policy with how it is enacted. She noted a lot of the detail is unnecessary and it can be reduced to one paragraph. The board agreed this should also be addressed with Tina Danzy, GBHA Executive Director.
2. Rent Collection – P. Orenstein stated this policy is unnecessary - it should be incorporated into the lease as that is the governing document. He stated he has asked T. Danzy for a copy of a tenant lease to determine what is in it and if all leases are the same. He stated he also has the DHCD model lease for comparison. The board discussed having just the main points of rent collection stated in a policy i.e., payment timing, grace period for payment, etc. so tenants can access information easily – but also include that all rent issues are subject to the lease agreement. P. Orenstein agreed to write a shorter version of the policy. P. Orenstein also stated the grace period can be extended by the Executive Director – and inquired if T. Danzy has a policy for handling that and for when the board should be brought in. It was agreed that T. Danzy should be asked about the process/policy.
3. Grievance Procedures – J. Grogan stated this policy needs revision and it is identical to the DHCD handbook. He noted the policy provides a right to a hearing, but does not give details about such provisions as a hearing officer – so more information is needed. He noted if a tenant has a complaint involving harassment, there is a grievance procedure, but no complaint has ever been filed. E. Mooney stated the policy is too confusing. J. Grogan stated he would revise the policy and provide a more linear description of the process so it is more useful to tenants. The board agreed the LTO should be involved in the grievance process. Jackie Sinico, resident of Flag Rock, stated she knows of people interested in being grievance officers and will send the names to J. Grogan.
4. Tenant Lease Addendum – E. Mooney stated this is unnecessary as it should be covered in the lease – but that has to be confirmed with T. Danzy. It was noted again that the board needs GBHA’s tenant lease agreement. It was also discussed that leases for families and seniors might be different, but within those groups leases should be the same – there should be consistency. It was also noted that the board is not involved in leases, but it should be ensured they are uniform.
5. Schedule Maintenance Charges – P. Orenstein stated this is straightforward, but asked if it is updated and how charges are determined – i.e., is it actual cost and both parts and labor. The board agreed T. Danzy should be asked how it is managed as it is operational.
6. Security Deposit – P. Orenstein stated this is specified in state law, but can also be covered in the policy. The board discussed the requirement that interest on security deposits be paid to tenants annually – and agreed to ask T. Danzy how it is handled.

7. Public Records Viewing – J. Grogan stated the policy it is okay as is, except for the last section regarding proprietary documents which are not defined. The board agreed it should consult with T. Danzy and DHCD regarding guidelines and E. Mooney stated she would review/check with the state public records division.
8. Damage Charges – E. Mooney stated this policy is okay - the writing just needs to be tightened. The board discussed this could be in the lease or a separate policy.
9. Smoke-free – P. Orenstein stated it is okay as is. J. Grogan asked if vaping is included. P. Orenstein confirmed under state law, if smoking is prohibited, so is vaping. E. Mooney asked if smoking medical marijuana is also prohibited. It was discussed there is both a smoke-free policy and lease addendum - and that it should be an addendum not a policy. J. Grogan stated T. Danzy had commented that there are no consequences for violating the addendum/policy – P. Orenstein confirmed the process for handling violations is in the addendum and policy. It was agreed that T. Danzy should be asked what she needs in regarding enforcement of rules. J. Sinico confirmed everyone signed the addendum.
10. Nondiscrimination – J. Grogan stated GBHA follows equal opportunity guidelines and the policy should cover both employment and access to housing – but there are a lot of existing laws/guidelines that do not have to be repeated in policy. It was noted this topic is not included on the DHCD list – GBHA just needs to state it complies and follows DHCD rules and applicable law. P. Orenstein noted other housing authorities have a blanket statement on their websites and policy documents. The board agreed it is enough to state GBHA is aware of these important rules and makes every effort to comply. T. Blauvelt pointed out that the existing policy covers both employment and filling vacancies – and perhaps the employment piece belongs in the personnel policy.
11. Prohibiting Harassment – J. Grogan stated DHCD suggests a policy on sexual harassment specifically, but not harassment/bullying generally. He noted both are important and can be covered in one harassment policy. E. Mooney stated there are state and federal laws and she asked the Town's HR lead for a list of those laws. P. Orenstein asked if reasonable accommodation would be under the discrimination policy. J. Grogan commented that nondiscrimination, harassment/bullying, sexual harassment and reasonable accommodation/ADA should be together in one blanket policy – for tenants and employees. The board agreed these matters are covered by state/federal law, but should be listed in a policy or statement with reference to the applicable laws.
12. Capitalization – E. Mooney stated there are minor changes to this policy. P. Orenstein stated this is purely an internal accounting issue, and should not be policy – the board agreed, but T. Danzy should be asked to confirm.
13. Snow Removal and Towing - P. Orenstein stated these two policies should be combined. He inquired what is meant by tenants clearing their vehicles – J. Sinico replied cars are to be cleaned before 10am – tenants help each other with this, and noted the idea is to shovel in between cars to aid with plowing. She also commended Rich and team for their work. She also noted there has never been towing. P. Orenstein stated certain parts of the current policy are useful – i.e., that GBHA is responsible for snow removal on roads, parking lots, etc. and families are responsible for their driveways. T. Blauvelt asked if this also applies to the Sheffield property as it is not mentioned – it was agreed that should be confirmed. P. Orenstein stated he would combine the two policies and note the open question about Sheffield.

14. Pets – J. Grogan stated there are two different pet policies and suggested the same policy for families and seniors. He also noted the policy refers to a pet committee and management responsibilities, but with no details. The board discussed dogs are not permitted in family units, likely due to risk concerns - and J. Sinico added tenants take advantage of service dog designations to get around it. J. Grogan suggested the pet policy focus on control and violations – i.e., biting/aggressive dogs are not allowed and a process/steps to manage issues. P. Orenstein stated legitimate services dogs should be allowed. J. Grogan suggested allowing dogs, but perhaps with a weight limit and restrictions for barking/disturbances – and to require legitimate service dog certification.
15. Abandoned Unit – E. Mooney stated she has questions for T. Danzy on this and will send them to J. Grogan. She will also tighten the language.
16. Bad Dept – P. Orenstein stated this is unnecessary – it is internal accounting and DHCD dictates had to handle – and the board agreed.
17. Procurement – J. Grogan stated this policy is boilerplate.
18. Reasonable Accommodation – J. Grogan stated the policy looks okay, but suggested this be looked at within the context of the proposed harassment, etc. blanket policy.
19. Dehumidifier and Fan – E. Mooney stated this is a lease addendum and should not be policy – the board agreed.
20. CORI – E. Mooney asked if it is required – J. Grogan confirmed it is on DHCD's list. P. Orenstein stated there are state rules for CORI. It was agreed to hold off on this for now.

C. J. Grogan reviewed those DHCD policies that GBHA does not have currently –

1. Language Access Plan/Policy – J. Grogan stated this may come under nondiscrimination – with a statement that if someone needs an interpreter, one will be provided. The board agreed.
2. Affirmative Action – J. Grogan stated this would be listed in the blanket statement previously discussed and the board agreed.
3. Sexual Harassment – J. Grogan stated this would also be listed in the blanket statement and the board agreed.
4. Evacuation Plan – E. Mooney stated there had been a drill last year with Chief Burger in attendance. P. Orenstein stated there should be a plan and the board agreed.
5. Lease Enforcement – J. Grogan stated consequences are stated in the lease so this is not a necessary policy – and the board agreed.
6. Criminal Offender – E. Mooney stated she would look for a sample policy.
7. Staff Travel – T. Blauvelt confirmed that is part of the personnel policy.
8. Reimbursement - T. Blauvelt confirmed that is part of the personnel policy.
9. Accounts Payable – The board agreed this is straightforward and not a necessary policy.
10. Emergency Response – The board agreed to add this to the evacuation plan.
11. Disposition – E. Mooney stated this is a lease addendum and should not be policy. The board agreed. P. Orenstein noted DHCD's model lease addresses a lot of the issues discussed – procedure, pets, etc. – and the current GBHA leases need to be reviewed for consistency.
12. Maintenance – J. Grogan asked if this needs to be policy. J. Sinico stated she has a list of daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal tasks. J. Grogan replied that is helpful, but not policy – policy is more about response time and the like. J. Sinico stated she would deliver this document to E. Mooney for the board to review.
13. Investment – The board agreed this is not relevant to GBHA.

14. Press Protocol – The board discussed that this is part of the Executive Director’s role and agreed this should not be policy.

D. J. Grogan confirmed he would send the list of questions, as discussed, to T. Danzy and copy the board.

E. T. Blauvelt stated he had reviewed the personnel policy and the substance looks good – and he just had a few questions. J. Grogan stated it would be discussed at the next policy meeting to be held in two weeks. He also stated T. Danzy will be invited and a vote on the policies would occur at the following meeting – he noted the goal is to complete the process and have final/approved policies by calendar year-end.

F. J. Grogan expressed concerns tenant complaints regarding harassment/bullying have not gone forward with the grievance process and escalation steps as outlined in detail in the existing policy. The role of the LTO in this was discussed. E. Mooney suggested the language be made clearer and J. Grogan stated he would work on it and asked the board to review/edit/comment as well.

III. Citizen Speak: No citizens asked to speak.

IV. Board Comments – No board members asked to speak.

V. Adjournment – T. Blauvelt made a motion to adjourn; E. Mooney seconded. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 12:48pm.

Documents reviewed

- GBHA Policies

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow