

Great Barrington Housing Authority Minutes
Tuesday, August 23, 2022

I. Call to Order: Attendance Roll Call – potential board vote. 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.”

Also in attendance: Executive Director Tina Danzy and staff Rich Phair and Madonna Meagher.

A. Board Organization; New member officer appointments - Potential Board vote

E. Mooney made a motion to appoint T. Blauvelt as Vice Chair of the Housing Authority board; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.

E. Mooney made a motion to appoint T. Blauvelt as the board representative to the Community Preservation Committee; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.

II. LTO REPORT: New tenant survey.

A. Marlene Koloski presented questions and responses/results for the Great Barrington Housing Authority (GBHA) tenant survey which the board received. T. Danzy asked that the survey/results be sent to her. The survey questions focused on feedback on the Executive Director, Assistant Executive Director and Maintenance for accessibility, responsiveness and follow up. Responses categorized as negative/ positive/mixed were shared and results indicated the need for some improvement in tenant communications. M. Koloski expressed a need for change and heightened respect for residents and their homes.

1. T. Blauvelt asked how many surveys were sent out – M. Koloski stated there are over 100 tenants and 30% completed the survey – it was agreed this is not a good response rate. M. Koloski stated her view it is because tenants are fearful and have not seen change over time.
2. J. Grogan stated tenants deserve respect and clean facilities. Board members agreed it is alarming that tenants are fearful and there should be zero tolerance for any demeaning or abusive attitudes/interactions among board, staff and tenants. It was also noted that some tenant concerns can be addressed especially in the survey feedback areas, but others, like landscaping, may not be due to staffing/time constraints - but best efforts should be made. It was noted T. Danzy’s hours may not be sufficient to do the job and that the board will consider adding hours. The board confirmed its commitment to making the properties a better place to live and agreed to consider establishing a code of conduct.
3. J. Grogan stated for the GBHA office/board evaluation survey done in September the response rate was high – that should be duplicated and response used as a baseline to measure results go forward. It was noted that survey is completely anonymous.
4. The board thanked M. Koloski for her efforts and commitment and assured her issues would be looked into.

III. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT:

T. Danzy stated Madonna Meagher, Rick Phair and Sue Honeycutt of Fenton Ewald were participating.

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

1. New AUP contract - Potential Board vote – T. Danzy stated she has identified Lisa Fallon to perform the AUP audit which needs board approval.

a. E. Mooney confirmed the fee for the AUP audit is set by DHCD.

- b. The Board inquired about DHCD requirements/process for AUP audit - S. Honeycutt explained it is not a full audit – it is agreed-upon procedures which is similar – but results are pass/fail and DHCD identifies who can perform it. She stated it examines bank accounts – i.e., pulls checks for correct coding and proper procedures and reviews the general ledger, trail balance, payroll, tenant write-offs, etc. . Orenstein asked if contracts are verified via random sample – S. Honeycutt replied they ask for a list of contracts and check certain ones to ensure that procurement is correct. P. Orenstein verified DHCD does not require an audit, but does require an agreed-upon procedures review which is smaller in scope and guided by DHCD specified terms/procedures including who performs it and what they are paid. E. Mooney confirmed the stated asked if the state requirement for annual housing authority audits – S. Honeycutt confirmed there is no longer a state requirement for housing authority audits that have under \$750,000 in federal income – so GBHA does not qualify. She also stated an agreed-upon procedures review includes recommendations/suggestions for improvement.
- c. P. Orenstein asked about the meaning of S. Honeycutt’s statement on monthly balance sheets noting financial statements are not reviewed – S. Honeycutt replied that language is required – it means we do not audit and cannot form an opinion - we are compliers meaning taking information and creating reports – but she noted that they check everything and will raise any issues to the board/DHCD. She also noted formal audits are very expensive and unaffordable for the GBHA. J. Grogan stated he is uncomfortable having a fee accountant stating an audit is not affordable/needed – S. Honeycutt stated her opinion is that it is not needed and there are no funds to pay for it – but ultimately, it is a board decision.
- d. E. Mooney asked why the board was not advised the reserves were low and resulting in a DHCD corrective order – S. Honeycutt replied it was in the year-end report that it was under the 35% DHCD requires – but that is due to unanticipated expenses for safety/staffing/other tenant/property needs.
- e. J. Grogan suggested the board approve Lisa Fallon to do the AUP audit and continue discussing a full audit next meeting with more expense information, etc.

J. Grogan made a motion to approve Lisa Fallon to perform the AUP and for billing at the state mandated rate; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.

2. Financials – T. Danzy stated June financials are in the packet and noted the year-end statement has a lot of unanticipated expenses especially for maintenance.

- a. T. Blauvelt asked about the balance sheet allowance for doubtful accounts for approximately \$8,400 – noting that is 25% of total receivables – he inquired how that number is established and tracked against actual write-offs – S. Honeycutt replied that is calculated by a formula every year-end – and is an industry standard. He also confirmed \$5,000 is the dollar threshold for a capital asset.
- b. E. Mooney asked about a \$300 cash withdrawal shown on the bank statement – T. Danzy stated it was an emergency situation for someone needing housing/meal allowance for a few days – it was paid via money order. The board stated their approval.
- c. E. Mooney also inquired about the pay schedule for Adirondack and for monthly invoices/ T. Danzy stated invoices are available - E. Mooney asked for something more explicit and P. Orenstein asked for monthly/quarterly reporting noting the amount Adirondack charges is different each month. E. Mooney asked for Adirondack invoice 220602 and T. Danzy replied she would send it. P. Orenstein asked and the board agreed that check images be included in the packet as the bank statement is not sufficient information.

- d. E. Mooney asked why the notice for bids for the GBHA RFP for carpeting a facility is on the GB Town website – T. Danzy replied bids require public notice and are always sent to the Town for posting.
3. LTO Budget - Potential Board vote – T. Danzy stated the LTO year-end statement and proposed budget for this fiscal year has been submitted.
- J. Grogan made a motion to approve the LTO budget for \$672.00; T. Blauvelt seconded. J. Grogan asked if any discussion - T. Blauvelt asked if \$.30/mile reimbursement was correct – T. Danzy replied it is low and should be more as per the state allowance. E. Mooney asked if M. Koloski got everything that is needed/required – M. Koloski stated she would like an office with privacy for tenant conversations – T. Danzy stated there is suitable space available with a locked cabinet. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.
4. Policy Subcommittee/Policy Review - Potential Board vote – J. Grogan stated the board will be reviewing GBHA policies and making suggestions for changes – and to complete the process potentially by calendar year end. E. Mooney and P. Orenstein offered to help. T. Danzy stated the policies are in a binder as is the commissioner handbook. J. Grogan suggested the three board members take a third of the policies and take a month to review – E. Mooney to assign portions.
5. Budget Reserve & PMR Report Discussion - Potential Board vote – T. Danzy asked to discuss the DHCD corrective action to raise the reserve from 19% towards 35%. She noted there have been unanticipated expenses, but no unnecessary expenditures. P. Orenstein asked if it is due to increased costs or vacancies/rent – S. Honeycutt replied it is due to increased costs/expenses and DCHD gave only 4% increase this year – she noted it is happening in other places and perhaps DCHD will decide 35% is not reasonable. She also noted there are vacancies for units needing repairs.
 - a. J. Grogan asked that if the properties continue at 100% occupancy/rent collection with the current budget and no abnormal expenditures – what would the reserve be – and noted the goal is to see it increase over time. T. Danzy replied there are few vacancies and most tenants pay on time. She stated she would review the budget, but there is not much leeway noting that reasonable accommodations and remediation is costly.
 - b. P. Orenstein asked for a budget report for fiscal year-end as of March 31 with over/under on expenses - S. Honeycutt stated she would send a full expense report.
 - c. J. Grogan noted the reserve has suffered due to inflation and unexpected expenses and the budget is being managed as carefully as possible as to not cut into the reserve further – but to try to grow it, though with no guarantee. He asked if DCHD would find that position acceptable – S. Honeycutt replied they would.
6. Legal issue – J. Grogan stated the issue is explained in the packet.
 - a. E. Mooney asked to meet with the Housing Authority’s lawyer and P. Orenstein agreed though it is not about the substance of the complaint. J. Grogan stated he would schedule the meeting.
7. Maintenance report – Rick Phair provided a maintenance update – he stated work has started in the Brookside Manor unit to deal with damage and painting quotes are high; tree removal and fall gutter cleaning are going out to bid; elevator inspection is due in August will not occur until September, but there are no safety concerns; best efforts are being made to keep up with landscaping/trimming/mowing.
 - a. P. Orenstein asked about the condition of the deck on the second level at Flag Rock - R. Phair replied he has asked contractors to look at it for ideas on how to improve it, but he has not heard any follow up. P. Orenstein also confirmed all vendors/subcontractors are put out to bid.

IV. Chairperson update - Community outreach progress and ideas.

A. J. Grogan reported he connected with Jane Ralph of Construct, Fred Clark of the GB Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Carol Bosco Baumann of Community Development Corporation of Southern Berkshires – noting no one from the Housing Authority had reached out previously. The primary topic was the idea of tenants graduating from subsidized housing to another form of housing or downsizing i.e., moving 2 people in a 3-4 bedroom apartment to a 1 bedroom. They also discussed microloans from Greylock and Salisbury Bank that can help build generational wealth and noted banks do financial counseling/education along with the microloans - he expressed interest in making that more accessible to GBHA tenants. He also stated there was also interest in forming a subcommittee with the Housing Authority. It was confirmed that banks have found microloans to be successful and good for business – and that the loans can be used for a variety of expenses not just housing.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Accounting Software/Fenton Ewald - Potential Board vote. – The board agreed to table this item.
- B. Joint Subcommittee with Affordable Housing Trust - Potential Board vote – E. Mooney stated this was not discussed at the Affordable Housing Trust meeting.
- C. Added item - Assistance to Flag Rock tenants re: water quality – The board discussed providing relief to residents at Flag Rock due to issues with the Housatonic water and to provide access to clean and usable water. T. Danzy proposed surveying Flag Rock resident to understand if they would want/use a community water cooler and if so, to get an estimate – and to ask DHCD for an exemption/waive the cost. J. Grogan pointed out the water is not safe for the elderly due to carcinogenic effects. P. Orenstein expressed concern about seniors who are unable to buy water because it is heavy and expensive. He suggested not waiting for DHCD funds as the situation is urgent and order/provide gallon jugs of water to any of the 32 senior units that are in need. S. Honeycutt pointed out that DHCD will need to approve, but it can be fast-tracked. It was noted receipts for the water should be saved.

J. Grogan made a motion to buy 2-gallon jugs of water for the elderly units for the next month. T. Danzy pointed out there could be others at risk so family units should be included – and if not offered to all it may raise fair housing issues. The board agreed.

J. Grogan amended his motion to buy 2-gallon jugs of water for each unit at Flag Rock – 100 gallons per week for the next month - and to ask DHCD for reimbursement; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – T. Blauvelt inquired about getting donations for water – T. Danzy confirmed GBHA can accept donations. E. Mooney noted there are water stations in Great Barrington where residents can fill up. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.

- 1. J. Grogan stated the expense will come out of the operating budget and should be approximately \$250 for a month for 50 units. T. Danzy stated DHCD is aware of the issue and would likely be receptive to the exemption.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

- A. Flag Rock Parking – Item was not discussed.
- B. Website updates. E. Mooney asked for website updates sent to the board last month to be approved. E. Mooney made a motion to approve the website updates; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – P. Orenstein stated he would like to look at the updates before approving. The motion/item was tabled for the next meeting.
- C. Dog Walking/Doggie clean up station follow up - Item was not discussed.
- D. Public Records Officer Update. Potential Board vote. E. Mooney reported this has been filled.

E. Added item: Check signing - P. Orenstein confirmed T. Danzy had asked the bank to add him as a signatory and that the bank will follow up directly with him – once the process is complete, he can sign checks. He inquired further about warrant packages and asked that T. Danzy and M. Meagher sign the warrant cover sheet to have a record of payment approvals after checks are sent to vendors - and then give the package to the board member signatory. The board discussed the check and warrant signing process, timing, protocol and state requirements. It was determined that one board member signs checks – preferably the Treasurer, and at least a board quorum signs warrants in a timely manner after the checks are mailed, i.e., one month out.

1. P. Orenstein raised concerns about how the board can object to a check being sent out – it was noted this has not happened or rarely does. He suggested a policy that if a check is for a low dollar amount and a regular/reoccurring expense such as utilities only one board member needs to sign, but other checks for large amounts or an unusual expense/vendor those should be flagged and to wait for the next board meeting before paying the vendor. T. Danzy stated she will flag and hold large/unusual expenses and noted capital expenses are preapproved by the board. It was agreed this process/protocol should be added to the new/revised policies.
2. E. Mooney asked that on the warrant sheet it be noted to what accounts payments are Charged/credits added. It was confirmed E. Mooney would sign checks being held now.
3. P. Orenstein asked why four items had been written in on the warrant cover sheet – T. Danzy replied they were cut off so were written in – P. Orenstein expressed concerns about the process.

VIII. Minute Review/Approval Board Meeting of July and site visit Meetings.

A. Regarding the April 13, 2022 minutes - there was discussion about the approval procedure when there is not a quorum for a vote. J. Grogan asked E. Mooney to confirm with the Attorney General's office.

B. Regarding the August 3, 2022 minutes - T. Danzy had multiple edits that she will put in writing and send to E. Mooney – it will be discussed at the next meeting.

J. Grogan made a motion to approve the site visit meeting minutes; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – T. Blauvelt stated he was not at the meeting and would abstain. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “abstain,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” Motion passed: 3-0 with 1 abstention.

IX. CITIZEN SPEAK:

A. Sue Ball, Flag Rock Apartment 112, asked that cameras be placed in the Flag Rock parking lot as cars are being hit/damaged. The board agreed this is a reasonable request and should be looked into.

X. BOARD COMMENTS – There were no comments from the board.

XI. ADJOURNMENT – P. Orenstein made a motion to adjourn; J. Grogan 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 1:36pm.

Documents reviewed: Personnel Policies; employee hours/wages; financial statements; draft minutes; LTO budget/financials.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow