

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY
Wednesday, April 5, 2023

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.” Also present: Executive Director Tina Danzy, accountant, Sue Honeycutt.

II. Response to RFP for GBHA Accountant - Potential Board Vote

- A. P. Orenstein summarized his conversations with Teresa Ewald, Fenton Ewald, regarding her offer to again work with GBHA including monthly accounting/reporting, quarterly reporting to DHCD, annual budget preparation and year-end accounting/reporting.
- B. S. Honeycutt described the staffing and process for Fenton Ewald going forward for the future which included adding Kimberly Thompson, an accountant with the firm, to cover monthly accounting/reporting with S. Honeycutt supervising and meeting with GBHA management quarterly. In addition, they would be available to attend four board meetings annually including budget presentation. S. Honeycutt clarified there would be no monthly visits as there had been in the past.
- C. P. Orenstein asked about the procedure to answer board questions on financials and emphasized that there is an expectation questions will arise and be answered by Tina/the accountant. It was agreed this should be specified in the new contract. T. Danzy suggested that Teresa Ewald could do a board training on financials to enhance familiarity with process/reports/information presentation specific to housing authorities. E. Mooney stated there were some questions because it is a different process, but there were also specific questions about account transactions that were not answered. P. Orenstein asked about the last AUP review of GBHA financials in the report of October 2022 – it noted one exception on how GBHA was reporting deficiencies to DHCD – he asked about the nature of the oversight. S. Honeycutt replied there is a DHCD form for approval of spending from reserves. She noted the form is not used as expenses come too late to complete the form. She stated the GBHA will not get to 35% reserve and noted she has requested DHCD augment the budget, but has been turned down, which is their general practice. It was clarified the reserve is not an account, it reflects unrestricted net assets and annual profit and loss – and that the 35% is what DHCD would like housing authorities to have. She further explained that in eastern MA it is easier to maintain as incomes/rents are higher. P. Orenstein stated, and it was confirmed, the reserve is more like retained earnings – and it was added the reserve is not an account. E. Mooney asked about clarification on using funds from the reserve – S. Honeycutt replied if GBHA spends more than its income that is a loss which is essentially spending from the reserve.
- D. The Board considered the two potential options for a fee accountant – Fenton Ewald and Katie Brelsford-KB Accounting considering/comparing services and fees. T. Danzy stated she is concerned K. Brelsford will raise her rates after the three month review and that she supports continuing to work with Fenton Ewald as she has a good working relationship with S. Honeycutt.
- E. Mooney asked for a list of charges from each candidate.
 - 1. For Fenton Ewald it was noted the charge would be \$1,081/month; \$350/year for data entry and \$1,500/year which T. Danzy stated would be reimbursed by the state. It was clarified that they are asking for a 5% increase from the prior year. For K. Brelsford, the fee for services to be provided excluding bookkeeping is \$1,090/month. E. Mooney suggested issuing a new RFP that clarifies bookkeeping is not expected - J. Grogan replied it is unlikely that will improve chances of getting new applicants. T. Blauvelt agreed and noted timing is short because as of April 1, GBHA will have no accounting services.

T. Blauvelt made a motion to retain the services of Fenton Ewald Associates as GBHA account firm; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion –

- E. Mooney stated there should be a new person doing the accounting and asked if someone else from Fenton Ewald could be assigned – she noted it has taken time in the past to get basic information, especially for the Administrative Other line item.
- P. Orenstein stated there is no tolerance for avoidance of Board questions and that should be in the contract. He noted disputes/disagreements in the past that cannot reoccur in the future – he added that responses have improved recently. He also noted material questions would be submitted in writing. He also stated the contract is for one year and the situation can be evaluated at that time.
- J. Grogan stated GBHA's financial well-being has improved – but it had deteriorated during Fenton Ewald's tenure – though he questioned if they or the Board at that time was responsible. He noted there is a risk in bringing in someone new and inexperienced in working with housing authorities/DHCD, but noted K. Brelsford's enthusiasm and interest in learning.
- T. Blauvelt noted Fenton Ewald's institutional knowledge is valuable, but it is good corporate governance/practices to make a change. He stated if the contract is revised to reflect timely response to board questions, he would give Fenton Ewald a chance.
- E. Mooney stated there were financial problems in the past, but new office procedures have helped. She added a new approach could be beneficial and expressed concerns past issues would not be resolved.
- P. Orenstein stated he supports good governance practices and wanted a change in accountant. He noted it is a question of expertise vs a fresh perspective and when is the right time to make a change.

J. Grogan asked for public input – there was none. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “no,” E. Mooney, “no,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” Motion result: 2-2 tie vote.

E. J. Grogan stated K. Brelsford would be at the office monthly, but would have a steep learning curve, though he stated a lot is dictated by DHCD – he also noted her enthusiasm for the job. P. Orenstein noted there may or may not be a disruption in operations with a new person, but from a risk perspective Fenton Ewald may be a better choice as things are getting better and may continue to improve. T. Blauvelt pointed out KB Accounting is a two person operation at this time and expressed concerns about the impact if K. Brelsford is unable to work. P. Orenstein stated she is growing the business, but is not there yet – and noted she may reapply in a year and be better positioned. He stated there is no guarantee Fenton Ewald would be rehired next year.

J. Grogan made a motion to rehire Fenton Ewald; T. Blauvelt seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “no,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” Motion passed: 3-1.

It was noted that the contract needs to be updated - and it was clarified to add an expectation for responding to the Board on accounting questions. It was agreed the contract would be reviewed at the next meeting.

III. CITIZEN SPEAK: No citizens asked to speak.

IV. BOARD COMMENTS

A. E. Mooney asked if there would be a policy meeting this month – J. Grogan replied he is trying to keep extra meetings to once per month, so policy discussion would be next month.

It was agreed that the next meeting would be Thursday, April 20 at 11:00am.

V. ADJOURNMENT – E. Mooney 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 12:00pm.

Documents reviewed: Fenton Ewald contract and services/fee schedule and KB Accounting services/fee schedule.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow