

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY
Thursday, April 20, 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, Staff Madonna Meagher.

II. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT: Financials, vacancies, maintenance, legal and other updates.
Potential Board votes.

- T. Danzy reported there is \$153,000 in the operations bank account and the reserve is low due to unanticipated expenses related to unit vacancies/damage.
- Vacancies – T. Danzy reported efforts to fill current vacancies and get applicants in the queue for future anticipated vacancies. She noted DHCD’s efforts to clean up the system will make pulls more efficient and targeted. She added that three units have been filled since the last meeting.
- Maintenance - T. Danzy reported spring clean-up and mowing has started – and that multiple projects, including elevator repair, have been completed or are in progress. Regarding procurement projects, T. Danzy reported there are 20 open projects and that ARPA funds have been released to do upgrades at Dewey and Brookside for community rooms including wifi. She explained that if projects are under \$10,000 they can be done in house, if \$10,000-50,000 it is done through RCAT and if over \$50,000 DHCD would be directly involved. She also stated she would prepare a workflow chart for pending/in progress projects.
- Legal - T. Danzy reported on pending legal matters stating eight units are in Housing Court for nonpayment and there is a preliminary case management hearing on April 12.
- Resident Services - T. Danzy stated an update from Karen Lewis, Resident Services Coordinator, was sent to the board and reported that resident services are at an all-time high and providing residents with help on arrears, making referrals, accessing insurance, etc.
- Volunteer efforts - T. Danzy stated Nan Wilde is working with Greenagers to install raised planting beds for community use to grow vegetables – and she encouraged any residents interested in planting to contact the office. She added that M. Meagher has secured wood for building additional beds. T. Danzy noted a donation from Ted Okun and the Rotary offering to install air conditioners – she stated it will be in the May newsletter.
- Pet Policy/Dog Walking - Regarding dog walking areas, T. Danzy stated there would be signs in the upper lot area at Flag Rock and at Brookside. She stated about half of residents have reported having pets and reminders were sent to non-responders, and when 60-days are up, it will be a potential violation of the lease. It was discussed and clarified that Town dog licensing rules are part of the GBHA policy. The process for informing residents about the questionnaire and policy was clarified as well as follow up efforts with non-responders. It was noted all sites have drop boxes for responses and that both email and hard copies have been sent.
- P. Orenstein asked about reporting on the occupancy rate - T. Danzy replied it is not usually an issue though there have been several openings recently – it is 2 or 3 out of 114 units. It was further discussed how the occupancy rate impacts the reserve – T. Danzy stated it is not the number of vacancies, it is the related extraordinary expenses that are a challenge and she noted the updated DHCD system will help. J. Grogan asked T. Danzy to provide at each board meeting an updated vacancy report showing overall numbers for the three properties. T. Danzy stated that currently there are two vacant units at Flag Rock and one at Dewey.
- E. Mooney asked about signage at the end of the road at Flag Rock to keep people off the adjacent property – T. Danzy clarified where signs would be placed and noted residents should not be on the adjacent property.

A. Cable Billing Discussion. Potential Board votes. T. Danzy stated GBHA is covering a \$738.46 cable bill this month based on the package/bulk rate from Spectrum, since residents are not required to take the service and not everyone does. She stated it may be less expensive for residents to purchase individually. P. Orenstein stated he had reviewed the bills and spoken with Spectrum about GBHA which has been paying the bulk rate for a while. The rate is \$2,400 per month across all properties for basic cable. He stated that GBHA pays the bill and if fewer people use cable, GBHA subsidizes the gap, so is not being fully reimbursed as it is below full usage. He added that 15 units are using cable, but GBHA is not billing them – so he recommended before there is an adjustment, we should reconcile who are users. It was discussed that Spectrum charges a bulk rate for 88 units across three properties and it was clarified this is only for seniors. T. Danzy stated staff had reached out to Spectrum regarding units not accounted for and is awaiting a report – she suggested discussing after the audit whether to continue with the current approach.

E. Mooney made a motion to continue the discussion to the next meeting when there is more information; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – P. Orenstein stated he confirmed with Spectrum many residents are arranging for additional services beyond cable and 58% of the units arrange separately for wifi. He asked what would happen if the program was discontinued regarding residents potentially having to pay more because there is currently a bulk discount – J. Grogan added some residents cannot afford a significant increase. P. Orenstein stated we should first get records from Spectrum and GBHA should audit its own records against it - and depending on the outcome, we can discuss whether to keep the program, but he added we should be billing all those who use it. E. Mooney stated she would call Spectrum directly about herself and get information to report back. **Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.**

B. Cell phone reimbursement for staff. Potential Board votes. J. Grogan stated this was discussed at the last meeting and the board inquired how other housing authorities handle this matter. T. Danzy stated Lee, Lenox, Stockbridge and Williamstown all reimburse staff \$50 per month for cell usage. E. Mooney noted this is not in the budget and asked how it will be funded. She added T. Danzy, and Maintenance - R. Phair and Tim, could be covered, but was not sure about others on staff. P. Orenstein stated this would be an enhancement to staff compensation – and if it is authorized by DHCD and other housing authorities are doing it, we should move ahead – but he expressed concerns about funding. T. Danzy stated cell phones could be used for monitoring the security cameras, but that is not the sole reason for the reimbursement. P. Orenstein asked for confirmation from DHCD on moving forward with this from a budget/funding standpoint – he added he is supportive of additional compensation for staff, but asked to be sure the board has the authority to make this decision. T. Danzy stated M. Meagher and Teresa should be included as it is important to their job functions. J. Grogan clarified it is \$250 total per month and we should confirm with DHCD we can spend that. It was noted the reserve is decreasing, which may not be the situation with other housing authorities. J. Grogan stated he would reach out to Carolina at DHCD to get her approval. E. Mooney asked if DHCD would reimburse for this expense – T. Danzy replied it would come through line 4190 which would be monitored to stay within budget – she added that last year’s budget was spent. T. Blauvelt stated the reimbursement would be on a go forward basis and stated we should proceed with DHCD approval.

E. Mooney made a motion to discuss the matter at the next meeting; there was no second.

J. Grogan stated no vote is needed to close the conversation.

C. Security Camera/Video update. Potential Board votes. J. Grogan opened discussion about security cameras. Jackie Sinico, tenant, stated only T. Danzy should have access to surveillance footage. T. Danzy stated she requested two nest cameras to cover the entire parking lot and they must be hardwired. She stated there are two plans - \$6 per month for a 30 day event history and \$12 for 60 days. T. Blauvelt confirmed there would be cameras at all properties. T. Danzy added there would be video signage and privacy areas would not be surveilled. P. Orenstein stated the camera should focus on the office entrance and the surrounding parking lot. It was agreed only T. Danzy, R. Phair and Tim should have access to video footage, and if there were an issue, T. Danzy would extract the clip and share it, as appropriate. It was agreed the back basketball court area should not be covered. T. Danzy stated she would send the cost estimate including cameras and installation to the board – and it was agreed the \$12 plan option is best.

D. Board Approval and Acknowledgement of Regional Attorney Fees. Potential Board votes. T.

Danzy

stated she has bills from the beginning of the year for attorney fees as DHCD is now only covering legal fees on “for cause” cases where a resident is behind in rent. She continued to state she was able to get an additional \$7,000 for these expenses, but is now nearing that amount and there are several nonpayment cases – she stated she would ask for additional funds. It was clarified that the Retained Risk Program is prepaid legal services for other kinds of cases, i.e., liability claims, but this is the Regional Legal Services Program which is different. J. Grogan stated we have no choice but to approve this.

T. Blauvelt made a motion to authorize J. Grogan to sign the agreement; 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.

III. FEE ACCOUNTANT CONTRACT: Potential Board votes. P. Orenstein stated he sent a change in the contract and we would expect to get it back from Teresa Ewald after tax season. T. Blauvelt pointed out an inconsistency regarding the monthly fee amount and T. Danzy reviewed P. Orenstein’s comments – resulting in overall agreement. P. Orenstein stated he is asking for confirmation that when the board has questions they will get addressed and noted either Fenton Ewald can revise the contract or send a letter to J. Grogan incorporating that item and then it is acceptable – the board agreed.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Discuss requesting a state auditor’s report beyond UAP. Potential Board vote. E. Mooney requested a state auditor’s report beyond the AUP and noted accountants have pointed out there has not been a financial audit of the books and that the AUP focuses only on procedure – J. Grogan stated he was advised similarly by an accountant – which the board agreed would be an expected point of view.

E. Mooney made a motion to write the state auditor and request a free audit; T. Blauvelt seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – it was agreed E. Mooney would write the note to the auditor and P. Orenstein would review. P. Orenstein stated this does not imply any accusation or issues with the current accounting, but if the state will provide the service for free, we would like it. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.

B. Discuss Eileen Mooney’s accusation of grievance mishandling. Potential Board vote. E. Mooney stated this is about an allegation that the Executive Director ignored a grievance. J. Grogan stated the board will review grievances upon appeal as that is the grievance process. He noted someone is hearing this grievance, and if it is appealed, it will come to the board. The board supported following the grievance process. E. Mooney stated there will be informal discussion about the matter next week. J. Grogan noted it is not being ignored.

- C. Appliance damage chargebacks process. Potential Board vote. E. Mooney asked about a Facebook post by a GBHA tenant who stated he received a used stove and was asked to pay for it – and she asked if tenants get used stoves. T. Danzy replied appliances are shifted among units – they get repaired and reused and they are tracked. She clarified that if a tenant breaks an appliance, we take depreciation and charge a percentage of the cost of a replacement. She added it does not happen often, but when it does, we are fair about it. The board agreed with the approach.
- D. Covid work/sick time compensation for employees- board discussion/vote. J. Grogan stated the concern here is there is a five day mandatory time-off for staff who get COVID. Staff get total 10 sick days, so required COVID time off would amount to half. He stated the request is for dispensation to pay staff for COVID sick time. The board discussed how many days is appropriate – T. Danzy suggested five days as per the Executive Director’s discretion. She noted the staff is vaccinated and boosted. E. Mooney asked what other housing authorities do – T. Danzy stated Worcester compensates up to five days – and she clarified this is only COVID related, not additional sick time. It was noted it should be added to the personnel policy that staff is entitled to five days as per the Executive Director’s discretion.

J. Grogan made a motion to allow GBHA up to five days annually for COVID related compensation by discretion of the Executive Director, as needed by employees, and to be added to the personnel policy; T. Blauvelt 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.

T. Blauvelt left the meeting and was thanked for his service and commitment.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

- A. Policy readings - Second Readings - Reasonable Accommodation - Potential Board vote. J. Grogan stated this would not be discussed.

VI. LTO REPORT: Marlene Kolowski, LTO leader, stated the tenant with the stove should not be discussed specifically – E. Mooney replied she was just clarifying the policy. M. Kolowski stated the usual process is that tenants get what is available. J. Grogan stated he will reach out to Mark Pruhenski, Town Manager, to get on a Selectboard agenda regarding the appointment of an LTO representative – and would ask M. Pruhenski to reach out to M. Kolowski directly.

VII. Minutes Review/Approval Board - Meetings of Sept. 21, 2022, March, 16 and April 5.

- A. E. Mooney asked that Karen Lewis be identified as Resident Services Coordinator in the September 21, 2022 minutes.

P. Orenstein made a motion to approve the Sept. 21, 2022 and March 16 and April 5, 2023 minutes as amended; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – J. Grogan asked that the votes be bolded and the vote of each person be noted in the minutes. Roll call vote: T. Blauvelt, “aye,” J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 4-0.

VIII. CITIZEN SPEAK – No citizens asked to speak.

IX. BOARD COMMENTS

- A. E. Mooney asked that a typo in the report by K. Lewis be corrected to “referred to” a local lawyer.
- B. P. Orenstein stated regarding the cable issue, he will send information to the board. He also noted that for residents separately contracting for wifi, there is a federal subsidy of up to \$30 if a tenant qualifies. T. Danzy replied they are aware of that and K. Lewis has helped a few people apply – and she added K. Lewis can help tenants reestablish service, if needed.

C. E. Mooney stated the Open Meeting Law complaint against J. Grogan has been withdrawn. She stated she filed it because he had not publicly provided his evaluation of T. Danzy, and as he has now done so, she has dropped the complaint. She also stated the Division of Open Government has issued an Open Meeting Law determination that three former board members violated the Open Meeting Law.

X. ADJOURNMENT – J. Grogan made a motion to adjourn; P. Orenstein 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 1:08pm.

Documents reviewed: Financials, Fee Accountant contract.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow