

Great Barrington Housing Authority
Thursday, May 25, 2023

I. CALL TO ORDER: Attendance Roll Call. Executive Director, Tina Danzy opened the meeting with Board members John Grogan, Eileen Mooney and Phil Orenstein present.
Also present: T. Danzy and staff Rick Phair and Madonna Meagher.

a. Board reorganization - Board votes required.

i. T. Danzy stated this is the GBHA board's annual reorganization meeting and asked for a motion to nominate a Chair.

P. Orenstein made a motion to nominate J. Grogan as GBHA Chair; E. Mooney seconded. T. Danzy asked for any discussion – E. Mooney stated she has not been given the opportunity to see warrants and review time sheets and payroll information. She also asked about the Chair's outreach efforts to the Affordable Housing Trust and other housing authorities. J. Grogan replied he had done outreach to housing authorities, but with little response, but stated he would try again. He also noted E. Mooney could view warrants, time sheets and payroll at the GBHA office. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, "aye," E. Mooney, "abstain," P. Orenstein, "aye." Motion passed: 2-0 with one abstention.

ii. J. Grogan stated E. Mooney is welcome to join him at the GBHA office to review materials and availability/convenient timing was discussed. T. Danzy noted a meeting is scheduled for next Tuesday at 1:00pm. E. Mooney stated she wants to be present when checks are signed and requested to see warrants with invoices or the warrant cover sheets with checks that have been sent.

E. Mooney made a motion to nominate P. Orenstein as Vice Chair; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, "aye," E. Mooney, "aye," P. Orenstein, "aye." All in favor: 3-0.

P. Orenstein made a motion to nominate E. Mooney as Treasurer; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, "aye," E. Mooney, "aye," P. Orenstein, "aye." All in favor: 3-0.

iii. It was discussed that it was not necessary to fill the secretary position.

iv. E. Mooney stated the Community Preservation Committee role will need to be filled – J. Grogan replied we can hold off on that for a while.

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

a. Approval of year end financials. Potential Board votes. T. Danzy stated Sue Honeycutt, Fenton Ewald, was in attendance. They proceeded to review the year-end financial reports. S. Honeycutt stated the reserve account has a negative balance which could impact the cash balance and ability to pay bills – though she noted there is cash available as DHCD has overfunded with subsidies. She continued to recommend advocating for additional funds from DHCD and finding ways to save money and continue to fill vacancies. T. Danzy stated they are trying to hold down costs on turnovers and suggested not continuing to outsource maintenance. S. Honeycutt suggested notifying DHCD immediately on larger/emergency expenses. P. Orenstein asked how to categorize expense overages/deficits and how to think about managing expenses. It was discussed that utilities are reimbursed and rental income is subtracted from the subsidy. P. Orenstein requested that for the next board meeting guidance be provided to the Board to help prioritize thinking on what is causing the operating deficit, top line items/categories responsible for it and what to be mindful of in an effort to fix it. S. Honeycutt highlighted maintenance, specifically contract costs, as being especially high as well as nonroutine expenses. T. Danzy stated capital funds can be used for some work and she clarified GBHA is not eligible for DHCD vacancies funds.

E. Mooney asked for a status report on capital projects – T. Danzy replied she would provide a report and funding status. E. Mooney asked if the May 18 DHCD letter is a form letter – T. Danzy replied it is permission to pay expenses and S. Honeycutt added it is a form letter. P. Orenstein confirmed the capital improvement cost report tracks each project individually. T. Danzy stated the Board needs to provide approval to submit statements for the completed fiscal year and she added the FY23 budget is in the packet. T. Danzy confirmed the FY24 budget was approved and it will be sent to the Board.

J. Grogan made a motion to approve the year-end financial report to DHCD; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – P. Orenstein confirmed the T. Danzy has and will continue to report to DHCD on any unexpected repairs – and will inquire about additional funding. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “abstain,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” Motion passed: 2-0 with one abstention.

E. Mooney stated GBHA should be looking into additional funding sources and other housing authorities may have suggestions or the Town may have funds available.

- Maintenance report – R. Phair stated staff mowing and spring trimming is taking time away from other turnovers/projects. He described issues with a couple of apartments that need extensive repair – which the staff is trying to do without outside help. He suggested hiring part-time help with mowing, painting, etc. so the work is not outsourced. He also noted work involving a tree and culvert at Flag Rock that are awaiting engineering plans. T. Danzy confirmed 1-2 units turnover each month. J. Grogan clarified the request is that instead of hiring seasonal help, to hire a part-time employee for maximum 18 hours/week as it would attract a more qualified person and be more cost effective. It was confirmed that maintenance tries to dedicate staff to each property especially for snow storms. It was agreed that R. Phair should not be mowing as other work is more important.

J. Grogan made a motion to hire a part-time worker in part to defray the cost of contract work and to free-up Rick to do apartment turnovers – it was agreed it would be no more than 18 hours per week; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – the Board discussed issues with finding a licensed/insured electrician – J. Grogan stated he would reach out to Eric Gabriel. T. Danzy stated an electrician is needed to install the security camera. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0.

- Vacancies – T. Danzy stated GBHA is at 95% occupancy – and there are currently six vacancies and two units have accepted
- Legal – T. Danzy reported there has been a judgment for possession for a family unit and they are seeking legal aid so it will go back to court; there is a conference scheduled for August and there are nonpayment cases pending review in court. T. Danzy clarified these cases are for family units at Flag Rock.
- Other items:
 - Gardens – T. Danzy stated there are seniors and families interested in taking a gardening spot and that they are looking for donations to start a children’s garden. She noted there is one tenant who has taken multiple spots and a grievance will be filed. The Board expressed its support for each person/family taking one spot only.
 - Pet Policy – T. Danzy reported they are in the final stages and will be sending letters of noncompliance. She added that signs will go up next week regarding areas for dogs.
 - T. Danzy reported she request funds for bear-proof dumpsters
 - T. Danzy stated she is researching products for smoke detection.
 - Regarding Brookside, T. Danzy reported the bid package for the laundry room improvements is in early stages and noted pedestals were purchased to raise the washers/dryers and the cost will be billed to the project.
 - T. Danzy stated she has offered to join committees of the Mass Housing agency.
 - T. Danzy announced there would be a craft event on June 22, a Father’s Day breakfast on June 15 and a cookout on July 12 with activities and entertainment all at Flag Rock.

- T. Danzy stated there are senior apartments on the second floor at Dewey and prospective tenants are turning them down due to stair access only – it also precludes people with disabilities. She stated there is a LULA elevator which is installed outside and is essentially a lift which could be installed at one building and catwalks installed to connect with other buildings. She added she is looking for accessibility and local community preservation grants. It was confirmed that a ramp would not work.
- b. Cable Billing Ongoing Discussion. Potential Board votes. T. Danzy stated she spoke with Spectrum and received a report that did not indicate which units are taking part in the basic service, taking additional services or contracting individually, P. Orenstein added the offering is only for seniors in 91 units across three properties – it provides a bulk rate for cable TV, and for units opting in, GBHA passes through the proportional cost to each – but Spectrum cannot provide information on usage. He continued to note only units using the service are being billed and GBHA is losing money on the program - and it cannot continue. He added trying to redo billing to accurately reflect who is using the service is a significant burden. Danzy stated the program is costing GBHA \$738/month and DHCD recommends eliminating the program. It was confirmed Spectrum is aware this is for subsidized housing. P. Orenstein noted he deleted the redacted file sent by T. Danzy. The Board discussed the importance of having tenants weigh in – and the value of letting tenants make the best choices for them – though it was noted it may not bring cost savings. P. Orenstein added if tenants go direct, they may be eligible for a \$30/month subsidy for internet service. It was explained that if Spectrum provided a bulk rate for cable and internet it would be very difficult for the office to sort out, manage and bill tenants. It was agreed tenants need time to consider and handle – T. Danzy stated Karen Lewis, Resident Services, could help them. Marlene Koloski, LTO leader, stated Spectrum offers package deals. E. Mooney added she checked with Spectrum and her monthly bill would not change if she got service directly.

J. Grogan made a motion to ask T. Danzy to look into terminating the Spectrum bulk rate cable contract next week and for the Board to make a decision at the June policy meeting. P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – P. Orenstein asked T. Danzy to come back to the Board with a transition timeline per Spectrum’s requirements. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0.

- c. Cell phone reimbursement for staff. Potential Board votes. The Board discussed reimbursing staff for work-related cell phone use. It was noted that while other housing authorities reimburse staff, DHCD’s position is that it does not recommend reimbursement, but to instead purchase phones/plans for staff. The Board agreed it does not want to purchase phones and it was noted that this expense is not budgeted for.

E. Mooney made a motion to continue the discussion for three months; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – P. Orenstein started if we can get more clarity on the appropriate course in light of T. Danzy’s request and the financial situation it could be discussed sooner. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0.

- d. Security Camera/Video update. Potential Board votes. This was not discussed.
- e. “Cost of Maintenance” discussion - hiring vs. contractors - finding a permanent PT solution. Potential Board votes. This was discussed under maintenance.

III. FEE ACCOUNTANT CONTRACT: Update/final - Potential Board votes.

It was confirmed Teresa Ewald, Fenton Ewald, had made requested changes to the contract.

P. Orenstein made a motion to approve the contract; J. Grogan seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “no,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” Motion passed: 2-1.

It was agreed J. Grogan would sign the contract.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Board email discussion. Potential Board vote. P. Orenstein stated this would be a way for tenants to contact/connect with the Board to offer feedback, suggestions, comments, etc. He noted the Board would need to be vigilant to refer grievances and other similar issues as the Board would not provide input. E. Mooney stated this could violate the Open Meeting Law and T. Danzy stated her concerns and that these kinds of matters should come to the office first, and if unresolved, a grievance could be filed. She noted there are suggestion boxes at each site. J. Grogan stated the email would address some tenant concerns about approaching the office. It was agreed not to move forward, but to try to improve communication.

b. Role of board chairman. Potential Board vote. E. Mooney stated that was covered earlier in the meeting.

c. Regular meetings of board members with director – J. Grogan stated he meets with T. Danzy when checks need to be signed, so there is no regular schedule, but he would be happy to coordinate with E. Mooney to schedule a mutually convenient time to go to the office. It was agreed J. Grogan and E. Mooney would schedule meetings for 11am.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

a. Update requesting a state auditor's report beyond UAP. Potential Board vote. J. Grogan stated he read the letter and objected to the implication that something was potentially wrong with the process we are using and the comment referred to in the AUP was just boilerplate language. P. Orenstein stated not all his comments were included in the final letter. He clarified that there is confusion about what is an audit, the proper procedure and how it is described. He continued to state that the best way to explain what is being requested is to refer to the AUP letter – he added that no criticism was intended. He also stated that our accountant does not do what is being requested. It was confirmed the letter had been sent and that a reply was received indicating they are considering the request.

b. Covid work/sick time compensation for employees- board discussion Potential Board vote. It was stated this was discussed/decided at the last meeting.

VI. LTO REPORT: Marlene Koloski requested that in person Board meetings resume as it provides tenants with easier access. Other options for participation were discussed. It was agreed that the meeting would be in person and rotate among the sites. It was also agreed that the Board would meet on June 21 at 11am at Flag Rock. M. Koloski also asked about the Selectboard appointing the new GBHA Board member. J. Grogan stated he would check with Mark Pruhenski, Town Manager, and get back to M. Koloski. M. Koloski thanked T. Danzy for arranging the gardens.

VII. Minutes Review/Approval Board Meetings of April 20, May 3, Feb. 8 & Feb. 22.

E. Mooney stated corrections are required for the April 20 and May 3 minutes.

J. Grogan made a motion to approve the April 20, May 3, Feb. 8 & Feb. 22, 2023 minutes as corrected; P. Orenstein seconded. J. Grogan asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: J. Grogan, “aye,” E. Mooney, “aye,” P. Orenstein, “aye.” All in favor: 3-0.

VIII. CITIZEN SPEAK

a. Jackie Sinico, tenant, asked about the size of the lift elevator – T. Danzy replied there are different sizes and it was confirmed it is at least large enough for a wheelchair. J. Sinico also confirmed the issue with the tenant with multiple garden spots is a grievance – and she suggested having a garden policy. She also requested in-person Board meetings.

IX. BOARD COMMENTS

- a. E. Mooney asked about a dead tree on the walkway behind the family units and asked if the contractor would replace it – T. Danzy replied it will not be replaced. E. Mooney stated cutting a tree in a buffer zone requires an application to the Conservation Commission. J. Grogan replied it should be left to T. Danzy to manage.
- b. A GBHA policy meeting was scheduled for June 7 at 11:00am in person at Flag Rock.
- c. E. Mooney suggested a site visit to each property and it was agreed the matter would be added to the June 7 agenda.

X. ADJOURNMENT – **P. Orenstein made a motion to adjourn; J. Grogan 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 1:30pm.

Documents reviewed: Financial statements, Letter to the State Auditor, minutes of Board meeting to discuss the letter.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow