

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY
Regular Meeting In-person at Flag Rock Village
Common Room 2 Bernard Gibbons Dr., Housatonic MA
Wednesday, January 24, 2024 1:00 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER: Attendance Roll Call. Chairman John Grogan opened the meeting at 1:02 p.m. with Board members John Grogan, Eileen Mooney, Phil Orenstein, Jackie Sinico, and Maureen Meier present. Also present: Executive Director Tina Danzy, Assistant to Director Madonna Meagher, Maintenance Person Tim O'Neil, and tenants Bob S, Anne P., Karen S., Mary E., Lynn N., Bob L., Rosemary B., Joanne I., and Frank F.

II. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

1. Tina D. announced that CHP Mobile (Community Health Programs, Inc.) will offer a flu shot clinic tomorrow at Dewey Court from 9:00 to noon, then at Flag Rock from 1:00 to 4:00. Eileen M. inquired whether tenants had been notified by email. Tina replied that they had.
2. October and November financials were presented. Tina D. announced that GBHA would receive an approximate additional \$57,000 in the coming fiscal year, but EOHLC expected that GBHA reserve funds be replenished first.
3. Two family units were recently vacated. With Rick Phair out for at least another four weeks, Kat's focus will be on getting the empty units prepared, while Tim will cover regular maintenance along with keeping outdoor areas safe given winter conditions.
4. Community wi-fi is now available at Dewey Court. Community room work will begin shortly, so any personal belongings should be removed immediately. Tina D. reported hearing from a couple of families that they were made to feel unwelcome in the community room. Tina stressed that the community rooms belong to everyone, and should be shared accordingly.
5. Tina D. reported entering into payment agreements on two units during her time in court, and that a few other unit occupants had upcoming court dates in early February.
6. Several calls were received and handled over the last month relating to lack of heat. Tina D. stressed that any heating and plumbing problems constitute an emergency, and should be reported immediately.
7. Tina D. circulated a summary of projects underway, and expressed a sense of urgency about using the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds, but she has been held back due to the lack of available engineers.

BOARD VOTE

Tina D. called for a vote to approve spending on replacement cabinets for the vacant smoke-damaged unit at Flag Rock. Tom Boyer (EOHLC Construction Advisor) recommended going with high-grade commercial-type replacement units. The lowest bid came from Budget Cabinets (a subsidiary of Allied Flooring) for \$7,710.64, the only bid which included

installation. John G. moved to approve the awarding of the contract to Budget Cabinets for \$7,710.64. Jackie S. seconded. Motion passed 5-0.

BOARD VOTE

Tina D. asked for a vote to write off bad debt totaling \$13,735.33 prior to the end of the fiscal year. The total comprises four separate debts, two larger debts from tenants who have vacated and left the area, one smaller debt from a tenant who is now deceased, and the last from a tenant on a very limited income.

Board members had questions as follows:

1. John asked for additional information on the frequency of bad debts such as these, as well as the size of the dollar amounts. Tina replied that many tenants were able to receive RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) money at the start of the Covid epidemic, which then required little to no proof of need. More recently, many of the same tenants have continued to apply, but faced with stricter guidelines about eligibility, are being denied. As a result, some have fallen into debt in the thousands because they expected that funds would continue to be available, and they are unlikely to be able to pay those debts in a timely fashion. In addition, Tina explained that the courts are slow to offer court dates, and continuances are often given, so those amounts continue to grow.
2. Eileen asked if the amounts due had ever been contested, as was the case when Eileen contested her own amount due for her unit. Tina said these were legitimate amounts presented on a "Move-Out" Statement, adjusted for any charges for damages, paid security deposits, uncollected rents, and accrued interest. Tina said none of the amounts were disputed.
3. Phil asked for a reason, other than standard accounting practices, for the Board to declare the money to be bad debt. Tina replied that EOHLC expects that annual reports be adjusted for any debts that are likely to be uncollected. Tina D. also assured the board that declaring the money to be bad debt did not preclude future collection of said monies, although in her estimation such collection was unlikely. Phil offered that additional information might have aided the board in making their decision, for instance, a clear written statement that Tina D. believed the money to be uncollectible, and that the money represented debts existing over a specific number of months.

John G. moved to approve the bad debt write-off as proposed by Tina D., and Jackie S. seconded. Motion passed with a Board vote as follows: John G.(aye), Jackie S.(aye), Maureen M.(aye), Phil O.(aye), Eileen M.(nay).

Eileen M. stated for the record that the reason for her "nay" vote was that though the deceased tenant's nonpayment of debt was self-explanatory, the remaining three lacked sufficient explanation of circumstances.

III. BOARD COMMENTS ON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. Eileen M. reported attending a workshop where she learned that it is the board rather than the executive director who appoints the grievance officer. Tina D. responded that our contact Carolina Gonzalez (Housing Management Specialist at EOHLC) stated in an email that it is the purview of the executive director in our case.
2. Regarding financials, Eileen M. noted that a lawyer has been paid a sum of money in spite of the legal fees account having a zero balance. Eileen asked what account the money came from. Tina responded that it came out of the general fund. Eileen asked her to give a specific account within the general fund, and Tina said she was unable to answer. Tina responded that money promised by EOHLC has not yet come to GBHA due to our contact being on leave for an undetermined amount of time. Tina also suggested that Eileen was failing to read the financial statements correctly. John G. ended the discussion on the matter.
3. Eileen M. asked for an explanation of money paid to John Grogan in the amount of \$159.27. John responded that it was a reimbursement for the Zoom software used to record the meetings. Eileen asked to see an invoice for the amount as verification. John agreed to provide the documentation.
4. Eileen M. pointed out there was no notation on the October bank statement enclosed in the Executive Director's packet as to the nature of the deposits. Tina said she would provide that information.

IV. CITIZEN SPEAK:

Lynn N. reported that she had been advised to refrain from paying rent, saying that this recommendation came from people living in the housing community. Those people assured her that by failing to pay, no rent would be required for a long time due to the slowness of the courts. Ann P. reported having been told that she was hated by people in the office, and she expressed dismay because she had been under the impression that she was liked. John G. assured Ann that he had heard only positive comments in the office with regard to Ann P.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

1. The next regular meeting date was set for 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 2/28 at Flag Rock following a motion made by Maureen M., and seconded by Jackie S. The motion passed 5-0.
2. Tina D. asked for more discussion on the water concession. John G. expressed a desire to get one more EPA measurement to determine water potability. He also reminded everyone to save receipts with the possibility of reimbursement extending to 2026. The discussion was tabled until the next meeting.
3. Per discussion at the board's December meeting, noting the departure of the board's minute-taker, Maureen M. volunteered to take minutes, and asked to be appointed secretary. Revisiting the matter at the current meeting, John G. motioned that Maureen be appointed secretary. In discussion, Eileen noted that Maureen has other duties. Jackie S. expressed the opinion that she could handle it, with John G. agreeing. Eileen also noted that Maureen would need to take

minutes while at the meeting due to the possible failure of the Zoom recording. Maureen M. expressed that she was aware of that possibility, and had a plan if such a thing were to occur. John re-stated his motion in favor of the appointment, and Jackie S. seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

VI. REGARDING THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MANAGEMENT OF TENANT COMPLAINTS ABOUT STAFF

Eileen M. began by explaining her concern that once a tenant's complaint has been made, the tenant has no way of knowing whether any action has been taken on the complaint. Eileen recalled someone mentioning that garbage had been strewn about so that a photo could be taken. Eileen asked to know whether there had been a reprimand about the incident, such as a note in the staff member's file. Tina D. said that if she receives a complaint, she determines whether or not the complaint is legitimate, and then acts accordingly.

Eileen M. asked whether Tina D. followed up on tenant complaints raised at a prior board meeting. Maureen M. noted that tenants should not be making complaints about staff at board meetings. Eileen agreed, but stated that nonetheless, the complaints had been made, and were on the record. Eileen asked whether Tina had reached out to those tenants with complaints to see what might be done. Tina said that in the case of the complaints made to the board, she reviewed those complaints to discern whether they were legitimate or whether they were being expressed by someone with a personal gripe.

John G. mentioned that Marlene K. had enumerated in writing some tenant complaints about treatment by staff, and he expressed confidence that Tina D. was handling the issues appropriately, although admitting the board had no actual way of checking. Tina expressed a strong preference to hear any complaints directly, and to hear them prior to their mention at a board meeting, believing that given the opportunity, issues would have been addressed without ever involving the board.

Phil O. stated the importance of having tenants be confident that any complaints made would be addressed appropriately. Phil also stated that it was difficult for the board to exercise oversight in matters where no measurable information was being provided.

Maureen M. suggested that the executive director keep an ongoing log noting the date, time, and nature of any complaints made, but that the board be barred from examining such a log due to privacy concerns, especially given the fact that two board members lived in GBHA apartments. Absent any specifics, the executive director could simply note the number of complaints along with the number of resolutions of said complaints.

Tina D. stated the very few direct complaints are ever made, and that she routinely discusses tenant issues with staff by meeting with staff on a regular basis which had resulted in the ongoing improvement of staff practices. Tina also offered that on an occasional basis, she has had to reprimand staff.

Tina D. reiterated that it is of utmost importance that she be the first person to hear a complaint.

VII. REGARDING STAFF COMPLAINTS ABOUT BOARD MEMBERS

John G. stated that board members may not make any demands of staff members, nor can board members approach staff members to comment on the performance of their job. Only the executive director can manage staff, and any complaints about staff should be referred to the executive director. Staff must do the same; that is, contact the executive director to lodge a complaint about a board member.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

1. John G. reported the possibility that the Great Barrington Fire Department may be able to aid Flag Rock with the acquisition of a defibrillator. Eileen M. suggested that the Sheffield Fire Department might be persuaded to do the same for Dewey Court. John concurred, and reported that he would continue conversations with the Great Barrington Fire Department as a first step.
2. Eileen M. inquired about progress on the Flag Rock culvert issue. Tina D. reported that work was stalled due to the lack of availability of a civil engineer to complete a review of the proposed work. Also, Tina stated that due to the area being tied in to wetlands, the Conservation Commission needed to be involved. Phil O. reported that in spite of his best efforts to reach Chairman Shep Evans to discuss the matter, he had no success to report.

IX. LTO REPORT

No LTO report was provided.

X. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETINGS 10/25, 11/1, and 12/13/23

1. REGARDING THE DRAFT of minutes for the 10/25 meeting:

Eileen M. suggested that where the minutes stated that a non-working Zoom link was the reason for cancelling the discussion of listed agenda items, it should also be noted that Tina D.'s absence was a reason for cancellation.

Eileen motioned that the minutes be approved as amended, and Phil O. seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

2. REGARDING THE DRAFT of minutes for the 11/1 meeting:

Eileen M. requested that where Shep Evans was mentioned, for the sake of clarity, he should be identified as the Conservation Commission Agent.

Eileen M. requested that where the delivery of the bear dumpster to Dewey Court was mentioned, it should be clarified that the MSPCA grant paid for the full cost of the dumpster; that is, the cost of the dumpster itself plus the cost of shipping it to the housing authority.

Eileen M. questioned the reference to a water filter being ordered from Moran Mechanical.

Madonna M. responded that the statement in the minutes reflected what had been happening

at the time, but later on, those plans changed. Madonna also mentioned her ability to verify the statement from the tape of the meeting, at which point Eileen M. conceded.

Eileen M. requested that it be noted that CDCSB (Community Development Corporation of Southern Berkshire) and Habitat for Humanity expressed their desire to collaborate with GBHA in the future.

John G. made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, with Jackie seconding. Motion passed 5-0.

3. REGARDING THE DRAFT of minutes for the 12/13 meeting:

Eileen M. requested that where mention had been made of a December 12th cancellation of a grievance hearing, it should be corrected to read that it was in fact a grievance interview that had been cancelled.

Eileen motioned that the minutes be approved as amended, and Jackie S. seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

XI. BOARD COMMENTS - Year in Review / Year Ahead

Maureen M. explained that after hearing Tina's plan going forward at the Public hearing on 12/13, she thought it might be appropriate for the board to consider its own work during the past year, and discuss any goals going forward.

Maureen M. offered that she felt she had received excessive emails on matters regarding the GBHA board, citing 599 emails received since July 1 of 2023, many of them sent as group emails. In her estimation, some of those emails had violated Open Meeting Law. Eileen M. stated that OML guidelines did not establish any limit on the number of emails a board member might receive. Maureen M. stated that emails sent in a "Reply All" format were often inappropriate and may have violated OML.

Phil O. expressed that he refrains from responding in a "Reply All" manner for fear of violating OML. He agrees that "Reply All" emails are sent to a full quorum of members, and therefore caution needs to be exercised to be certain there is not deliberation occurring between posted meetings.

Maureen M. also expressed a desire going forward that there be a focus on staying positive, recounting the appeal that Tina made for the same at 12/13 meeting. Maureen also stated that her inclination was to follow a lesson taught to her by her parents to "leave the place better than you found it."

John G. added that the board needs to support the executive director in a positive way in addition to exercising oversight.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Eileen made a motion to adjourn, seconded by John. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned at 2:39.

Materials Distributed: Executive Director's Meeting Packet

--- Minutes submitted by Maureen Meier