

# **GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY**

**2 Bernard Gibbons Drive**

**Great Barrington, MA 01230**

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## **MEETING MINUTES**

**November 16, 2017**

The meeting of the Great Barrington Housing Authority was called to order at 2:15 PM by Executive Director Vera Cartier, acting as Secretary of the Great Barrington Housing Authority.

Board members in attendance: Karen Smith, James Mercer, and Jackie Sinico.

Michelle Loubert was present as recording secretary.

Ms. Cartier called for nominations for Chair of the Board. Ms. Smith, however, requested to begin with the position of Treasurer and nominated Jackie Sinico as Treasurer. This nomination was seconded by Mr. Mercer. The vote was called. It was by unanimous vote that Ms. Sinico was elected as Treasurer.

Ms. Sinico nominated Karen Smith as Chair of the Board. This nomination was seconded by Mr. Mercer. The vote was called. It was by unanimous vote that Ms. Smith was elected as Chair.

Ms. Smith nominated James Mercer as Vice Chair. This nomination was seconded by Ms. Sinico. The vote was called. It was by unanimous vote that Mr. Mercer was elected Vice Chair.

Ms. Smith, Chair moved forward to agenda item, Approval of Minutes of the August 17, 2017 meeting. She announced that in error, the August 17, 2017 meeting began at 2:12 PM instead of the posted time of 2:15 PM. She apologized for this error and stated that such an error would not occur in the future.

Ms. Smith called for a motion to approve the minutes. Motion was made by Mr. Mercer and seconded by Ms. Sinico. The vote was called. It was unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the August 17, 2017 meeting.

Ms. Smith brought forward the Executive Director's Report. Ms. Cartier presented her report. Ms. Cartier first welcomed the new board and introduced Michelle Loubert as her new administrative assistant.

Ms. Cartier then presented the Wage Match for State Housing Program Tenants. She explained that if a tenant's income changes and income information at the GBHA is not updated, it will eventually be disclosed to the GBHA through this system. Ms. Cartier was informing tenants of this and encouraging them to disclose income changes when they occur. Income changes affect the rent paid which could be an increase or a decrease. The income information in the Wage Match system comes from various sources such as the IRS and Social Security Administration.

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Responding to a question as to when income information is updated by tenants, Ms. Cartier responded that one time is annual when a lease is renewed or a new lease is done. Also, at income recertification which occurs in August.

Another source of income information is an “anonymous” tip that someone is working when GBHA records indicate otherwise. Then the income is looked into.

Income is verified to the Wage Match system. Ms. Cartier pointed out that when income changes or deductions change (for example, high medical costs), these will impact income and thus, impact the rent paid.

Ms. Smith stated that it was the tenant’s responsibility to report income changes.

Ms. Cartier then discussed the conveyance of Dewey Court in Sheffield. She said that the process has been going on since May 2017 and should be completed by the end of the GBHA fiscal year, March 31, 2018. She explained that she is already working at Dewey Court and getting to know the property and the people.

Ms. Cartier then announced that there would be a Thanksgiving celebration at the Claire Teague Senior Center on Tuesday, November 21. A SBETC senior van is offering free transportation to the event. Flyers have been given out, and Ms. Cartier encouraged tenants to join in the fun and to RSVP by tomorrow.

She also mentioned that there was a fall gathering at Flag Rock. A group of tenants from Brookside Court joined in. It was a great event where people were able to meet one another. Another event is being planned and flyers will be issued when the event is arranged.

Ms. Cartier then thanked the Board for the opportunity to work with such wonderful board members and staff as well as the tenant community.

Ms. Smith then proceeded to Financial Updates. Ms. Cartier gave a brief explanation of the financial reports presented—Capital Spending and CIP submittal benchmarks for FY 2017 as required by the state. She noted that there were no findings indicated and that this is positive.

Ms. Smith pointed out that the packet information provided was “voluminous” and to have a future agenda item reserved to discuss what information the Board will want in the future.

Ms. Cartier stated that the next set of reports will be from the GBHA accounting firm of Fenton, Ewald & Associates. She noted that the GBHA is up to date on all state requirements.

Ms. Smith called forward the next agenda item of Old Business, Tenant Organization. She explained that the local housing authority should have five members, the three presently seated here plus a state appointee and a tenant organization member. She explained that the state has selected a designee but this designee must be vetted. Regarding the tenant organization member, there are parameters and procedures under the Commonwealth which won’t be available until

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May 2018. These two issues create a problem for the current three member board; due to quorum requires, a five member (full) board is necessary. Therefore, per Ms. Smith, perhaps putting some pressure on the state to move forward the state appointee and issue the rules regarding tenant organizations would be productive. It might be necessary to seek assistance from Sen. Hinds, State Rep. Pignatelli, the Select board, and our Town Manager. At this point, per Ms. Smith, the current Board does not know what the state will require.

Mr. Mercer stressed the importance of the state designee and encouraged prompting the state to move forward the vetting of the designee.

Eileen Mooney of The Newsletter stated that perhaps the DHCD should be pressed on this matter. She continued that being without state rules affects the Election Division in that no one can be on a ballot in Massachusetts for a position in the housing authority. Therefore, the Elections Division may be helpful in moving this along.

Ms. Smith stated she would look into this information and that a letter to the state should be drafted regarding this matter with copies to Sen. Hinds, Rep. Pignatelli, and Town Manager.

Under New Business, Ms. Smith addressed the Local Housing Authority Training for Board members. At present, Mr. Mercer and Ms. Sinico cannot access the training and this is unacceptable. Ms. Smith has accessed the training and has completed it. Per her, board members have 90 days from appointment to complete the training. She reminded the board members that ethics and Open Meeting Law training must also be completed. Completion certifications should be submitted to the GBHA office.

During Citizen Speak, tenant Ann Pruhenski was recognized by the Chair. Ms. Pruhenski welcomed the new members of the board. She expressed her dissatisfaction with the housing authority during the past twelve years. However, over the last couple of months, there has been a change for the better. She feels that tenants are now respected and listened to. With the assistance of board member Jackie Sinico, there has been improvement in the maintenance of the property. She asks the board to listen to residents, respect them and not look at tenants as those who want a "cheap way out." She is thankful to have a home and stated that a smile goes a long way.

Ms. Smith recognized that this was a very positive citizen speak. She added that the board is here to help the tenants.

Ms. Smith recognized Joanne Iarocci. Ms. Iarocci noted that some tenants have keys to the greenhouse which is being used as a winter smoking venue. If so, may she have a key?

Ms. Cartier stressed that she is unaware of this and did not approve it. She will look into the matter.

Ms. Smith stated that this is an example of a policy that should be reviewed by the board.

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Ms. Smith introduced Board Member Speak. Mr. Mercer stated that it was wonderful to see the residents here at this meeting and that such attendance is important. He then stated that with regard to maintenance issues, tenants should report issues. He then requested that Ms. Cartier pull together a report of any issues for the December meeting. On finances, he would like to see a "running tab" of expenses; monthly and year to date based on the GBHA fiscal year. If possible, historical information as well. Mr. Mercer is also interested in capital improvement information.

Regarding maintenance issues, Ms. Smith asked Ms. Cartier what is being handled by staff or by contract. She explained that she is asking for this information in order to ensure that work is being performed efficiently and in a timely manner.

Ms. Cartier brought to the attention of the Board that the GBHA works with a small maintenance staff, one full time and one part time for Flag Rock Brookside Court, and Dewey Court and that the GBHA budget is very tight. This must be taken into consideration.

Ms. Smith acknowledged this information but stated she needs to know the facts before addressing issues brought to the Board's attention. She noted that much of the documentation is in a "disarray" and that it may take a year to make sense of it. However, this information is needed in order to advocate for the standards the tenants want. She said that perhaps a Tenant Advisory Board may be helpful.

Tenant Jane Green told the Board that it may be helpful to have a cleaning service clean empty apartments and therefore, the apartments would be prepared for new tenants at a faster rate. Right now, it takes a considerable amount of time to get an apartment ready for a new tenant.

Ms. Smith asked if there were any vacancies at the moment. Ms. Cartier responded there are no vacancies at any of the GBHA properties.

Ms. Smith thinks that using a cleaning service may be worth it, and the matter warrants further research.

Ms. Smith called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Sinico made the motion. Mr. Mercer seconded. It was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 3:02 PM.

Approved December 21, 2017