

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

2 Bernard Gibbons Drive

Great Barrington, MA 01230

Phone: (413) 274-1142 || Fax: (413) 274-1143 || Email: gtbarringtonhousingauthority@gmail.com

MEETING MINUTES

December 21, 2017

The meeting of the Great Barrington Housing Authority held at 2 Bernard Gibbons Drive, Great Barrington, Massachusetts was called to order at 2:15 PM by Chair, Karen Smith.

Board members in attendance: Karen Smith, James Mercer, Jackie Sinico, and (State appointee) Diane Dillon. Also present at the table was Executive Director, Vera Cartier.

Michelle Loubert was present as recording secretary.

Chair Smith brought forward the first order of business which was to rescind the vote taken at the November 16, 2017 meeting to approve the minutes dated August 17, 2017. The August 17, 2017 minutes presented for approval were actually a draft and not the final version of the minutes to be approved. Therefore, to correct this error, the Chair called for a motion to rescind the November 16, 2017 vote approving the August 17, 2017 minutes. Mr. Mercer made the motion to rescind the November 16, 2017 vote to approve the August 17, 2017 minutes; Ms. Sinico seconded the motion. Chair Smith and Board members Mercer and Sinico voted to rescind the vote; Dr. Dillon abstained.

Chair Smith then asked for a motion to approve the final and correct version of the August 17, 2017 minutes. Mr. Mercer made the motion to approve the final and correct version of the August 17, 2017 minutes; Mr. Sinico seconded. Chair Smith, members Mercer and Sinico voted to approve the minutes; Dr. Dillon abstained.

Chair Smith then brought forward the minutes of the November 16, 2017 meeting for approval. No changes to the minutes were brought forward. Mr. Mercer made a motion to approve the minutes with a second from Ms. Sinico. The vote was taken and Chair Smith and Board members Mercer and Sinico voted to approve the minutes; Dr. Dillon abstained.

The Chair brought forward the Executive Director's Report. Executive Director Vera Cartier welcomed Dr. Diane Dillon, the Board state appointee, to the GBHA board. Ms. Cartier informed the meeting that there is now one more vacancy on the board. This is for the tenant member. She referenced a Board survey contained in the agenda packet for completion by the Board. This survey relates to the new tenant member. The survey was sent to executive directors by the Department of Housing and Community Development. The deadline for the board to return the surveys to Ms. Cartier is the week of December 25, 2017. Ms. Cartier will then forward completed surveys to the DHCD.

Ms. Cartier informed the Board that she will be meeting with her staff Wednesday, December 27 to review personnel policies. Any suggested changes, additions, deletions will go before the Board for their review, discussion, and approval.

Ms. Cartier discussed the Public Housing Administrative Certification; Ms. Cartier is currently attending classes for this required certification. This certification is in accordance with her contract. Ms. Cartier will complete these classes by the end of February.

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Ms. Cartier discussed the December tenant gathering and thanked everyone for their well-wishes and holiday treats. For 2018, she would like to change the frequency of the gatherings from every month to once every three months, commencing March 2018. She wishes to “sync” the gatherings with the tenant meetings. There will be gatherings in June, September, and then the holiday celebration in December. She stressed, however, that anyone can contact her at any time regarding any issues; tenants do not need to wait for a gathering or a meeting to discuss issues with her.

Regarding Dewey Court (Sheffield), a notice was received from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts about the Dewey Court housing moving to the GBHA. This has passed the Senate and is now in the House. Ms. Cartier said that the GBHA is “really close” for the conveyance of Dewey Court to the GBHA. When the conveyance occurs, the GBHA will have three developments and groups of tenants to manage, listen to, and work with.

Chair Smith thanked Ms. Cartier for her report. She then brought forward the maintenance report given by Richard Phair, head of maintenance of the GBHA. Mr. Phair stated that a couple of vacancies are coming up. He stressed that one family unit requires considerable work to get ready for a new tenant; however, that work is progressing nicely. Tenant dryer vents are being cleaned and that project is almost completed. This has taken a bit longer than anticipated due to emergency projects popping up such as a broken water pipe at Brookside and a leak in a tenant’s home here at Flag Rock. He stressed that other than interruptions due to emergency projects such as these, Maintenance strives to address maintenance issues as fast as they can.

Ms. Smith added that Mr. Phair and Ms. Cartier are reviewing daily, weekly, monthly maintenance issues in order to obtain a better sense of workflow (Note: Maintenance is comprised of 1.5 employees). Ms. Smith said that Mr. Phair has been asked to attend each meeting of the GBHA to address any questions regarding maintenance.

Ms. Smith also stated that adding an additional employee to maintenance is being discussed, particularly with the addition of Dewey Court (Sheffield) to the GBHA.

Chair Smith brought forward the next item on the agenda, Financial Updates. Although Ms. Cartier had no financial updates, Ms. Smith explained that Board member Mercer requested a copy of the GBHA FY18 budget, which was given to him. The Chair asked Board members to make these requests through her. She also requested that copies of the budget be sent out to all members of the Board. This will be done the week of December 25, 2017.

The next agenda item was to discuss Board packets. Ms. Smith expressed concern over the size of the December 21, 2017 packet. Also, she asked if it is better to receive packets hard copy or electronically. Hard copies of the packets are available to Board members. Mr. Mercer prefers to receive his packet electronically. Extra packets are available at meetings.

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Next on the agenda, the election process of a tenant board member. Chair Smith said that in line with the tenant election process, GBHA now has a tenant advisory board. Tenant Carol Piontek is the Chair of that Board and told the meeting attendees a bit about the tenant advisory board including its mission/purpose: to establish a Tenants' Association of Flagrock Village and Brookside Manor." Ms. Piontek told the audience that Susan Hipwell Morris is the Vice Chair and Judy Carlson is the Secretary of the Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board will be using a suggestion box system for tenants to make suggestions to the Advisory Board. Ms. Piontek said that any suggestions would be turned over to the GBHA Board. However, Chair Smith asked her to direct suggestions to the Executive Director, Vera Cartier. Ms. Smith then instructed the Executive Director to then write up a summary of suggestions for the Board's information.

There was discussion regarding the inclusion of the tenants from all housing facilities in GBHA and tenant meetings. Mr. Mercer suggested that the GBHA board rotate meetings between Flag Rock, Brookside, and Dewey Court. Also, he suggested that the Board tour these properties. He particularly wished to view the building that experience a mold issue.

The Chair suggested the tour take place the following week. Later, it was decided by the Board to tour on Wednesday, December 27 at 2:30 PM.

The Chair also requested a listing of the 2018 meeting dates for the GBHA Board.

Ms. Cartier pointed out that both Flag Rock and Dewey Court have nice community rooms where the Board can meet; however, Brookside does not. Ms. Smith said that this need is something the Board can address (feasibility, cost, etc.).

The tenant advisory board will schedule meetings at other GBHA locations as well. It was discussed/suggested that this board should meet every three months.

Ms. Piontek also mentioned that tenant gathering times should be changed from 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM to 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. This way, tenants who volunteer at the Senior Center serving lunch will be able to attend.

The Board stated that the next meeting of the GBHA will be held at the Great Barrington Senior Center on Wednesday, January 17 at 2:30 PM.

Chair Smith encouraged the tenant advisory board to make sure all tenants are informed of their meetings. She offered the services of the office of the GBHA to assist the advisory board.

Ms. Piontek also mentioned that there will be a tenant suggestion box at all three housing locations. Suggestions will be gathered once a month.

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Mr. Mercer asked what the status was of forming the local tenant organization. Ms. Cartier responded that although the LTO can be formed, a tenant board member cannot yet be brought forward.

Under New Business, the Chair brought forward concerns raised by employees as to “what are they” and the state pension system. Are GBHA employees municipal employees? State employees? There is confusion here. Ms. Cartier stated that the GBHA employees are not state employees. One point of employee concern is eligibility in the Massachusetts state pension system. The Chair plans to contact State Representative Pignatelli and State Senator Hinds regarding these questions.

Regarding the signing of GBHA checks, Chair Smith suggested that Ms. Cartier be allowed to sign checks alone (at present, two signatures are required). In the absence of Ms. Cartier, two board members would need to sign. Any change would require a GBHA bylaw change.

Mr. Mercer expressed that he feels it important that to people sign so a “checks and balances” exists.

Ms. Smith believes it would be more efficient and practical to allow Ms. Cartier alone to sign. She asked Mr. Mercer if he would be available to sign checks. Mr. Mercer, believing that a conflict exists since Housatonic Water Company is a GBHA vendor, declined.

Chair Smith stated that she is not comfortable signing checks; it wasn’t her responsibility to know the detail on who was being paid and why; that this was the responsibility of Treasurer Jackie Sinico.

Mr. Mercer suggested that this matter be revisited when the budget process was under review by the Board.

Ms. Cartier expressed concern that at times, no board member is available to co-sign checks with her.

Mr. Mercer asked the payroll frequency. Ms. Cartier stated weekly and that the staff is hourly; her position is salaried.

Ms. Smith suggested paying people electronically.

Ms. Smith stated that she will not sign checks if she doesn’t know the background information.

With permission to speak given by the Chair, Ms. Loubert referenced the GBHA warrant process where the Board signs a warrant that lists the payments issued to vendors. The current board was unfamiliar with this process and will review, with the Executive Director, what this process is.

The next agenda item, Executive Director’s contract, was brought forward. The contract, for one year, will be voted on at the January 2018 meeting. Ms. Cartier explained that her current contract will run out March 31, 2018; this new contract will begin April 1. She stressed that final approval is in the hands of the DHCD; the Board approves the contract, the Chair signs the contract, then it goes to the DHCD.

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The next item was Citizen Speak and tenant Annie Bushka stated that she loved the new Board and extended a thank you to the Executive Director. Her concern was the need for handicap accessible doors; the current doors are very heavy for many people to open and in particular, for those with special needs, to open. Her concern is the community room building where three doors need to be looked at.

Chair Smith acknowledge Ms. Bushka's comment. She directed the Executive Director to research this matter, look into cost, and to report back to the Board.

Mr. Mercer asked if there was funding available for this need. Ms. Cartier said she would check with the DHCD and stressed that the GBHA must comply with ADA laws.

Tenant Jane Green asked that the laundry facilities be looked with regard to obtaining a heavy duty washer that could handle the washing of comforters and larger items, a high need for those tenants who may have physical issues that cause increased laundry needs. Ms. Cartier explained that the washers are leased.

Chair Smith would like information regarding laundry costs (existing costs and costs relating to expanding laundry equipment). This information can be presented in the spring.

In relation to this issue, tenant Ann Pruhenski asked about getting a change machine. This is on the Executive Director's list of things to investigate/research. Tenant Marlene Koloski stated that she has been researching this matter; a change machine costs about \$1,000. However, what about using a credit card to pay for laundry use? She stated other housing facilities do this.

The Chair asked Ms. Koloski to get information to the Executive Director for her review.

Chair Smith brought forward Board Speak. Ms. Sinico brought forward the issue of bird droppings and that this has been and continues to be a health and safety issue (lights, sidewalks, and more).

The Chair suggested that this be addressed at the tour of the housing facilities.

Speaking of the housing facilities, Mr. Mercer thanked Ms. Cartier for the holiday decorations, "they look great."

The Chair recognized Dr. Dillon who requested that meetings be moved to another day instead of Thursday due to her work commitments. Discussion took place regarding possible meeting days/times. It was decided that meetings would be held on (third) Wednesdays at 2:30. The Chair called for a motion to make this change. Ms. Sinico made the motion and Mr. Mercer seconded. The Board voted unanimously to make this change.

The Chair called for motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Dillon made the motion to adjourn and Ms. Sinico seconded. It was unanimously voted to adjourn at 3:15 PM.

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Approved January 24, 2018