

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

2 Bernard Gibbons Drive

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MEETING MINUTES

Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Commissioners

January 24, 2018

The meeting of the Great Barrington Housing Authority held at Brookside Manor located at 909 South Main Street, Great Barrington, Massachusetts was called to order at 2:33 PM by Chair, Karen Smith.

Board members in attendance: Karen Smith, Jackie Sinico, and Diane Dillon. Board member James Mercer was absent. Also present at the table was Executive Director, Vera Cartier. Ms. Cartier was the recording secretary.

Chair Smith brought forward for approval the minutes of the December 21, 2017 meeting. She asked if anyone had any changes to the minutes. There were none. A motion was made by Ms. Sinico, seconded by Dr. Dillon to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously by the board members in attendance.

Chair Smith called forward the Executive Director's Report.

Ms. Cartier introduced Tim Garlington of Automatic Laundry. She explained that the GBHA is looking at this company to provide laundry services. She credited tenant involvement in this process. The laundry facilities at both Flag Rock and Brookside were reviewed. Mr. Garlington developed a proposal which he will present this date to the Board.

Mr. Garlington was introduced and stated that Automatic Laundry is located in West Newton, Massachusetts. However, it likes to be known as the "local laundry" vendor. Although their area spans from Maine to New York, Mr. Garlington stated that Automatic Laundry can well-serve our area and address service issues in a timely manner.

He continued that what is being reviewed at the moment is a new payment system that would use payment cards instead of coins. Mr. Garlington explained that the industry is going in this direction and that Automatic Laundry has had success using this payment method particularly for housing authorities.

The system proposed is a credit card to Automatic Laundry card system. Funds from a tenant's credit card are transferred over to the Automatic Laundry card in order to use the laundry facilities. This action is performed at an Automatic Laundry kiosk. The card can be used only for Automatic Laundry. Automatic Laundry will offer training in the use of this card system. He stressed that if any tenant is having difficulty with the system or learning the system, Automatic Laundry is available to offer support including weekends. Laundry equipment will also be updated. Overall, Automatic Laundry will provide improved equipment, improved service, and a better "cut" of the revenue to GBHA.

Chair Smith asked about service calls; for example, if there is an issue on a Friday night. Mr. Garlington responded that service calls are responded to within 24 hours. However, the GBHA lease agreement will state 16 hours. A technician is based out of Springfield. This person handles several housing authorities in the area.

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Chair Smith asked "what is the cut" that would be going to GBHA? Mr. Garlington responded that the cut will be a 50 percent split as opposed to what the housing authority is presently receiving from the current vendor. Currently, GBHA is also paying a 9.75 percent lease fee. Automatic Laundry does not have a lease fee.

The Chair asked if the Automatic Laundry contract comes before the Board. Ms. Cartier responded that the contract must be approved by the Board. At this meeting, the contract is not being presented; just the proposal.

Chair Smith stated that by the February GBHA meeting, she would like Ms. Cartier to be able to sign the contract. She recommended that Ms. Cartier speak with the stakeholders and if they are happy with the proposal, Ms. Cartier can move forward. The Chair told the Resident Advisory Board to inform Ms. Cartier of their questions, comments, concerns.

Ms. Sinico asked whether or not coins could still be used. Mr. Garlington said that the card system would be set up on the machines; tenants would be unable to use the existing cash boxes, but if this became an issue, the machines could be changed to again accept coins.

The Chair pointed out that having cash on the property can create issues. She said that the Resident Advisory Board and the Executive Director can act as tutors in assisting tenants in the use of this new system which she feels is a "cleaner" system.

Mr. Garlington stated that on a tour of the laundry facilities, he did meet with Carol Piontek (Chair of the Resident Advisory Board) and discussed tenant concerns and what can be done to remedy the situation.

A meeting attendee asked what it would cost to use the machines. Mr. Garlington said the price proposed is \$1.75 to start. There is a "boost" worked into the lease agreement of 5 percent each year which keeps up with the price of utilities and maintenance.

A meeting attendee stated she did not have a problem with the current service and it is a \$1.50. There is a need for one big machine. Also, she doesn't use credit cards.

Mr. Garlington said Automatic Laundry machines would be larger than the ones currently in use. As far as using coins, Mr. Garlington said that if a tenant does not want to use credit cards, he/she could send in a check to cover the cost of use of the laundry services. He said the system can go back to coins if it becomes an issue but that would require a further conversation.

The Chair said that the Resident Advisory Board can deal with such issues.

Ms. Cartier asked if it is possible to leave one machine that will use coins. Mr. Garlington responded that by doing so, Automatic Laundry will need to come and collect the money which somewhat defeats the purpose of the card-based system.

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Ms. Cartier recommended that there be further discussion at the Resident Advisory Board level. The matter will be continued allowing time for tenant input and working out any issues.

Mr. Garlington said he is available to respond to any questions.

Ms. Cartier continued with her report and spoke about the Board member tours of the Great Barrington Housing Authority properties. This was a good experience for Board members since they were able to get out and see the properties, the condition of the properties, as well as meet tenants. Ms. Cartier said that conversations at Board meetings as well as directly with her have been helpful in dealing with what issues need to be addressed.

Chair Smith called forward the Maintenance Report as presented by Richard Phair, head of the GBHA maintenance.

Mr. Phair updated the Board on the work being done on the vacant, 4 bedroom unit (number 11). This includes painting and the moisture testing that must take place. Maintenance is also waiting for the opportunity to work on a couple of other family units once moves take place. Also, the maintenance staff has been dealing with the many snowstorms that have taken place this winter season.

The Chair asked how maintenance has been managing the work surrounding the snowstorms. Mr. Phair said that he has received no complaints. Chair Smith pointed out that a "thumbs up" was issued in The Berkshire Record for the work Mr. Phair (this to include Scott Sheridan as well) conducted at the housing authority properties.

Chair Smith asked Mr. Phair and Mr. Sheridan if they had any issues they would like the Board to be aware of at this point. The response was no.

Chair Smith recognized Ms. Piontek for the Resident Advisory Board report. Ms. Piontek reported that a "mini meeting" was held Saturday, January 20. Susan Morris, Ms. Cartier, and Ms. Piontek were in attendance. The discussion was about the laundry. It was determined that larger machines are needed and more machines. A new laundry facility is desired as well as a meeting room. Ms. Piontek said that she prepared a drawing of what is wanted for the laundry facility. Suggestion boxes have been installed. The boxes will be checked before each Housing Authority meeting and suggestions will be discussed starting next month.

Chair Smith recommended that the Resident Advisory Board look at the suggestions first and then report to the Board. Ms. Piontek said that the Advisory Board meetings will be held the Tuesday before the GBHA Board meetings. Suggestions will be presented to the Board after review by the Resident Advisory Board and the Executive Director. Per Ms. Piontek, if there are suggestions or comments not pertinent to the GBHA Board, they will be disposed of.

Ms. Piontek stressed that the Resident Advisory Board is open to all tenants so feel free to attend these meetings. This way everyone will know what is going on, particularly if a tenant placed a suggestion in the suggestion box. The meetings will be posted. Citizen speak will be placed on each agenda.

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With regard to Ms. Piontek's rendering of the desired laundry facility, Chair Smith suggested Ms. Piontek meet with Richard Phair and then look at the budget for this capital improvement item.

Ms. Cartier referenced the structure of the Resident Advisory Board. This Board is proposing that they become the GBHA Tenant Association. Therefore, when DHCD (Department of Housing and Community Development) releases information regarding Tenant Associations, GBHA's Tenant Association will already be in place. Per Ms. Cartier, a newsletter was printed and issued to all of the tenants regarding the structure of the Tenants' Association.

Chair Smith asked, what is the difference between a resident advisory board and a tenants' association? Ms. Cartier said that they are two different things and that a housing authority can have both a resident advisory board and a tenants' association. Ms. Cartier encouraged tenants to use the Tenants' Association with regard to issues, suggestions, etc.

The Chair offered the laundry facility project as an example of this.

The Chair advanced the agenda to financial updates. At this point, Dr. Dillon requested the floor. She explained that she is "still learning" about the GBHA and thus, is spending more time listening than talking at GBHA meetings. She said she really enjoyed the tours and seeing where everyone lives and getting to know the tenants.

Financial Updates, Fiscal 2019 Budget Guidelines in Brief. Ms. Cartier explained that she just met with the GBHA accountant (Sue Honeycutt of Fenton, Ewald) and explained that she and Ms. Honeycutt are working on the budget taking into account things that she wants to have done. Ms. Cartier explained the GBHA fiscal year ends March 31, 2018. However, the budget guidelines for the new fiscal year came in late. Therefore, DHCD is giving GBHA additional time to work on the budget.

Chair Smith asked when the Board would be able to look at the budget. Ms. Cartier responded either February or March. The Chair then requested that Ms. Cartier e mail the budget to her when it is prepared.

The agenda moved on to Old Business. The Executive Director's contract was brought forward. Chair Smith explained that she reviewed it and did not have any concerns. She asked other Board members if they had any questions or concerns. None being voiced, the Chair called for a motion to approve the contract. Ms. Sinico made the motion. Dr. Dillon seconded. With no further discussion, the Chair called the vote. The vote was unanimous to approve the contract of the Executive Director.

Next, the agenda item of check signing was brought forward. The Chair explained the issue of the requirement of having two people signing GBHA checks. She believes that the Executive Director has the power of signature. The Chair would like the Executive Director alone to have the authority to sign check. However, if the Executive Director is not available, then two board members would sign.

Ms. Cartier stated that according to the GBHA accountant, Sue Honeycutt of Fenton, Ewald & Associates, even we take into account various financial aspects such as audits, having one signer may reflect badly on the Housing Authority. Therefore, the Executive Director is working with the Treasurer

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on making sure checks are signed in a timely manner. If the Treasurer is unavailable (such as on vacation) other arrangements will be made. There are other signers and Ms. Cartier asked Dr. Dillon if she was a signer. Dr. Dillon responded that she is not yet a signer. Dr. Dillon will proceed in becoming a signer and then, there will be three Board members who can sign.

The Chair moved forward to Warrant Procedures. Ms. Cartier requested that this matter be carried forward to the February meeting. She wants the opportunity to review this matter more thoroughly before bringing it before the Board. The Chair asked Mr. Edward Abrahams, one of the Great Barrington Select Board members in attendance, how warrants are handled by the Select Board. Per Mr. Abrahams, the warrant is signed by Select Board members each week; a list of what is to be paid is prepared and then, the Select Board members sign off on it.

Chair Smith asked Ms. Cartier to do further research as to the warrant procedure. The matter will be on the February agenda.

The agenda item of the GBHA Meeting Schedule was brought forward. Ms. Cartier said that although there is no objection to having meetings at different GBHA locations, but the current schedule of meeting locations is "a lot." Because Flag Rock is the home office, Ms. Cartier suggested going to Brookside once every three months or every other month. This would make it easier to attend meetings. After discussion, including the topic of transportation to and from meetings, the Chair asked if meeting at Brookside on a quarterly basis was acceptable. Meeting attendees said this was acceptable.

The Chair asked about the time of the meetings. Currently, the meetings begin at 2:30 PM. Ms. Sinico said the earlier the better since Maintenance goes off duty at 3:00 PM. Someone in the audience said that it would be wise to coordinate the time with the BRTA bus schedule. In this way, if a tenant wishes to take the bus to a meeting, he or she can coordinate it with the bus schedule.

The Chair suggested 1:15 PM but it was stated by an attendee that this will conflict with those who volunteer serving lunch at the Senior Center.

The decision was made to hold the February 21 meeting at Flag Rock at 2:30 and revisit this matter when the Chair returns in March.

Next on the agenda, New Business, Tenant Responsibilities. Chair Smith said she was made aware of a situation at Flag Rock where a family fell behind in their propane payments. Requiring propane to heat their unit, the family borrowed a 40 lb. propane tank and hooked it up themselves. Chair Smith that under circumstances will this be allowed. Such an action endangers the safety of others living in the housing community. She emphasized that according to the lease, tenants of these units are responsible for their own utilities.

The Chair instructed the Executive Director to look into this, work with Mr. Phair and the propane provider, to ensure that this (tenants hooking up propane tanks) cannot happen again. The Chair recommended that the Board come up with a policy on this matter. She also requested information as to lease specifics on this topic. She asked Ms. Cartier, if a tenant falls behind on such payments, is there any way the GBHA can be notified?

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Ms. Cartier stated that in the past, she has worked with utility companies regarding shut off notices; she would be notified. If given a "heads up" that there is a problem, Ms. Cartier can communicate with the tenant and offer assistance in terms of resources that may be able to help.

Ms. Cartier informed the Board that the leases used by GBHA are those standard leases of the Department of Housing and Community Development. These leases state what the tenant is responsible for and the tenant is aware of these responsibilities.

Board member Sinico asked how long the 40 lb. tank would be in place. The Executive Director said it should already be removed. Ms. Cartier noted that this has sometimes been done in the past. However, Chair Smith made it clear that it has to stop.

Dr. Dillon is interested in looking at the lease agreements. She feels she can be helpful in terms of problem solving and how to connect tenants to resources (this situation is an example).

Citizen speak: Marlene Koloski asked if the pet policy would be brought up to date.

The Chair asked what the policy was at present.

Ms. Cartier said that tenants must pay a security deposit if they have a pet. The pet must be on a leash if it is out. Veterinarian information must be provided (shots, etc.). A tenant must also provide the name of someone who will care for his/her pet if the tenant is unable to do so. When asked if there are any dogs at the housing authority, Ms. Cartier responded there are two small dogs; one at Brookside and one at Flag Rock.

Ms. Koloski did speak about a cat that is a nuisance. Tenant Joanne Iarocci spoke up and stated it is her cat that sometimes gets out without a leash. The Chair said this is an issue for the Resident Advisory Board which can review the pet policy, work on it, then move it forward to the GBHA Board

Moving to Board Member Speak, Board member certification as listed on the agenda was not addressed.

Ms. Sinico again brought forward her concern regarding birds and their droppings. She said she has been asking for two years to have this matter addressed. She hopes that with a new Board and Executive Director, this will now be addressed.

Chair Smith feels that perhaps an expert should be called in such as the Audubon Society. She wants a "pro" to look at this situation in order to find out what action should be taken. The Chair instructed the Executive Director to make a call and have this situation evaluated. Dr. Dillon and Ms. Sinico supported this directive.

Ms. Sinico then stated that at the first meeting of the new Board (November 2017), the matter of work orders was brought forward. A review of work orders was requested at that time. As of this date, this has not yet been done. Ms. Sinico would like to review the work orders by spring due to the projects

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that needed to be done. She believes that maintenance works 240 hours/month and feels this is ample time to get projects done.

Ms. Cartier told the Board that Mr. Phair, head of maintenance, has been present at two Board meetings, and that this is the time to bring such issues to his attention. She stressed that the DHCD regulates how the maintenance work day should be: emergencies, vacancies, snow removal, and so forth.

Chair Smith reminded the Board that it isn't up to the Board to tell Maintenance what they should be doing. However, she requested a two-page report with regard to work schedule (daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, etc.). She feels more information needs to be provided to the Board in order to appropriately address what needs to be done and what can be done and the appropriate amount of time to complete projects. Such a discussion will then be based on facts versus opinion. She instructed the Executive Director that at the March meeting, she wants to have this information presented to her, initialed and dated. She instructed that the concerns that Ms. Sinico presented, please look into and if possible, get the matters resolved. Ms. Sinico will provide a list of what needs to be done and what is not getting done.

Ms. Sinico continued that Maintenance has equipment such as a power washer as well as a truck with a plow. She feels that GBHA is "spending a fortune" on snowplowing. If the GBHA truck was repaired, she feels that Maintenance could handle the plowing that is not handled by an outside vendor.

The Chair asked for an inventory of equipment and its status. She wants this presented at the March meeting. Chair Smith requests that Mr. Phair attend the entire March meeting. The Executive Director acknowledged this request.

Chair Smith concluded the meeting by stating that what she has learned over the last few months has been incredible. Through meetings as well as seeing tenants out in the community, she is getting a sense of what the needs are of the GBHA. However, she asked that tenants keep in mind that nothing gets done overnight. She reminded everyone that e overnight. Mr. Mercer will be chairing the February meeting since she will be traveling.

The Chair asked if anyone had anything else to say. Ann Pruhenski of Flag Rock Village mentioned that she is hard of hearing as well as others and requests that board members and others speak louder so they can be heard.

The Chair called for a motion to close the meeting. Ms. Sinico made that motion and Dr. Dillon seconded. It was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 3:33 PM.

Minutes approved 2-21-2018