

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

Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Commissioners

February 21, 2018

This meeting of the Great Barrington Housing Authority was held at Flag Rock Village, at 2 Bernard Gibbons Drive, Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The meeting was called to order by the acting Chair, James Mercer, at 2:35 PM.

Board members in attendance: James Mercer, Jackie Sinico, and Diane Dillon. Chair Karen Smith was not in attendance at this meeting. Also in attendance was Vera E. Cartier, Executive Director and Secretary of the Board as well as Michelle Loubert, the recording secretary.

Mr. Mercer brought forward the January 24, 2018 minutes for approval. There was no discussion or comments regarding the minutes. Ms. Sinico made a motion to approve the minutes, and Dr. Dillon seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve the January 24, 2018 minutes.

Mr. Mercer proceeded to the Executive Director's report. Ms. Cartier stated that the items she would like to discuss with the Board would be addressed later in the agenda under Old Business. Therefore, Mr. Mercer addressed the next item on the agenda, the Maintenance Report by Richard Phair, Maintenance Supervisor.

Mr. Phair stated that Maintenance continues to work on the empty units, preparing them for tenants. This work was disrupted somewhat when an apartment flooded due to a stuck toilet valve. An adjoining apartment was also affected by this water damage. This emergency pulled Maintenance away from other projects. Catamount Remediation worked on this project with the GBHA.

Mr. Mercer asked if this project is insured. Mr. Phair responded yes. There was concern expressed for the displaced tenant. Mr. Phair responded that the tenant would be staying with family while the damage to the apartment was repaired. He also stated that the state construction supervisor Jonathan Leonard of the Regional Capital Assistance Team (RCAT) visited the GBHA to look at the damage. The process is that the GBHA will arrange for the repair work and submit invoices to the insurance company for reimbursement minus a \$1,000 deductible. He pointed out that the other apartment affected was able to be restored without the tenant having to move out.

Mr. Mercer asked if Mr. Phair had anything else to report. Mr. Phair pointed out that Maintenance is aware of the potholes but at this time of year, it is difficult to address these potholes. If the weather stays mild, the potholes can be "cold patch" until a more permanent repair can take place.

Mr. Mercer asked Mr. Phair the status of the 4-bedroom unit. Mr. Phair said that the unit was inspected the previous week; this was a court ordered inspection. Now, work can continue on this unit.

Mr. Phair also mentioned that recent ice storms have taken up a considerable amount of Maintenance's time.

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Mr. Mercer commented that he is pleased as to how maintenance is taking care of the grounds during bad weather and inquired as to spring needs. Mr. Phair said he has a list.

Ms. Sinico commented that it is very difficult for the maintenance staff (two employees) to take care of three properties. She observed that "things are breaking down due to age." She feels it is difficult to deal with these issues while handling the daily, weekly, monthly tasks that the maintenance staff is required by the state to address. She continued that when the GBHA assumes the Dewey Court housing, that a part-time maintenance person should be hired in order to assist the current maintenance staff with their responsibilities.

On another matter, Ms. Sinico continues to address the issue with birds nesting in various areas at the housing and creating a safety issue. She requested that this issue be addressed. This being said, Ms. Sinico said that this is the type of item that could be assigned to a new, part-time person.

Ms. Sinico also observed an issue with dangerous trees during her tour of Brookside Manor.

Mr. Phair explained that he did speak with National Grid regarding this issue because power wires are affected. He said that National Grid will send an arborist to look at the trees.

Ms. Cartier asked about issues with property lines when dealing with the trees. Mr. Phair responded that property lines have come up when working on the trees.

Mr. Phair asked if he could go back a bit to another apartment that is experiencing a major repair issue—apartment 109 at Flag Rock. There has been extensive damage to the apartment due to an air conditioner being left in the apartment window. The window has rotted as well as the wall. An estimate for the repair has been obtained; Jonathan Leonard of RCAT came in to inspect the damage. GBHA will begin repairing that damage in the very near future.

The next item on the agenda was the report of the Resident Advisory Board by Susan Morris. Ms. Morris referred the report to tenant Marlene Koloski since Chair Carol Piontek has resigned from the board. Secretary Judy Carlson has resigned as well.

Ms. Koloski stated that many tenants are confused by the rules and laws that govern the Advisory Board. At a recent meeting (February 20), a tenant brought forward to the Resident Advisory Board these rules and laws. This caused confusion and some distress for the Resident Advisory Board. Now, what remains of the board seeks guidance from the GBHA Board of Commissioners.

In order to best address the Resident Advisory Board concerns, Mr. Mercer asked Ms. Cartier for a copy of the rules and laws governing the Resident Advisory Board. Ms. Cartier stated she would provide this information.

In another matter, it was expressed that tenants would like to be able to have a clothesline.

Mr. Phair mentioned that some time ago, a former fire chief informed the GBHA that clotheslines must be removed since they would hinder the fire department when putting out a fire.

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Ms. Cartier asked if clotheslines could be located anywhere else. Mr. Phair did not know; both he and Ms. Cartier will look into the matter further.

Returning to the topic of the rules and regulations for the Resident Advisory Board, tenant Jane Green commented that information should be in layperson's terms and easy to understand, not legal terms. She asked that such information be "kept simple."

Mr. Mercer stated that something will be coming out in May regarding the Tenants' Association and as soon as the GBHA Board of Commissioners has that information, it will be communicated to the residents. He stated that it sounds like that the Resident Advisory Board needs only some structure.

Mr. Mercer called forward Financial Updates. Ms. Cartier stated that the Board should have the financials in their packet as prepared by the GBHA accountant (Sue Honeycutt of Fenton, Ewald & Associates). This was for the quarter ending December 31, 2017. Ms. Cartier explained that the Housing Authority is "playing catch up" with regard to GBHA finances. She also pointed out that the GBHA has now moved to Adirondack Payroll of Pittsfield, MA to handle GBHA payroll including tax withholdings and other payroll related matters.

She asked if there were any questions. Mr. Mercer stated that at this point, no.

With regard to the Automatic Laundry services, Ms. Cartier explained that the GBHA is ready to move forward on this. She stated that the company wanted to charge more for any larger machine that was installed. Ms. Cartier told them that this was unacceptable and that the agreed upon charge of \$1.75 for all machines would remain. The Automatic Laundry contract was revised to state this. Ms. Cartier did state that the cost could go up at some point in the future.

Mr. Mercer asked about the lease fee being paid with the current provider. Ms. Cartier stated that the current laundry service is more costly to the GBHA. Ms. Cartier, upon researching that company, discovered that the GBHA did not have a contract with them. This made it easier to search for a new laundry service provider. She stated that with Automatic Laundry, there will be no lease fee.

Moving on, Mr. Mercer asked about the service provided by Spectrum. Ms. Cartier explained that (elderly/handicap) tenants pay \$17 per month to the housing authority. This is added to their rent. Then, the GBHA pays Spectrum. Ms. Cartier explained that she is negotiating a lower rate with Spectrum. There is an issue with tenants receiving bills, sometimes being billed twice for basic cable service. Ms. Cartier is instructing tenants to call Spectrum and let them know that the basic service is already being paid for through their GBHA rent. Ms. Cartier stated that GBHA does not have a contract with Spectrum and that a representative of Spectrum will be meeting with her to discuss cable service.

Ms. Cartier requested that the Board vote in favor of her signing the Automatic Laundry contract.

Mr. Mercer made the motion to approve Ms. Cartier signing the contract; Dr. Dillon seconded. The vote was called, and it was unanimous.

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The next item under Old Business, Warrant Procedures. Ms. Cartier pointed out that previously, warrants were presented to the Board during meetings. She asked how the current Board would like to address warrants. She mentioned that Ms. Sinico could sign the warrants at the time checks are signed. Ms. Cartier asked if board members could come into the office and sign the warrants. However, she is happy to bring the warrants to the monthly meeting.

Mr. Mercer asked if accounts payable was monthly. Ms. Cartier responded that accounts payable is done on a weekly basis.

Mr. Mercer would like to see the bills paid twice a month rather than weekly.

It was determined that warrants would be signed at meetings. Ms. Cartier stated that there was the necessity to catch up on the backlog of unsigned warrants.

The matter of check signing was brought forward. Dr. Dillon explained that she has been unable to get to Berkshire Bank to become a signatory. However, she will do so.

Ms. Sinico asked Mr. Mercer if he would be willing to sign checks, excluding any check that was his (Housatonic Water Company). Mr. Mercer responded no.

Mr. Mercer called forward New Business. Although no New Business was listed, Ms. Cartier wanted to reiterate what Mr. Phair had stated previously, that the court-ordered inspection and testing of unit 11 has been completed, and work on that unit would be moving forward. She also stressed that the damage apartment 109 experienced—due to an air conditioner—must be looked at. Should air conditioner units be allowed to remain in tenant windows after the hot months are over? This practice not only causes extensive damage but affects heating costs as well. Ms. Cartier also informed the Board that Unit 4 is also being worked on.

Ms. Cartier also wanted to discuss Dewey Court (Sheffield). The GBHA assuming Dewey Court has passed the house so for the most part, legally, it is now part of the GBHA; technically, however, it isn't. A deed must be transferred over and vendors notified. The Berkshire Regional Housing Authority and the Department of Housing and Community Development is working on this. This work should be completed by the end of June.

Mr. Mercer asked about bills relating to Dewey Court. Ms. Cartier responded that accounts payable can stay separate or can be combined with the GBHA accounts payable. She explained that the DHCD must make the decision whether to keep Dewey Court finances separate or to combine them.

It was asked how the governance of Dewey will be handled such as the elections of new Board members. This is in question since Dewey Court is in Sheffield, not Great Barrington.

Ms. Cartier stated that it is possible that Dewey Court will be run separately; for example, a separate Board of Commissioners.

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Ms. Cartier returned to the topic of a part-time maintenance person. Ms. Cartier stated that this person could do the many things Ms. Sinico brought up earlier. She stated that much thought must be given on how this person would be used since many maintenance tasks are dictated by the state. Ms. Cartier stated that this person would start part-time and later, possible full-time.

Ms. Sinico asked who is in charge of hiring this position. Ms. Cartier responded that the Executive Director hires this person but that a Board member can sit in on an interview if they would like to do so. However, the Executive Director has the final say.

Mr. Mercer inquired about the current GBHA Personnel Policy. However, his inquiry was not responded to.

Ms. Cartier wanted to return to the topic of the Resident Advisory Board. She stressed that the reason why the Resident Advisory Board was formed was to allow for tenants to get together and have input as to what was going on in the GBHA community. She said that it isn't intended to be like the GBHA Board of Commissioners. She reminded the Advisory Board that they are the Advisory Board, not the Tenants Association at this time. Ms. Cartier said she would get things sorted out for the Advisory Board including the rules, regulations, and laws.

Ms. Green stated that what occurred at the February 20 meeting was that it was implied that the board had been formed without anyone knowing about it which is a misunderstanding. Ms. Green said that oftentimes, when people are asked to do things, it is the same people who step up. She stressed that guidance is needed.

Ms. Cartier said that the Advisory Board is a good thing and pointed to the new laundry as an example of what the input of tenants can do.

Moving on, Ms. Cartier passed out information to the Board from RCAT with regard to the GBHA capital plan, a five-year plan. She explained that RCAT assists the GBHA in obtaining funding for projects. Right now, dehumidifiers for units is being worked on as well as the repair to apartment 109 (Flag Rock) as well as work being done on apartment 4 at Brookside Manor. ADA power doors are also being researched. Projects not yet active are those that have not yet been approved by the DHCD.

Ms. Koloski would like to see something done regarding the (ADA) power doors.

Ms. Cartier asked if she could address the tree situation again. She had received a note from tenant Nan Wile regarding the trees. Ms. Cartier would prefer to do something as soon as possible; to be proactive on this matter.

Mr. Mercer asked if there had been power outages due to the tree branches. Ms. Cartier responded yes as well as roofing replacement.

Ms. Cartier reiterated that she works with RCAT on these projects. RCAT secures state funding for these projects. The cost does not come out of the GBHA budget.

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Mr. Mercer brought forward Citizen Speak. Mr. Edward Abrahams, a Great Barrington Select Board member, asked to speak. He stated that he attends the meetings (among other meetings) to find out what is going on. He stated that as a citizen, he thinks the GBHA is doing an amazing job turning the GBHA around. He also stated that the Friends of the Library (of which he is a member) has many books that the Friends would like to donate to the Housing Authority. It was stated that the books currently available in the Community Room have not been updated.

Ms. Cartier thanked Mr. Abrahams for the offer of books and would follow up with him.

At Board Member Speak, the time of GBHA Board meetings was again addressed. Ms. Sinico asked if meetings should be pushed up since Maintenance leaves at 3:00 PM.

Mr. Mercer stated that it might be best to discuss this when Chair Karen Smith returns in March.

Ms. Sinico asked if Citizen Speak could be moved elsewhere on the agenda. This question was then referred to recording secretary Michelle Loubert. Ms. Loubert responded yes; the Chair may place citizen speak anywhere he or she wishes to on the agenda.

Dr. Dillon asked the date, time, and location of the March meeting. It was stated that the March 21, 2018 meeting would be at Flag Rock at 2:30 PM.

Ms. Koloski asked who was following up on the clothesline matter. Both Mr. Phair and the Executive Director will do so by contacting the Fire Chief, Charlie Burger.

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 3:31 PM.

*Approved by the GBHA
Board of Commissioners
March 21, 2018*