

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Approved 11/7/18

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MEETING MINUTES

Great Barrington Housing Authority Board of Commissioners

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

Present: Karen Smith, James Mercer, Jackie Sinico, Diane Dillon

Administration: Vera Cartier, Rich Phair

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Karen Smith at 2:00PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Board vote was tabled as minutes were not included in the packet distributed. Minutes will be voted on at the next scheduled GBHA Board meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT

a) Certification Paperwork

Cartier reported some tenants are homebound, hospitalized or have a representative payee. For those tenants Smith or Cartier will go to them to complete their documentation and recertification.

b) Change Order for Dehumidifier Contract

Cartier reported there are (2) change orders for the dehumidifier project present that need Chairperson's signature. The first one is an order to remove and re-locate (6) washing machine boxes that have been found to be leaking. Since the wall is already open, now is the time to replace them. The second change order is to install the dehumidifier into the kitchen cabinets due to the space required for proper operation of the units.

Cartier reported additional installation time has been necessary due to work stoppages created by tenants not allowing workers to enter their units. Cartier stated specific units involved will be called to the office for a conference. Appropriate notice was given to all tenants regarding the project and there was no reason for the delay. It should not have happened. At present the stoppage has been resolved. Additional time has been dealt with between ARCAT and the contractor, with no additional monies charged to the Authority.

The (2) change orders were signed by Karen Smith, GBHA Board Chairperson

c) Spectrum Update

Cartier stated three other local Authorities previously reported they charge their tenants \$20.00 per month for cable services. If GBHA were to stop providing this service tenants would be charged a basic fee of \$53.00 per month, which would create a hardship for tenants living on a fixed income. Cartier suggests the Board raise the monthly fee to \$20.00 per month if the Board wishes to do so. She does not suggest this service ever be discontinued due to the hardship it would cause. Smith inquired whether information requested at the last meeting as to how much the Authority paid for vacancies was available. Cartier stated vacancies of the one-bedroom units turn over quickly, unless extensive repair is necessary, which is not often. She estimated possibly 6 or 7 months per year are paid by the Authority for vacancies. Mercer stated he would like to see the charge remain at \$17.00 per month. He believes that should cover the cost of vacancies. Smith stated she would like to know at the end of December how much vacancies have cost the Authority in 2018 for this service. The charge will remain at \$17.00 per month at this time.

d) Verizon and ATT Update for Coverage

Cartier reported letters have been sent to both local and corporate offices of Verizon and AT & T requesting information on anything that may assist in boosting cell service on the property. Cell service, no matter the provider, is intermittent and considered a safety hazard as this may be the only phone service a tenant has. She is currently awaiting a response. Smith stated it would assist the authority if they would also call the local companies and complain about the cell service they receive. In addition, when entering the office area, signing onto wifi calling can help. Smith thanked Carter for sending the letters.

e) Garbage Contracts

Cartier reported June 1, 2018 Roger's Trucking began providing trash removal services for the property. Republic Services, the former vendor, now states they have a contract signed by a previous Executive Director that extends to February 2019. No proof or evidence of a signed three-year contract exists in the GBHA office. If it was known the property was already under contract, services with another provider would have never been pursued. Mercer stated since the original contract was not on file in the office a new vendor was pursued. The Authority was able to get a better quote from Roger's so a new contract was signed, not realizing the Republic contract was still in force. Mercer has spoken to both companies. Republic will resume pick up from November 1st until February 2019 at the contracted rate. Roger's will resume pick up starting in February and the new contracted rate. The Authority does not need to pay Republic for the time that Roger's was picking up, so GBHA will still receive the savings incurred between June 1st and October 31st. Smith stated Republic has since sent a copy of the signed contract, long after the trash removal service change was made.

RESIDENT ADVISORY BOARD – Marlene Koloski

Marlene stated most tenants she has spoken to recently have many questions and request answers from the Board regarding the Executive Director, Vera Cartier, being fired from her position by the Board. They do not know when this is to happen, but they believe it is happening. Marlene stated she believes Chairperson Smith's behavior, slamming her hand down on the desk and screaming at the Executive Director in such a manner, more than once, is uncalled for. GBHA was a mess with the vacancy of the previous Executive Director, and when Vera Cartier came on board that began to change. Tenants believe she works very hard and would benefit from getting some help instead of

letting her go. Marlene stated Board member Mercer has stated this to her. Tenants would like to know why she is being let go. Is it believed she is not fit to work here? She has experience in this field, but not the correct help she needs. Marlene stated she views Chairperson Smith's treatment of the Executive Director that day as elder abuse. A Chairperson should not act in that manner. Tenants are very upset. It seems soon after that incident occurred the talk of letting the Executive Director go began. Marlene stated she understands Board members may not have experience working with tenants, especially those who may not ever have company visit, no family to care for them and no services to check in on them. The Executive Director makes it a point to check in on these people. Tenants do not believe the Board fully understands the value of that. It is also not understood why Chairperson Smith speaks to the Executive Director in such a way. Marlene stated she had been told another tenant stated they had come to the office for an appointment. When they arrived they said Chairperson Smith told them to come back another time, and slammed the door on them. They did not mention they had an appointment because they did not want the Executive Director to get yelled at. Most tenants on all three properties are upset about the possibility of the Executive Director being let go. Marlene stated she believes the Chairperson should be setting a better example.

Jane Greene – Tenant – stated the previous Executive Director treated people horribly. They made them feel like "low-lives" because they lived in senior housing. Vera treated her "like a princess". She treated people in the way she would like to be treated. Jane believes the Executive Director walked into a mess when she took this job and has not ever been given adequate help to straighten it all out. Jane explained due to her emphysema she can only walk so far, and then she needs to rest. She walked all the way down to the office for her re-certification appointment and found later that her documentation was never entered into the computer, so she had to walk all the way down to the office again the next day. Jane believes the Executive Director is very good at what she does and works very hard, but believes she needs the right kind of help.

Smith declined further comment and stated this section of the agenda is for the Resident Advisory Board to make their report. Others in attendance will be given a chance to speak at the Citizen Speak section.

FINANCIAL UPDATES

- a) Accounts Receivable/Accounts Payable
- b) Accounts Payable
- c) All Bank Accounts
- d) Vacancies

Cartier stated Board members have the required financial updates included in their packet. There are (2) Money Market statements. 689 is Building 1. This account was set up when the program was started and is usually very consistent. Monies are only used for emergencies, such as the breakdown of the air conditioning unit this past summer. Balances of the Dewey and Housing Pet Accounts were reported. This account only changes if a pet is added or subtracted through death, etc. The Dewey account currently has a balance of \$30,427.28. All outstanding bills will be paid. As of 10/16 bills in the amount of \$5,413.00 are due. Any outstanding bills from the Dewey property, as well as GBHA will be taken care of on Friday. The last page of the report shows the GBHA account, \$61,256.00. This

account will be keeping one month of advance payroll. Smith thanked the Executive Director for her report. The Board had no further questions.

OLD BUSINESS

a) Pools – Karen Smith

Smith reported she has spoken to the Great Barrington Board of Health and will continue working on a policy over the winter months regarding the use of pools. It is possible to put in a small pool area that is commonly accessible for all family units to use who wish to. This area would be enclosed by a 4 foot fence and a locked gate. The area would also be maintained by the family units. If this arrangement does not work there would be no pools allowed at all for safety reasons. Unattended and un-emptied pools can attract animals and present a serious danger to small children who could fall into them.

b) Apartment Damages – Rich Phair

Phair distributed a listing of damages and associated prices to fix those damages. He explained appliance replacement cost would depend on the size of that appliance, such as a refrigerator could run between \$350.00 and \$500.00. A cooking stove between \$450.00 and \$550.00. Doors are \$30.00 for cheap, hollow doors. He would not recommend the Authority ever use those. If an entire casing and door needs to be replaced it would be \$178.00 for a solid core unit. Windows would depend on what kind and where they were purchased, as the current windows cannot be replaced since the company they were purchased from is now out of business. Replacement screens also cannot be purchased any longer. Phair estimates a new window to be in the range of \$220.00.

It is understood that unless it is tenant damage, refrigerators and stoves are the responsibility of the Association to replace as they are provided with the unit.

When carpeting needs to be replaced it can cost between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to do so if it can be pulled out by staff. It would be higher if it must be professionally removed. Many units still have original carpet, so it needs to be replaced when a unit turns over. If padding is not salvageable then the price goes up. Mercer inquired whether a checklist regarding the condition of a unit is completed when a tenant moves in. Cartier stated yes, a walk-through is done and a checklist is completed and signed when a tenant moves in and also when they move out.

c) CHAMPS – Karen Lewis

Lewis explained the CHAMP system (Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Public Housing) is a way for housing applications to be filed electronically to a common State waitlist. There will be one waiting list for all of Massachusetts. Some are worried this will mean applicants from other areas of the state would take our local housing vacancies. This is not true. The system will work on preferences and priorities. Our preferences would still apply to vacancies in our area, residents living or working in the area, veterans, disabled, etc. Priorities would also remain the same. Priority 1 would be a natural disaster such as a fire or flood. Priority 2 is if a home is condemned. Priority 4 is medical emergencies or abusive living situation. Priority 5 is a voucher, which does not apply to public housing as it is already subsidized. Priority 6 would be a resident transferring, such as wanting to move from a second floor to the first floor. With the CHAMP system, as the application information is entered the preferences and/or priorities are automatically determined and the application is placed appropriately on the wait list in a fair and reasonable way. No more paper lists or doing this process by hand. This

system will be a time saver. Smith inquired whether GBHA data has been inputted into the system yet. Lewis responded no, as there was a problem with information that was left out of the template that was provided, so data will not migrate. Information will be updated with the appropriate information. Data migration is set for October 26th. In addition, applications will no longer need to be filled out repetitively for each association a client is applying to. One application is all that is necessary for all Authorities they would like to apply to.

d) Fire Pits

Mercer stated a final policy will be completed in the spring. What he has learned is there are no real Great Barrington Town regulations regarding fire pits. Considerations must be made for proximity to wooded areas and housing units, propane tanks and also residents staying up late around a fire pit and keeping other people awake, etc. Mercer would like to work with the Resident Advisory Board for ideas. The same would go for the Brookside and Dewey properties if they were interested. Smith stated possibly one fire pit for each property instead of each unit.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Sewer Abatement Application

Smith stated the sewer bills for the Brookside and Flag Rock properties are approximately \$20,000 per year. She is hoping the Authority can secure some kind of help/abatement from the Town of Great Barrington. She will work over the winter months with the Select Board as to how this process might unfold. Any sort of relief would be welcome. Anything that can cut municipal costs would be helpful. She is unsure how successful these efforts will be.

MAINTENANCE REPORT - Rich Phair, Maintenance Supervisor

- Dehumidifier project is complete. ARCAT and engineering company need to complete walk through.
- Roofs have been replaced at Brookside by Hill Engineering. Lawn repair has been done.
- LED lights have been installed in some living rooms areas. There are 35 living rooms. Bulbs are \$5.00 each at Carr Hardware. Tenant feedback has been positive.
- Dimmers in courtyard continue to work well. Electrician is looking into dimmer to control street lights.
- Fire alarm panel presented a problem this week. Need to look into upgrading the system. Current system is out of date and parts are becoming scarce. If worker had not had a part in his truck Rich and Scott would have had to perform fire watch this past weekend. Smith inquired whether this system is considered a utility. Phair stated no, probably health and safety. Smith has requested more than one quote for replacement of the system.
- Unit 27 will be finished shortly. A couple of appliances and fixtures are still on order.
- Unit 14 staff has been working on patching the ceiling. The Unit requires (8) new doors, range hood, a few cabinet doors, the carpets are out and the plywood in a couple of the bedrooms needs to be washed and sealed due to excessive damage. This unit will be off line at least another 6 weeks.
- A pallet of Ice and snowmelt has been ordered through Meadow Farms for \$16.00 per bag.
- Phair stated he is preparing the three properties for fall clean up and would like to know the Boards preference. In the past Gary O'Brien has been used to clean up Brookside and Flag Rock and has

done a great job. Scott has taken care of the Dewey property. Gary O'Brien charges \$500.00 per property. He will blow, suck leaves up and remove them.

Mercer made a motion, seconded by Sinico to approve up to \$1,500.00 for fall clean up services for Dewey, Brookside and Flag Rock.

Unanimous approval.

- Phair stated he is still waiting for the new truck to be delivered. Smith stated the monies for the purchase were released 13 days ago. She is waiting for those monies to come through.

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CITIZEN SPEAK

Michelle Loubert, Great Barrington, noted an Executive Session is listed on the agenda to occur following the regular meeting. She was wondering whether that Executive Session was still going to take place. Smith stated yes, it would be taking place. Michele stated she noticed the appropriate reason/language for the Executive Session is on the agenda, but wonders whether there has been discussion in open meeting regarding professional competence, as stated in a subset of the MGL, and if it has not been, will it be? Smith responded no, professional competence has not been and will not be discussed.

Michelle Loubert stated the Board is in breach. Smith responded according to counsel they are not. She welcomed Michelle to take up her disagreement with counsel. Michelle stated she would be notifying the Attorney General.

Dewey Way Tenant spoke how wonderful the Executive Director, Vera Cartier, has been to them. They have no complaints in regard to her performance.

Jane Greene – Tenant - stated she has known Chairperson Smith for 30 years and has always respected her knowledge and sense of humor. Jane was one of the first members of the GBHA Board many years ago. The Board was made up of all different people with different skill sets, hers being her work with disabled and elderly. The atmosphere was pleasant, which was the reason she wanted to be at Flag Rock Village when it came time for her to move to senior housing. Times had changed, and people were angry and afraid to speak out. The Executive Director at the time was cold not only to the tenants of the property but anyone who went to the office. That Executive Director and Board is now gone. When hiring a new Executive Director and Board the tenants wanted it to be done right. A one hour interview with Vera Cartier is all it took to know she was the right person to be the new Executive Director. Many also wanted Smith to serve on the Board as the Chairperson, but this tenant now believes she was wrong. The current Executive Director has turned so many things around full circle. She has listened to the tenants and have met their needs. Jane believes Chairperson Smith has managed to reverse every positive accomplishment into a negative. Jane admires all of Chairperson Smith's accomplishments and her dedication to the community, but she does not feel she should be Chairperson of the GBHA. There are young tenants with families who are working 2 and 3 jobs here. Some take advantage, but most, if not all, should be treated with respect. Vera Cartier did that. She listens to the needs of disabled tenants. Some seniors are fortunate as they have families, but too many have no one who cares. The Executive Director has been there for everyone, helping, listening

and doing. There have been rumors that you are trying to take Vera, our “security blanket” away, and we are not sure what this is all about. Tenants feel they have the right to know. Unfortunately, the Board is in charge of the lives of the tenants. There is no reason for the Executive Director to be let go. We ask that the Board help her clean up the mess that was here for years before she came on board. Help, don’t hound. From her time on previous Boards, Jane stated she knows if bills are not being paid then the State is partly responsible. If the checks are late the bills cannot get paid, and the Executive Director needs to pay the bills based on rent receipts alone until the State money is received. The Executive Director has received good reviews, so what has happened to create this mess? The Executive Director felt secure in her position and believed the Board was pleased with her performance. She is a senior citizen herself and purchased a new home, something someone this age does not usually do. The chairperson cannot scream or badger the Executive Director to make things go their way. It seems, “your way or the highway”. Jane believes this is emotional elder abuse on the part of Chairperson Smith, and she is very disappointed. So many people have worked so hard for many years to create a warm, welcoming town and community, but our opinions do not seem to matter to the Chair. Jane hopes Chairperson Smith remembers all this in her elder years when no one pays attention to what you are saying or feeling. This situation is very sad and very disappointing.

Marlene Koloski – Tenant - stated she has witnessed Chairperson Smith bully the Executive Director, Vera Cartier, without regard as to who was present. The Executive Director is in her 60’s and was left shaking and crying. The Chair has no right to treat anyone in this manner. It is uncalled for. Marlene stated she believes Chairperson Smith should resign from the Board. She also recognizes all the good things Chairperson Smith has done for the community, but does not feel her best is being done here in this situation. It is a tragedy that the Executive Director has to leave because she is not liked by the Chair. This Executive Director has tried to help everyone. Board member Mercer has stated he does not want the Executive Director to leave, but will not speak up publicly. People are afraid of Chairperson Smith. Her actions are horrible. She is a bully.

An unidentified tenant stated they believe the Executive Director should stay. She has treated the tenants very well and answers their needs. She treats tenants like human beings. Tenants need the Executive Director to stay.

An unidentified tenant stated she has been a tenant for 14 years. The first Executive Director was great. The next Executive Director was horrible. Tenants were actually scared of her. Many of the elderly tenants were also scared of her. The current Executive Director has been trying to make a difference within the community by organizing tenant gatherings of different sorts, such as picnics, etc. to bring families and elderly together. Vera Cartier has been great. All tenants signed a petition in support of keeping the Executive Director. It hurts to let go of someone who really cares.

Jane Greene – Tenant - stated she believes if the Executive Director was given more help she could accomplish more of what the Board expects from her. She asked the Board to please re-consider letting her go.

BOARD SPEAK

Sinico stated Jane Greene and Marlene Koloski have covered most of what she would have said. She stated throughout all of the months of this process not once did she receive any correspondence in

regard to what was being done. About 4 weeks ago a tenant mentioned to Board member Sinico what was happening around the Executive Director, but as a Board member she had no idea what they were talking about. She believes she should have received some sort of correspondence regarding this matter. It should have been distributed to everyone on the Board. Board member Dillon stated she had received correspondence. Sinico would like to know why she was kept in the dark. She believes it is because she is "pro-Vera". She would like to understand what the problems are with the current Executive Director.

Mercer stated he met with Sinico about 5 weeks ago. Because of laws and confidentiality personal matters cannot be discussed in public. Previously, a motion was made and approved to form a subcommittee of Karen Smith and James Mercer to look into the performance of the Executive Director. A file was shared from Mercer to Sinico and the same file was shared to Dillon from Smith. Sinico stated she did not receive anything and had to ask for it. Mercer re-stated he had shared it with her. Sinico stated she does not know the specifics of why this situation has come about. Mercer stated a file with 160 pages of documents was shared. Sinico stated the file she received made no sense to her.

Sinico stated at the April 2018 meeting minutes record Chairperson Smith stating the Executive Director's contract and raise would be approved and praised her performance. Sinico stated a few months later it seems all of this has fallen apart. Smith stated this was accurate. The reason for that cannot be discussed in open session. Smith stated a performance review was never done for the Executive Director. Sinico stated as a Board member she should have known everything before today.

Lou Delmasto – Tenant - inquired who the boss of the Board is. The reply was the DHCD and the Governor of Massachusetts. Lou inquired whether all three Board members have voted against the Executive Director. Smith stated absolutely no action has been taken. Lou inquired whether the legal counsel representing the Board is paid for by Flag Rock Village. The response was no, DCHD provides legal counsel. Lou stated the Board is like "King of the Hill" and goes behind everyone's back. You give her a good recommendation and then turn around and let her go. What is the reason?

Smith restated personnel issues cannot be discussed in public session.

Jane Green – Tenant - stated the board has the tenant's lives in their hands. Bookkeeping or whatever the problems are is secondary. Bookkeeping can be fixed. The tenant's emotions cannot be.

Smith responded the job of the Board of Directors is to ensure the long-term viability of the housing authority is maintained, based on State requirements and DHCD.

An unidentified tenant stated they have not been asked what is good for them. They are trying to tell the Board what is best for them and no one is listening.

Dillon stated she acknowledges and appreciates the tenants' willingness to share with the Board. It is obvious to everyone how successful the Executive Director has been in treating tenants with dignity and respect and being responsive to issues. Board member Dillon stated she wants tenants to know she hears them and acknowledges and applauds the Executive Director for her work.

Lou Delmasto – Tenant - stated he does not see this as a Board but as a lynching. He inquired what the things are that the State has told you to do that is causing the Board to come down on the Executive Director. Are the tenants allowed to see that paperwork?

Chairperson Smith asked for order in the room and once again stated that personnel issues cannot be discussed in public session.

Lou Delmasto – Tenant - inquired of the Great Barrington Select Board Member present at the meeting whether they believe it is a good idea to fire the Executive Director. The Select Board Member stated they were not able to speak for the Town of Great Barrington, but would be willing to give their personal opinion at the appropriate time.

Chairperson Smith called for order in the room again, stating she was returning to the agenda item Board Speak.

Chairperson Smith asked tenant Lou Delmasto to stop being disruptive or to leave the meeting area. Lou Delmasto left the meeting.

Mercer stated this situation is very challenging for everyone. Board members are accessible. Mercer stated he has heard from many individuals expressing concerns regarding this situation. It is clear the Board has not brought forth or commented any of the information spoken of today. Mercer stated he is not sure where this information is coming from, but it has not come from the Board as far as he knows. There seems to be lots of innuendo. The Board is trying to bring the community together, not separate it.

ADJOURNMENT

Mercer made a motion, seconded by Dillon to adjourn the regular meeting at 3:00PM and enter Executive Session under MGL c. 30A, Subsection 21(a) (2) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel and to conduct contract negotiations with nonunion personnel (Executive Director). The regular session did not reconvene.

Unanimous approval via roll call vote.



Respectfully submitted by Debra E Brazie