

Trumbull Housing Authority – April 7, 2020

Trumbull Housing Authority Virtual Meeting
April 7, 2020
4:30 pm

Commissioners Present: Chairman Paul Niebuhr, Suzanne Donofrio, Jean Rabinow, Laurel Anderson and Maureen Bova

Also Present: Executive Director Harriet Polansky and Jason Geel, Accountant

The meeting was called to order at 4:44 pm by Mr. Niebuhr followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call.

Past Minutes

Ms. Polansky noted two changes to the minutes of February 25, 2020 as follows:

1. Under Resident Comments – resident name should be Debbie Van Scoy
2. Under Executive Session – motion should be corrected to read “3. Discussion of the presentation to the L&A Committee on February 24.”

Motion was made by Mrs. Donofrio to approve the minutes as amended. Seconded by Mrs. Anderson. Motion approved with one abstention from Mrs. Rabinow.

Motion was made by Mrs. Donofrio to approve the minutes of March 24, 2020 as written. Seconded by Mrs. Anderson and approved unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report

Ms. Polansky presented the financial report for Mrs. Bova.

From July 1, 2019 through February 29, 2020, the overall gain of the Housing Authority was \$2,571,593 which includes all the rental income and Capital Grant Funding provided for the redevelopment – rehabilitation - remodeling efforts.

If the Capital Grant Revenue of \$2,684,645 is removed, the Housing Authority has an operating loss of \$101,644, of which \$67,168 is attributable to the Village and \$34,476 is attributable to Stern Center. Looking at Stern Village, the current month’s operating loss, excluding capital grant revenue, is \$392. This is primarily due to the current month payment of its annual robocall service subscription of \$1,671. In addition, vacancies for the month of February total \$8,150. They anticipate much improved operating results once the remaining vacant units are rehabbed in the spring/summer of 2020.

For the month of February, Stern Center recognized a loss of \$9,163 which is primarily due to heating repairs totaling \$8,684. The award of CBDG money will be used to rehabilitate the heating system.

One of the goals for this year is to increase the reserve account/investment for Stern Center. However, reserves have not been increased due to operating losses primarily stemming from continued heating repairs.

The overall cash position of the Housing Authority, including reserves, is \$1,296,802 which includes \$513,783 reserved for renovations costs at Stern Village.

Trumbull Housing Authority – April 7, 2020

As of February 29, 2020, there were Accounts Payable totaling \$131,036. This includes construction payables. All bills continue to be paid in a timely manner. Overall, the Housing Authority remains in a good financial position.

Executive Director's Report

Ms. Polansky reported the following:

There are three vacancies in the Congregate, one of them was Paulette's office. As much as they would like to fill these vacancies now, it's prudent that they wait a few months and hopefully, will be back to normal.

Our maintenance men have started to rehab units in the Village and they expect occupancy starting in May. Millennium will let Ms. Polansky know when it's safe to have their construction crew continue with the rehab.

The Community Room is near completion. They will only allow one or two workmen at a time. The Town needs to inspect it and provide a certificate of occupancy. That will not happen for a while. It will not be opened until the pandemic is over. When it does open, they will have a grand opening celebration and lots of activities and programs.

With regard to FEMA – Ms. Polansky is keeping a file of all the expenditures incurred during this time including cleaning the Congregate, masks, cleaning solutions, hand sanitizer and the like. The Department of Housing will provide direction on submittals. Expected expenditures are approximately \$12,000 on COVID-19 related items. Ms. Polansky would like to clean all the heat pumps in July as a precautionary measure which would also be submit to FEMA.

Ms. Polansky felt it important to let everyone know what steps are being taken during the Pandemic to keep our residents safe. As of now, there are no reported cases of COVID-19 in Stern Village. They are following all the precautionary measures per Lucy Banko, Director of Public Health for the Town of Trumbull, Emergency Management, the CDC, Governor Lamont, and the Department of Housing.

For the Congregate

- Residents are called on a daily basis and asked if they are ok. We've been doing the R U Ok calls for over six years.
- There is no congregating allowed in the dining room, foyer, second floor den and arts and crafts room.
- Residents are encouraged to go outside and social distance.
- All meals are delivered to the Congregants in Styrofoam containers. The Chef and kitchen staffers wear masks and gloves when they deliver the food. Residents fill out a bi-weekly menu which is provided to the Chef.
- The only visitors allowed are nurses, aides or family members acting in that capacity.
- Deliveries are dropped off in a designated area in foyer; either residents pick up or staff put the items by their door.
- Anyone who signs in are asked to first wash their hands.
- COVID-19 prevention and informational signs are throughout the building.
- EP Maintenance was hired to clean the entire building.
- All public areas, including doorknobs, railings and the elevator are continually sanitized and residents' units are cleaned weekly using bleach and water. Our cleaning person is properly outfitted.
- Only one person in the laundry room at a time.

Trumbull Housing Authority – April 7, 2020

- Rent checks and recertification papers can be placed in designated envelopes outside Daisy's office.

Stern Village

- Also making R U Ok calls to all Villagers on a weekly basis.
- If they know that a resident is returning from another state or country, they are calling them to confirm their return and requesting they quarantine for two weeks.
- Requesting only one person in the laundry rooms at a time.
- Residents can place paperwork and rent checks in designated large envelope.

Other

- Every Wednesday, GBT provides a 20-seat bus for our residents to go to Stop & Shop. They typically have 6-8 residents going so the bus allows for social distancing.
- Residents in need are encouraged to go to the Food Pantry. They can call to have their food delivered or go to the Senior Center for curbside service. Each resident has the hours and phone numbers.
- The Maintenance crew will only respond to emergencies or problems with plumbing, water, electricity or heat. If a resident isn't sure, they can call the office.
- Staff is alternating working from home and working on-site. They are enforcing social distancing and asking residents to do the same.
- As the weather gets warmer, they will be putting out lawn furniture, as long as residents will socially distance and wear a mask.
- Easy instructions on how to make a no sew mask have been made available in the laundry rooms and in the Congregate.

Mrs. Anderson asked what plans have been made should anyone in the Congregate become ill. Ms. Polansky noted they will still get their meals delivered to their door. The resident would have to quarantine in place and anyone who came in contact with them also. If someone goes to the hospital and returns to their apartment, it would be the same procedure. Mrs. Anderson asked if they would need special services if they return to their apartments. Mr. Niebuhr noted Ms. Polansky investigated to see if there was a state facility where the residents could be placed. Ms. Polansky noted that would not be available to the residents. The only alternative would be for a family member to take them in.

Mrs. Anderson referred back to the novovirus and asked if any work had been done with the Kennedy Center cleaners so that they know the kind of job that needs to be done under these circumstances. Ms. Polansky stated they have been instructed what to do and that there is a supervisor with them.

Henry Stern Center/Congregate Sustainability

Mr. Niebuhr noted that the Department of Housing (DOH) oversees the Congregate. The DOH expects the THA to increase the Congregate's reserve account and work towards making the Congregate viable. This is not a quick fix and will take time. He requested Ms. Polansky and Mr. Geel to discuss possible short and long term plans as a solution.

Mr. Geel noted he has experience in housing across the state and one of his main concerns is that the operating costs run tight. The Connecticut initiative to start to increase minimum wages upwards to \$15 will have a severe impact, especially on the services side. They have been working out different scenarios as to what service cost increases would be needed to make this sustainable. With the current COVID issue and potential rent increases, they may have to wait to give residents the ability to participate and give their concerns. He feels they need to concentrate on the services side. This side is

Trumbull Housing Authority – April 7, 2020

highly contingent on minimum wage employees. He feels there needs to be action taken and not wait and say this was a difficult year.

Mr. Niebuhr noted there are a number of residents of the Congregate that don't want the services and would like to move out into the Village. He asked if there is a sufficient number of residents in the Congregate that do not need the services, could they consider migrating the Congregate away from full services? Ms. Polansky noted that everyone who has applied to the Congregate or is actually living in the Congregate knows what the Congregate is and what it isn't. It is not a nursing home, it is not assisted living but it is independent housing with supportive services. Residents living in the Congregate knew what was available but their needs could have changed. There may be a handful of people who want to move. Once everything is rehabbed, they can open applications in June and offer it to the residents in the Congregate who want to move to the Village.

Mrs. Anderson shared a concern after reviewing the financials with Mrs. Bova and Mr. Geel. She noted that the Congregate owes Stern Village \$350,000. She noted it is not profitable and even with a rent increase, it is unknown how the Congregate can ever pay back this debt to Stern Village. If anything else major happens, the Village will be relied upon to cover the shortfalls. She feels it is time to take a holistic look and not focus on rent increases or services. It is time to take a deeper look at the Congregate as it is not a sustainable model.

Mr. Geel noted it is a challenging model because, in the event of something major, it is underfunded. He is not sure the THA has taken advantage of the DOH initiative over the last few years in coming out and promoting rent increases. In comparison to other housing developments, the Congregate is \$200-\$300 per unit less in rent than anyone else. Taking a \$200 rent increase would be approximately \$8,000 left on the table. In looking at the residents, a large majority are paying the full amount. In most cases, those residents have decided to move elsewhere or live in the Village where they are paying the 30%. Unfortunately, the state built the building and the THA can't just lease it to non-low income residents. Mrs. Anderson felt that other options should be investigated as the current model is not sustainable. Before we are in another budget year, we need to look at other models, what others are doing and what might work better for us. Mr. Niebuhr noted they have already proposed to the residents a choice between maintaining existing services as they are or increasing the rent by \$200-\$300. It is unknown what residents would choose. Mr. Niebuhr felt they need to look at their restrictions. It seems the majority of the residents wouldn't mind doing away with the cleaning service but what about the food service. There are a handful of residents that feel they don't need that. Do we have the flexibility to stop those services and how would the residents react to it. He doesn't feel any of the residents can handle a \$200 a month rent increase. Mrs. Anderson suggested creating a committee to work on this initiative so that they have a better idea of what needs to happen before they go into another budget year. She is not in support of Stern Village paying for Congregate expenses in the future. Mrs. Rabinow asked Ms. Polansky about the agreement with the State in order to get the Congregate built. Ms. Polansky will look for the document. Mr. Geel noted there should be a financial assistance agreement which goes on in perpetuity unless you ask to be released from the program and forgo the subsidy. This typically happens when you redevelop into a new model. He noted a lot of this is a revenue side. Rents and services are lower than the industry which indicates that they are not at the peak potential. This is due to possibly protecting residents from rent increases and then realizing that this may not have been in the best interest of the resident.

Trumbull Housing Authority – April 7, 2020

Motion was made by Mrs. Rabinow to create a committee to research the sustainability of the Henry Stern Center Congregate building. On the committee will be Mrs. Rabinow, Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Donofrio and Ms. Polansky. Seconded by Mrs. Donofrio and approved unanimously.

Unfinished Business

No unfinished business.

New Business

Mr. Niebuhr noted the THA staff has started working in shifts – one week at Stern Village and one week at home. This began on March 30, 2020. Ms. Polansky, Paulette and Heather work from home. The Maintenance crew works in shifts. All employees are being paid their full time pay through April 18. Ms. Polansky has looked into the payment protection program to help small businesses to keep their work force during the COVID 19 epidemic for the weeks the Maintenance men are not working. Mr. Niebuhr entertained a motion that the THA maintenance personnel can either be furloughed and collect unemployment or get paid using their vacation, sick and personal time first. Motion was made by Mrs. Donofrio and seconded by Mrs. Rabinow. Discussion. Mrs. Rabinow asked what the fiscal year was for the employees if we ask them to start using up their own benefits. Mr. Niebuhr noted the Maintenance staff has no limits on them and they have quite a bit accrued. Ms. Polansky noted there is a limit for two of the staff. Mrs. Donofrio asked if it affects them with the small business loan if they take unemployment. Mrs. Anderson explained the process and noted you need to show that you brought everyone back at least 75% and then you are eligible for the forgiveness. Ms. Polansky noted she has spoken with their attorney and the CBIA and it doesn't look like they will qualify even though they are a non-profit. They are a THA and would be placed into a category as a state entity and they are not eligible. There is a concern that, if they are approved and it is then determined they are not eligible, they may need to repay the funding. Mr. Niebuhr noted it is worth applying for the loan. Mrs. Anderson suggested a call to the Fairfield County Community Foundation in Norwalk to see if they may be able to clarify eligibility. Also Congressman Himes office may be of help. Mr. Geel stated that the THA is placed in with the rest of the country where there are no non-federal housing authorities. They are usually under HUD and therefore, would need to go through federal assistance programs.

Mr. Niebuhr reread the motion - for the weeks the maintenance staff are not working, the THA Maintenance staff can either be furloughed and collect unemployment or get paid using their vacation, sick and personal time first. It was not stated but the intention was to give each individual a choice of furlough and unemployment or get paid using vacation, sick and personal time. Mrs. Anderson asked if it could be restricted to vacation and personal time and made a motion to amend the initial motion to remove sick time. Mrs. Donofrio and Mrs. Rabinow approved this amendment to their motion. Motion was unanimously approved as amended.

Residents of the Stern Village Resident Association

No report.

Resident Comments

No resident comments.

Trumbull Housing Authority – April 7, 2020

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Mrs. Rabinow to adjourn the meeting at 5:26 pm. Seconded by Mrs. Donofrio and approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Crandall
Clerk