

Trumbull Housing Authority – May 26, 2020

Congregate Committee

Trumbull Housing Authority Virtual Meeting
Congregate Committee
May 26, 2020
3:00 pm

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

Also Present: Executive Director Harriet Polansky; Jason Geel, Accountant; Attorney Christopher Cody, Kathleen McGannan, First Selectman's Office; Daisy Torres, Congregate Manager and Christopher Hodgson, Labor Attorney for the Trumbull Housing Authority

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Donofrio at 3:04 pm followed by Roll Call and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Past Minutes

Motion was made by Mrs. Bova to approve the minutes of the Congregate Committee of May 19, 2020 as written. Seconded by Mrs. Rabinow and approved unanimously.

Summary of Policy and Procedure Changes

Mrs. Anderson prepared for the Committee a summary of discussion topics and policy and procedure changes suggested throughout the THA Congregate Committee meetings. Further discussion as follows.

Documentation – Mr. Cody has not been able to locate the original contract with the State regarding the Congregate. He did note that he researched advertising and outreach for certain income qualifications. The THA is entitled to use a point system that has been set by the State. The location of the State document may be in files from Ms. Polansky's office but they are packed away until the renovation of her office is completed. Mrs. Anderson felt that pertinent documents need to be scanned and available so they can be located when needed. The document retention policy should be reviewed. Mrs. Rabinow spoke on the FOI requirements that enable outsiders to review these documents. Anything that comes before the Commissioners should be retained at least for seven years. Other documents may need to be held indefinitely such as those from the State, bylaws and 501c3 documentation. Mrs. Anderson recommended the Commission look at what documents need to be on file to be readily available and that they be scanned. Mr. Geel noted some of these documents were located prior to the renovation and they will work towards having a centralized data collection. Ms. Polansky hopes to be in the office the first week in June and can search for the documents at that time. She noted they do follow a document retention policy from the State so they know how long to keep certain documents. Mr. Cody noted that once the document retention policy is decided, any information beyond that cutoff should be purged to pertinent files. When the policy is written, it should include the names of the documents and the location of the electronic file.

Long Term Debt and Reserves

Mrs. Anderson noted there were suggestions for policies regarding long term debt and reserves discussed during the prior meetings that need to be reviewed.

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1. When the Congregate cannot pay the Village, the Commissioners must approve, or be advised of, the non-payment in real time.
2. Discussion of the reserves was held. If the reserves are too high, it could hurt the THA in getting competitive grants. She felt the Commission needs to be aware of that fact, the fact that it needs reserves in emergencies and that there is debt on the books. There needs to be a broader discussion with Mr. Geel and with individuals who know about grants and State requirements. They should be discussing what to do about the debt, what is a good number for the reserves for the Village and Congregate and recommendations on how they get to that point. This should be brought back to the full Commission for discussion. At this time, the State has not required the THA to have the \$36,000 in reserves. Reserves should be guided by what the capital needs are in the CNA and budget accordingly.
3. Long term debt needs to be discussed at another time.

Financial Reporting

Mr. Geel has incorporated some of the changes requested by the Committee into the current reports for the regular Commission meeting.

Rent/Services Increases

Mrs. Anderson felt there should be a policy in place which would take the pressure off everyone and alert the residents what they can expect in the future with regard to increases.

Income Limits

Mrs. Anderson noted with their discussion with Mr. Coyle, the Ridgefield Housing Authority seemed to have a higher number of residents receiving subsidies than the THA. Discussion was held regarding income limits. Mr. Cody stated the information from the Fair Housing Regulations and other documents notes that a point system is permissible. If the point system is utilized, it must be the one set forth by the State. Mr. Cody reviewed this system with the Committee. The THA would need to read the documents and see to what extent they could create a preference. Ms. Polansky stated that, to her knowledge, the preference system is based on sub-standard housing such as condemned, serious health code violations, inadequate housing or unbearable living conditions. Question was raised that, in the nature of outreach, would the THA be permitted to seek out and provide a preference to individuals with a lower income. When questioned, the DOH responded that the point system was permissible so Mr. Cody interpreted this as preferences are allowed. The criteria should be reviewed by the DOH on this application system. The wait list regulations have not been passed by the State. DOH should be contacted to see what that means. Mrs. Anderson noted the overall concept of rent levels should be reviewed by the Commission. Ms. Polansky stated she will start reaching out through other markets for applications.

Transfer policy needs to be looked into between the Village and the Congregate residents. Mrs. Donofrio felt the transfer should be open to all residents as their situations may have changed. They may no longer need the Congregate services or, if they are in the Village, may require the Congregate based on their needs. This is a policy change the Commission would like to recommend.

Vacancies

Discussion was held regarding the vacancies in the Congregate. Mrs. Anderson recommended a policy with a specific number of days to be vacant and a vacancy rate no higher than 3%. Mrs. Rabinow suggested that this discussion be held with the Commission especially in light of COVID-19 but there

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should be formal guidance for normal times. Mr. Geel noted it is important to have a vacancy log that informs the Commission what rehab takes for the units. Ms. Polansky noted she has a tracking sheet that will be given to the Commission. Ms. Torres is aware that her goal is 100% occupancy. This information will be added to the Commission packet each month.

Operating Expenses

Based on discussions regarding the food budget line item, there needs to be a control with the oversight of the billing and what is paid versus the budget. Mr. Geel discussed the current budgeting of the food and noted that costs were budgeted differently in the past which caused the issue. Ms. Polansky reviewed the process for payment of invoices including who signs off on them and who pays them. Mrs. Anderson questioned why this item is so over budget if individuals were reviewing invoices. She felt internally there should be someone looking at the budget to actuals percentage off numbers in real time. Mr. Geel noted they had conversations with the vendor and they have requested that the vendor bill the same amount each month. Ms. Polansky will create a formal policy to reflect this process as requested by Mrs. Anderson. They are also looking at ways to save on bulk supplies. Mrs. Anderson requested that Kevin Bova, Purchasing Agent for the Town, be contacted for any suggestions he may have for purchasing supplies or services.

Contracts were discussed and Ms. Polansky noted her efforts to look for alternatives to lower costs. The security company is increasing their costs considerably and Creative Culinary is also increasing their costs. Ms. Polansky noted she goes out to bid when the contract is coming up or if they are dissatisfied with the service. Mr. Geel noted the longer contracts typically have the better deal. Mrs. Anderson suggested a list of contracts with terms be provided to the Commission on an annual basis for review by the Commission. She also noted there was a discussion regarding providing the Commission with complaints or issues Ms. Polansky is having with the service providers.

In discussion with the Ridgefield Housing Authority, they have a similar number of housing units but only have one staff maintenance person. It was suggested to look at the work orders on an annual basis and see what the requests are and what length of time is required for each. This expense should be reviewed to see if costs could be lowered. Mrs. Bova noted some areas may be a problem if outsourced especially during snow storms in the winter. COVID has shown they can do the same with less. Ms. Polansky will review this information.

Property

The Capital Needs Assessment Plan is outdated and the \$1,000,000 rehab of the Congregate is still to be completed. She suggested once this project is finished that they revise the CNA. Mr. Geel noted the CNA helps with the budgeting plan each year. Ms. Polansky noted they are moving forward with the bid package for the Congregate project for the 2019 Small Cities Grant that was received.

Mrs. Anderson questioned if there is a bid for the architect work on these grants or if it was automatically given to Mr. Wiles. Ms. Polansky noted they have not formally done a competitive bid in a while because Mr. Wiles knows the property and he was extremely competitive when they first went out to bid. Mr. Geel noted when the Village project was put together, there was a bid for the architect. They would piggyback off the 3-5 year window for the process, especially if they have had a good experience. Mr. Wiles has been used for approximately five years. Mrs. Anderson suggested with expenses this tight, it might be prudent to go out for bid on projects this large to find the best contractor.

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Legal Issues

Mrs. Rabinow noted they received a packet from Mr. Cody on this topic and felt that this might be a full Commission discussion. Mr. Cody noted the THA needs to gather the foundational documents and agreements for the formation of the Congregate. He feels they could move forward on some of the issues before these documents are located as background information he has researched can provide guidance. Discussion was held regarding information, in particular with the THA, such as assistance agreements. Mrs. Anderson requested Mr. Geel to work out a financial forecast/budget that would show over the next 2-3 years what the THA would need to do in terms of rent increases, what it would take for the THA to break even and how they would get to the reserve level. This will be addressed after the budget is prepared.

Resident Comments

No Resident Comments.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Mrs. Anderson to adjourn the meeting at 4:31 pm. Seconded by Mrs. Rabinow and approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Crandall
Clerk