

Trumbull Housing Authority – July 28, 2020

Trumbull Housing Authority Virtual Meeting
July 28, 2020
4:30 pm

Commissioner's Present: Chairman Paul Niebuhr, Maureen Bova, Suzanne Donofrio, Jean Rabinow and Laurel Anderson

Also Present: Executive Director Harriet Polansky; Jason Geel, Accountant; Attorney Christopher Cody, Kathleen McGannon, Chief Administrative Officer

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Niebuhr at 4:33 pm followed by Roll Call and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Past Minutes

Motion was made by Mrs. Rabinow to approve the minutes of June 23, 2020 as written. Seconded by Mrs. Anderson and approved unanimously.

Election of Officers

Mr. Niebuhr noted at this annual meeting the Board members will vote on a slate of officers, excluding Board Chairman, for 2020/2021 as per the THA Bylaws. Mr. Niebuhr proposed to refer the matter to the Board, acting as if in committee of the whole, for the purpose of nominating committee members for the 2020/2021 Board slate. Mrs. Donofrio voted to move into committee; seconded by Mrs. Bova and approved unanimously. Referencing the recent election, Mr. Niebuhr proposed the following slate of officers: Vice Chairperson - Suzanne Donofrio. Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Rabinow thought the Commission was discussing a bylaw change which would move the election of officers in line with the naming of the commissioners in December. Discussion. Mr. Cody noted they are currently acting in a committee of the whole to consider nominations. The current bylaws have the election of officers at the annual meeting in July. He recommended they elect officers in July and change the bylaws going forward that would move the elections to December. Discussion. Mrs. Rabinow noted that they cannot amend the bylaws at this meeting because it was not noticed on the agenda. Mr. Niebuhr proposed, since the item was not noticed on the agenda, that they vote in the current members and at another meeting between now and December, discuss changing the bylaws to move elections to December. Mrs. Rabinow announced that this will be her last meeting on the THA Board as a commissioner. She is being sworn in as the Deputy Registrar of the Town of Trumbull and cannot serve in both capacities. She will be sending in her resignation from the THA Commission. The Commission thanked her for her service. Mr. Cody noted the chairman is nominating the existing slate of officers for approval. Mrs. Rabinow requested that her name be dropped. Voting continued.

Vice Chairperson – Suzanne Donofrio. **Vote – Mrs. Anderson – Yes, Mrs. Rabinow – Yes, Mrs. Donofrio – Yes, Mrs. Bova – Yes, Mr. Niebuhr – Yes. Approved unanimously.**

Treasurer – Maureen Bova. **Vote – Mrs. Anderson – Yes, Mrs. Rabinow – Yes, Mrs. Donofrio – Yes, Mrs. Bova – Yes, Mr. Niebuhr – Yes. Approved unanimously.**

Assistant Treasurer – Laurel Anderson. **Vote – Mrs. Anderson – Yes, Mrs. Rabinow – Yes, Mrs. Donofrio – Yes, Mrs. Bova – Yes, Mr. Niebuhr – Yes. Approved unanimously.**

Secretary – this position will remain open at this time.

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Mrs. Rabinow motioned to exit as committee of the whole. Seconded by Mrs. Donofrio and approved unanimously. Motion was made by Mrs. Anderson to adopt the slate of officers for 2020-2021. Seconded by Mrs. Rabinow and approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Mrs. Bova presented the financial narrative for June 30, 2020. From July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, the overall gain of the Housing Authority was \$3,521,512, including all rental income, services income and Capital Grant Funding provided for the redevelopment, rehabilitation and remodeling efforts.

The Capital Grant Funding is \$3,687,811. The Housing Authority had an operating loss, before depreciation, of \$133,987. \$83,304 is attributable to the Village and \$50,683 is attributable to Stern Center.

Stern Village's current month's operating loss, excluding capital grant revenue, was \$28,984. This is primarily due to payout of severance and June having an extra week of payroll. Stern Center's current month's operating loss, excluding capital grant revenue, was \$12,955. This is partially due to severance payout and an extra week of payroll. In addition, the higher than average turnover resulted in lost services revenue and a few bad debts due to residents passing away.

The overall cash position of the Housing Authority, including reserves, is \$1,145,264. This includes \$507,878 reserved for renovation costs at Stern Village. Accounts Payable totaled \$70,537 including construction payables of \$17,592.

Total current assets compared to current payables, not including reserves, are as follows. For the Village, the total current assets were \$91,167 compared to \$116,316 in current payables or a deficit of \$25,149. This deficit includes the \$17,592 in construction payables and other construction payments based on operations due to nearing the conclusion of the construction project. Once the SHSP project is closed out, Stern Village is slated to recoup construction payments.

For the Congregate, the total current assets were \$59,847 compared to \$82,078 in current payables resulting in a deficit of \$22,231. The deficit increased \$3,174 compared to the prior month due to operating results. In addition, the Congregate owes \$322,825 to the Village which has been the average owed during the second half of the year.

Overall, the Housing Authority remains in a good financial position with Congregate sustainability being the primary focus, along with completion of current and future improvement projects.

Discussion. Mrs. Anderson requested that under the debt owed it should state the change each month so they can see the trend. Mr. Geel noted the \$322,825 number is the baseline and moving forward he will present this in table form in addition to other metrics. He discussed the reason for the increase. The yearend numbers are almost complete. Everything has been adjusted. Mrs. Anderson noted that accrued taxes were higher than 2019. Mr. Geel discussed the PILOT noting it was not paid last year causing the increase. The annual payment is approximately \$20,000. Mrs. Anderson requested there be consistency in calling the Village the Village and the Congregate the Congregate to avoid confusion.

Executive Director's Report

Ms. Polansky noted the following:

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1. They will have less vacancies in the Village since apartments are now being rehabbed and are being shown to those on the wait list. The goal for the Congregate is to have 100% occupancy.
2. \$113,500 was received from UI as an energy incentive for the new windows in Stern Village.
3. COVID-19 – everyone is socially distancing and wearing masks. Testing will be done in Stern Village on August 20 and 27. So far there are no cases reported. Ms. Polansky has submitted approximately \$11,000 to FEMA and is waiting for the next steps. There is substantial review of the submissions and she believes they would receive 75% back.
4. A grant was received for \$5,000 from CHFA to be used for food and essential items pantry. It will be located in the Community Room and will be available sometime in August. This will include non-perishable food, laundry items, paper goods and other essential items. One of the vendors donated a food pantry.
5. Ms. Polansky thanked Stop & Shop in Trumbull for allowing them to participate in the Community Bag Program for the month of July. Stern Village will receive a \$1.00 donation from each purchase of a bag. So far they have \$32 in donations.
6. The units in Stern Village have started rehab. They are located in the oldest section of Stern Village and will be remediated for asbestos. Letters have been sent to those residents about the remediation.
7. Paulette, Heather and Ms. Polansky have moved into their new offices in the Community Room. However, the Community Room is not ready for residents. Residents have been asked to call for an appointment. There will be a lock box at the door to the Community Room with the ramp for residents to deposit their rent checks.
8. Prior to COVID-19, Paulette and Ms. Polansky were holding monthly resident meetings. These meetings were providing a platform for residents to discuss any issues as well as offer ideas to improve the Stern Village community. These meetings will resume next month outside by the Community Room. Home Depot has been contacted for a large canopy to accommodate the residents appropriately. Paulette will also hold meetings outside to talk about timely issues and Heather is working on a newsletter.
9. Weekly ice cream trucks are at Stern Village and they are looking to have food trucks also.
10. A concert is planned for outside the Congregate for all the residents. The residents are also made aware of the entertainment schedule at the Town Hall.
11. All residents are able to be outside and meet with friends and relatives on the beautiful campus.

Mr. Niebuhr noted the THS Marching Band has a tent they rent to the public and they provide a crew to set it up and take it down. This could be a possibility for activities.

Mrs. Rabinow questioned what the procedure was when someone passes to obtain the keys to the unit. Ms. Polansky discussed the procedure when residents have family as well as when they do not. This is usually not a problem. Ms. Polansky also reviewed the vacancy list and noted the process. She felt they would be occupied no later than mid-October. Rehab funding was received in December 2019 from Eversource and Ms. Polansky hopes they will know in August about the next round of funding. During the COVID-19 shutdown, no work was done due to the close proximity for the workers in each unit. Ms. Polansky will keep on top the work being done.

Congregate Committee Findings

Mrs. Anderson reviewed the report from the Congregate Committee published with the agenda.

1. Document Retention – Ms. Polansky noted she emailed the original document from the State regarding the Congregate to the Commissioners. All appropriate documents will be scanned so they are available for review.

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2. Long Term Debt & Reserves – non-repayment of debt to the Congregate must be approved by the Commissioners. Mr. Geel discussed the repayment and will provide the appropriate information for review. It was agreed that discussion of repayment should be conducted in the future. There should be a policy in place that covers repayment, surplus cash and reserves. Mrs. Anderson requested a meeting be scheduled to discuss these topics. Mr. Geel noted CHFA is not consistent with determining funding for housing authorities. The metrics change annually.
3. Financial Reporting to Commission – these have been completed.
4. Rent/Services Increases – Ms. Polansky suggested that each December they review and decide whether they need to increase the rent and services or maintain it. CHFA and DOH provide guidelines on how to conduct this review. Discussion. It was agreed to review this in January so that the Commission has December's financials. This would be in time for budget preparation.
5. Vacancies – Congregate vacancies need to be filled with a definite number of days and a 3% vacancy rate. After discussion it was agreed to 45 days and no higher than a 3% vacancy rate. Ms. Polansky will post the vacancy report with the agenda.
6. Operating Expenses – oversight and approval of expenses. Ms. Polansky noted she distributed a copy of the policy to the Commissioners with regard to who reviews and approves invoices. There are several layers of approval for all invoices. Mrs. Anderson requested a report noting accounts that could potentially be over budget. This would be presented to the Treasurer who would address these accounts in real time with specific individuals.
7. Contracted Services – approval of invoices vs budget needs to have a better process. Review and approval of invoices is being addressed. Bids and contract terms were discussed including contract terms of three years with the possibility of two one-year extensions. Mrs. Anderson felt this term was acceptable as long as they are hard core about negotiation of rates. Review of the maintenance staff budget should be conducted to see if there are more savings in that area. Ms. Polansky noted there have already been significant savings. Anything that is outsource is beyond their capabilities such as sewer problems. Ms. Polansky will review this for additional cost savings. Problems with vendors must be placed in writing to provide documentation of issues. Commissioners should be advised of any complaints or issues with vendors. Ms. Polansky will devise a form to document problems. The bid process for formal and informal bids was discussed.
8. Property – The Capital Needs Assessment should be reviewed annually by the Commission to see the status. A new plan will be done when current projects are completed. It was proposed that the Maintenance staff review the plan and provide a document in December to Ms. Polansky as to the status of the projects. It was agreed to review this annually in January so that long term planning can be done. This is also inter-related with the rent increase discussion for budget purposes. This should be on the agenda each January.

Mr. Niebuhr thanked Mrs. Anderson and the Committee for their hard work.

Unfinished Business

No Unfinished Business.

New Business

Dealing with Tenant to Tenant Disputes – discussion was held regarding how disputes among residents are addressed by staff. Ms. Polansky noted that Paulette and Heather currently work to de-escalate any tenant issues mostly through informal meetings. Every resident has a copy of the THA grievance procedure. If a resident files a complaint about another resident and the complaint cannot be resolved amicably, they follow the grievance procedure. There is an informal grievance procedure whereby Paulette and another commissioner meets with the residents. Sometimes there is legal representation

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to mediate the process. The Mary Sherlach Counseling Center provides services for the residents and there is a resource guide available listing local services. Mr. Niebuhr asked if it would be helpful to establish an internal hot line for the residents. Ms. Polansky noted that residents call her all the time for resolution of issues. Mr. Cody noted that the THA is a landlord, not a social service agency and therefore, it does not have the resources to resolve these disputes. Mrs. Rabinow requested that the grievance procedure be amended so that if the resident feels a call to staff is not resolving their issue, that there is a formal agreement with outside services. The tenants would understand the Housing Authority expects them to call an outside source to mediate the grievance rather than to involve the police. Discussion was held regarding pre-termination notices given to both residents involved in disputes. When this is given, the resident can invoke the grievance procedure for a formal or informal meeting. Further discussion was held regarding mediation of tenant disputes as the landlord. It was noted that the THA does provide many services to their residents. Discussion was held regarding an intermediate step before the pre-termination notice. Mr. Cody again stated that staff should not be mediating disputes between residents because it is beyond their abilities. Mr. Niebuhr felt there should be guidelines that all of the staff follow as to when an outside agency should be contacted and what that agency should be. Mr. Cody noted the informal process gets the parties together for resolution. The pre-termination notices gets the formal grievance process started. Ms. Polansky was requested to formalize a policy as proposed by Mr. Niebuhr.

Discussion was held regarding the resolution of grievances between residents and staff. Mr. Niebuhr noted there is a policy already in place but Mrs. Rabinow noted the current policy should be changed with regard to grievances directed towards the Executive Director. This will be placed on the next agenda for discussion.

Resident Comments

No resident comments.

Next Meeting

The next Commission meeting will be held in September.

Adjournment

There being no further business, motion was made by Mrs. Rabinow to adjourn the meeting at 6:35 pm. Seconded by Mrs. Bova and approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Crandall
Clerk