



NORTHAMPTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

FEBRUARY MINUTES
FEBRUARY 26, 2024
Approved on March 18, 2024.

Members of the Northampton Housing Authority met via “Zoom” on Monday, February 26, 2024 at 6:12 P.M.

Chairperson Carney called the meeting to order at 6:12 P.M.

Upon Roll Call, those present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Richards; Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Cancel; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

ALSO PRESENT: Cara Leiper; Sharon Kimble; Jack Redman; Attorney Tom O'Connor; Angel Sadlowski; Amanda Huertas; Danielle McColgan; Jose Cruz; Aime Matos; Deb Walker; Danielle McColgan; Mary Chapman; Alfred Chagnon; David Edwards; Gwen Nabad; John Wyda; Ben Echevarria; Judy O'Kulsy & Cecilia Castiello.

TENANT COMMENT

Salvo resident – concerned for the health, safety and quality of life for people at Salvo.

Salvo resident – re: the Salvo monthly magazine for the last six months we have the same regulations required but it doesn't say when you have time stop downstairs and register it, they should have a date on it. We also need a sign for 10 minute parking, we have a lot of problems with tenant parking. You start something and you don't see it all the way through, you guys don't want to change it – parking stickers – let's do the program all the way.

Hampshire Heights resident – there is on 3/1/24 at Hampshire Heights, Valley Community Development is going to have pizza for residents. They want input from residents on some of their new low income and affordable housing that they are building.

McDonald resident – Wi-Fi for all is pretty important and it did go down today here at McDonald.

Notices are not accessible to all, if you have bad vision they are hard to read. Maybe you could put on the notices that you stick up or check the city site, not much to add or make it larger print, just saying accessibility is a big deal. Notices are not in Spanish, I am curious why as there is a lot of Spanish people on NHA properties. I think it is pretty important the notices be in Spanish as well. You are talking about embracing people and being inclusive, I was kind of disappointed to not see a brown person elected to those major roles. It seems like it would serve you very well to have a brown person there, that's all. Please think about making this accessible to others it's really difficult to get in here.

Salvo resident – thanked the NHA staff for the reasonable accommodation and for moving her because she has been dealing with harassment and bullying that has been happening at Salvo. They solved my problem ASAP. There are people watching what you are doing and who is coming to my door. Funny thing is, people on the Board who is doing this too, you guys should see who you have on the Board, they should stand by example and don't allow that conduct.

Salvo resident – I do agree with what someone said about bullying and harassment I have been the target of racial hatred. Some people get help and some don't. I think that should go across the board and not be selective. When people do come in here I have been part of the Northampton Neighbors, there were people who come in and there were times when they were watched, there are some things about the Neighborhood Watch I wasn't too pleased as going to listen at people's doors, I never participated in that

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but people do watch their neighborhoods. I am not sorry about the Neighborhood Watch, but hopefully we have really good people who are running and being a part of the LTO who are doing that so kudos to them. I just want to say about larger agenda notices. This week I went to McDonald House and I saw it wasn't large, it was a little larger here – is it just one building or is it all across the Board? Actually that is an issue that can be reported to the Attorney General's office, just know there are some people's eyesight that isn't so good. One of the way people get notices in this building is that you go around and put it on people's door. There are some people that have issues of depression and anxiety and having people's footsteps at their door can be triggering for a lot of people. People don't want things put under their doors, email them to us you have our emails, especially doing re-certifications. It is good to have involvement from the staff and Board but on one level it is getting concerning. I was at a Board meeting for the Ward 3 Neighborhood Association and we had someone from the staff who came and supported me. The person said to the community members we are here for the tenants, without the tenants I wouldn't have a job. When I heard it, it made sense, all your decisions, and budget and all the ways you talk to people, let's think about that, without tenants you would not have a job. Let's remember tenants are consumers and we should treat them with dignity and respect, of course it is in the bylaws and the Board should be reflective of that.

STAFF COMMENT

NONE

PUBLIC COMMENT

Judy O'Kulsky – thank you for all your hard work and effort to make life better for tenants.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

There was a discussion about asking questions about the ED report by the Board, public, etc. Attorney O'Connor – I would point out that we are doing exactly what you just hinted at. We are having a discussion about something that is completely off the agenda. We should just move on to the ED report and move on. If this issue is something that commissioners want to discuss, put it on the agenda, but for the time being we are off the track here.

Chairperson Carney – if you want to put it on the agenda then we can discuss it as a Board.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I want to clarify - for the record I did not ask for a point of order I asked for a point of information. It was Commissioner Cancel who said point of order. My point of information is pretty much what he said. I like that we can talk about it, I think the Attorney is correct let's discuss this.

Cara read the ED report with updates.

APPROVAL OF THE JANUARY 2024 MINUTES

Commissioner Brooks put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Vice-Chairperson Richards.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – where are the corrections from the December meeting? I never got those corrections.

Chairperson Carney – those corrections were made at the last meeting along with a couple of other corrections we made – those have been made Director Leiper?

Cara – corrections were made and you approved the minutes with the corrections made. I went back and listened to the audio and put all the corrections in and they were posted on the website as soon as it was done.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – can you tell me why we are now just putting the resident, we have them on attendance but not their name on their particular comments. Can you tell me why, like we have before?

Cara – at the recent NAHRO training we learned that we can say a resident is present but to actually use their name in the description of a comment was advised against by Mass NAHRO.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – why now and there was no notice that we are doing this now because a year ago on a Saturday and the lawyer came for lunch we had that meeting and talked about that. When it continued, we had that meeting last month and we still did it. When I read it I wondered why are we not putting that there, there was no notice and I am looking at my emails and I saw no notice as to what is going on and I see this as being presented here. What I am asking for is clarification. I heard him saying that a year ago, so why are we doing it now?

Commissioner Tarbutton – I withdraw that question but I have another question about a correction.

Cara – tell me the page and paragraph and what you are specifically asking to change.

Chairperson Carney – motion to continue the approval of January minutes until the next meeting to allow for commissioners/tenants to clarify comments that were written that is not exactly what was said.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield put forth the motion to table the approval of January minutes seconded by Commissioner Cancel.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Richards; Commissioner Cancel; Commissioner Jones and Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Brooks.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NONE

NEW BUSINESS

MOTION

Certificate of Substantial and Final Completion of Fish # 214123 – Boiler and Water Heater Replacement at Cahill Apartments.

Commissioner Cancel put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Vice-Chairperson Richards.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Richards; Commissioner Cancel; Commissioner Jones; Commissioner Brooks & Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

VOTING NAY: NONE

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I heard you mention this in the annual plan meeting. Is this the same thing you are talking about that is going on in Cahill?

Cara – the boilers and hot water heaters have already been replaced, this is already a job done through a Fish number with the State. Although it is on the annual plan it has already happened and that is what you heard me say at the annual plan meeting.

MOTION

Positive Recommendation from Executive Director to Recognize Walter Salvo Tenant Organization (WSLTO).

Cara read the Positive Recommendation for Recognition of the Walter Salvo Tenant Organization.

Commissioner Cancel put forth the motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Jones.

VOTING YAY: Chairperson Carney; Vice Chairperson Richards; Commissioner Cancel; Commissioner Jones & Commissioner Brooks.

VOTING NAY: NONE

ABSTAIN: Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Therefore, Chairperson Carney approved the Motion.

Commissioner Cancel – this is really exciting stuff for me. I want to congratulate the Walter Salvo LTO. As Director Leiper mentioned they have been doing a lot of work to really make this a team effort and work with the Housing Authority to improve conditions at Walter Salvo, we all know all of the challenges that Salvo has encountered in the last several years. I am very, very proud of this group for what they are doing and I am really excited for us to, and for them, to be working with the staff to continue to improve things. I grew up in public housing here in Northampton and this is also something new. I have never ever seen the Board formally recognize a Tenant Organization in this manner. I am proud of ourselves, I am proud of the Board, our staff for all their hard work and I look forward to working in collaboration with the Walter Salvo LTO. Thank you and congratulations to you all.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I am not sure I can vote on it even though you know my heart is in for it but if I have to abstain from this it is just because I live at Salvo. I echo Commissioner Cancel, I have been here a decade and I have never seen this happen before. At the Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants convention Christine Devine formerly with DHCD said the Executive Directors are encouraged to have residents form an LTO so you don't have a million things going on, you have one group of people representing their fellow tenants. I think I spoke afterwards – said can we put it in stronger words like incentivize, reward, because it is something that needs to happen, we even have a labor appointee on the Board that it is important to get residents voices heard. I think the group of people who are there are a fine group of people, I don't get to talk to them as much as I would like but I see them working tirelessly in their efforts to bring on community to really represent the LTO very well, so I want to applaud people for that. Question – why did we have to have the Executive Director recommend that? I would like to see the ED less and more of them, not to be involved with what is going on, just like I don't want people being involved with what is going on with this Board. I would like for it to be independent and consult. I am also asking when they will get the operation funds they need because it has been many years and I don't know what happened with the money that would be delegated. I think the tide is with us from the community, from legislatures that this is something that needs to be done as they did from Chelsea Housing Authority they say we need to get more representatives from residents, kudos.

Chairperson Carney – I will ask Attorney O'Connor a clarifying question. The point Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield brought up about being a resident of Salvo. That in no way would disqualify this Commissioner from voting on this tenant organization that I would see. In fact it would behoove the organization to have the resident commissioner from Salvo to be able to vote on this. Is that correct?

Attorney O'Connor – although I don't necessarily disagree with what you are saying, there is a notice to this point exactly. She needs to abstain from voting on this. If she made the motion it probably should be made and seconded by someone other than Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield. I know she is eager to participate in it but there is a notice that is directly at point to this exact issue.

Chairperson Carney – thank you for that clarification.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I withdraw the motion.

Cara then addressed questions from Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield.

Cara – although I have the sole authority to recognize a tenant's organization according to EOHLC this particular organization asked for the Board to recognize them and that is what delayed the process because we had to wait until the next Board meeting. The state requires that we have a budget and everything in 760 CMR 609 be presented in order for recognition to occur. I was trying to gather that information and we kept hitting some stumbling blocks then the EOHLC clarified it but because they had already kind of gone to the Chairperson I figured it was better to do a Positive Recommendation and put it before the Board rather than just going ahead and recognizing them. If this passes they will be funded shortly thereafter.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – clarification – I was in that meeting with Jeff Driscoll and one person said that I am the one that recognizes, I am the LHA and it is like no, that is the Board, we are also the LHA. I am not quite sure I heard what you heard in that. Regardless of all that I am just happy that it is being presented to the Board, I think it is a wonderful thing. I am the one who said that I would abstain because I don't want any problems coming up. So I abstained myself not because I am not with them, because I don't want any of this stuff going on and people saying this and it would somehow deter them. I know what my heart is.

Commissioner Jones – historically for the record we did have a Salvo Tenants Organization before which seems by my recollection, disintegrated into in-fighting between the participants, is one version of it. We did have groups at Forsander and Cahill and there was a group at McDonald House that I don't know if it was an official group but it acted as if it were a tenant's organization giving input at the monthly meetings. I am glad to see this happen and I wish every facility that we take care of would form their own tenant's organization and we go from there.

Commissioner Cancel – I suggest we do it this way moving forward. I noticed we are doing some things differently lately. I think we are moving in the right direction doing things the proper way. The training that I attended as you did on the Board it was explained that the LHA is the local Housing Authority and is the entity that can formerly recognize the LTO's. If at some point that task was delegated to the Executive Director that is different. Moving forward I like this process a lot better.

Chairperson Carney – I can clarify too that in my experience and that goes back to the prior director before Director Leiper, with any tenant's organization it was actually the Executive Director. However, I am fine and I appreciate this came to us with the recommendation from the ED because essentially the tenant's organization will primarily be working on tenant issues with the Director, so it is really important that all that work happened. It is fine for the Board to also be involved in terms of putting our imprimatur on this with an approval, however, we don't want to certainly exclude the ED. In this case here I think it was a case that people were anxious for it to happen, it could have happened sooner but it did have to wait to come to the Board because folks wanted it to have Board approval and it had to come to a regular Board meeting.

Commissioner Brooks – I think it is great that the Salvo Tenant's Organization is recognized by the Director. The previous Salvo Tenant's Organization did dissolve to some degree and back biting and from what I understood from people who lived there, there were two people who were doing the back biting. To see it go forward and be recognized as a new entity is important. I just want people to know that McDonald House always had a Tenant's Organization but in the last 8 or 9 years it sort of dissolved but we are on the way back. We had our first meeting this past week and we will continue to explore a Tenant's Organization here at McDonald House.

Vice-Chairperson Richards – how delighted I am that this is something we wanted to see happen for a long time, more Tenant's Organizations. I am delighted and will be voting to approve this.

Commissioner Tarbutton-Springfield – I want to clarify that there is a difference between a Tenant's Association and a Tenant's Organization and I think it got kind of muddled. Being an LTO that will stop some of the in-fighting because it did get to be problematic at one time. I think residents said they would be better off. They do offer training workshops, they offer a lot of stuff that would be helpful. I think this should be the norm, it is finally, as Commissioner Cancel said, it is getting done and let residents speak about resident's issues and to be part of the process, that really is a good thing. I just got a text from Mass Union and they said the lawyer is wrong, you have a right to vote but I am going to exclude myself from this because I don't want any problems with it. I also want to encourage if we could get our commissioners and staff to look at some of the rules - there is the Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants Organization. If we could look at that too that would be a little clarifying. Western Mass. is trying to be recognized. I know we have one LTO already with Forsander but the rest is my understanding are

Tenant's Associations and I think there is a difference and that is something we can ask for more clarification, what the difference is.

Cara – McDonald House has a recognized Tenant's Organization. They did become defunct due to some passing away of members but I have been working as asked over the last year to help them get back up and going. They are all LTO's. I have been working with Hampshire Heights to get their LTO up and going. Forsander has one, I have spoken with Cahill about having one. Tobin has a recognized LTO but the officers passed away and they haven't had a lot of interest, although I am still working on it. I have spoken with residents at Florence Heights and we are going to get a Tenant's Organization up and going. The confusion with this one is that Mass Union had advised the Tenant's Organization that they did not need to provide a budget in order to be recognized, that it was fine to go to the Chair and really what DHCD, because I have to answer to them, I emailed them with specific questions on when the time clock starts, does a budget need to be submitted, and the by-laws, etc. and they responded in the affirmative. That is what kind of took some time, although there were a lot of gossip happening where they were saying I didn't want to recognize them, somebody even said they tried to get me to do it and I wouldn't, that was not factual. It was getting the proper information in order to follow the 760 CMR which I now have and I am happy to say I am ready to recognize them and I hope the Board gives that.

Chairperson Carney – this does beg the question for us as commissioners or probably our governance and policy committee on whether we do want to put it in our own by-laws and I am not sure that we can require, I think what we are hearing is the State does say the ED may approve a Tenant's Organization, so we need to get clarification if this Board is interested in putting our own stamp on to the approval of a Tenant's Organization. Whether we actually institute that as a policy and require all Tenant Organizations to go not only through the Director, but also through the Board. That is something we could consider sending to the governance and policy committee to consider and then making that a policy that we require all Tenant Organizations to seek approval not only through the Executive Director, but also through the Board of Directors, that is for the future.

Vice-Chairperson Richards put forth the motion to adjourn the February meeting at 7:25 p.m. seconded by Commissioner Brooks.