

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING
- OPEN SESSION -
OF THE SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY
HELD ON MAY 16, 2017

The members of the Springfield Housing Authority met in Open Session at the Conference Room of the Springfield Housing Authority at 60 Congress St., Springfield, Massachusetts at 4:30 PM on May 16, 2017.

A copy of the Notice of Meeting, pursuant to Section 23B of Chapter 39 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, with the Certificate as to Service of the Notice, was ordered spread upon the minutes of the meeting and filed for records.

NOTICE OF MEETING

Notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 23B of Chapter 39 of the Massachusetts Laws, as amended, that a regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Springfield Housing Authority will be held at 4:30 PM on Tuesday, May 16, 2017 in the Conference Room of the Springfield Housing Authority at 60 Congress Street, Springfield, MA 01104.

SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY
/s/William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director
May 12, 2017

CERTIFICATE AS TO SERVICE OF THE NOTICE OF MEETING

I, William H. Abrashkin, the duly appointed and qualified Secretary of the Springfield Housing Authority, do hereby certify that on May 12, 2017 I filed in the manner provided by Section 23B, Chapter 39 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, with the Clerk of the City of Springfield, Massachusetts, a Notice of Meeting of which the foregoing is a true and correct copy.

Attest:



William H. Abrashkin/Executive Director/
Secretary to the Board

Chairman Thomas called the meeting to order at 4:31 PM, and those present upon roll call were as follows:

PRESENT
Thomas Labonte
Jessica Quinonez
Angela Robles
Willie Thomas

ABSENT
Raymond Warren

ALSO PRESENT
William Abrashkin
Blanca Berríos (arrived at 4:37 pm)
Michelle Booth

Priscila Chesky, Lyon & Fitzpatrick
Fidan Gousseynoff
John Healy
JoAnn White

The Board reviewed the Minutes of April 9, 2017. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Quinonez, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Minutes of April 9, 2017.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to approve the FYE 3/3/17 Schedule of All Positions and Compensation. Finance Director JoAnn White provided brief information on the form that is known as Top 5 form. Answering Chairman Thomas's question Ms. White explained why wages for different Deputies are allocated differently. She also informed that Real Estate developer's position will be eliminated as Sean Cahillane will be retiring in the end of May. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the attached Fiscal Year-End Schedule of All Positions and Compensation for SHA's fiscal year ending March 31, 2017 so that it can be submitted to DHCD.

Attachment 1 - FYE Schedule of All Positions & Compensation

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to award a contract for an investment grade energy audit with the intent to develop Energy Savings Contract to Siemens. John Healy reminded that back in 2015 the Board approved hiring an Energy Consultant who assisted with developing RFP for ESCO which was approved by HUD. Five responses were received, two of those provided the best bids and after the staff and the consultants reviewed many materials provided for the bids it was determined that Siemens will be the best option. The next phase, after getting the Board's approval, is to develop energy savings measures that would relieve capital funds, e.g. to preserve water, to make boilers and laundry rooms more efficient. In response to Chairman Thomas's question Mr. Healy explained that there is no dollar amount in the Contract yet and once Siemens completes its detailed audit, terms of the Contract will be negotiated and brought back to the Board.

Mr. Healy stated that the consultant and a representative of Siemens will be invited to the Board meeting to provide more information and answer questions. Commissioner Labonte commented that eventually there will be some costs since the services provided by the vendor cannot be covered by energy savings only. Mr. Healy responded that once the Contract terms are finalized it will cover all the costs. Answering Chairman Thomas's question John Healy explained that if, after the audit, the SHA decides not to proceed with the Contract, there won't be any obligations.

Blanca Berrios entered the Conference Room at 4:37 pm.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Robles, seconded by Commissioner Quinonez it was unanimously

VOTED: award a contract for an investment grade energy audit (IGEA) with the intent to develop Energy Savings Contract to Siemens of Canton, MA as the most responsive bidder. Length and terms of the contract to be negotiated and brought back to the Board.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to approve the SHA Section Eight Management Assessment Certification for FYE 3/3/17. Michelle Booth introduced Rental Assistance Director Blanca Berrios and apologized for submitting the materials for SEMAP certification late. She explained that the agency is required to pull out and audit randomly selected files and the delay was caused by trouble with locating one of the participants file folder due to changing the spelling of her last name. In response to Chairman Thomas's question Ms. Booth explained that files to be reviewed are randomly selected by the IT Department based on a special formula and there is different number of files to be reviewed for different indicators.

Michelle Booth reminded the Board that the assessment contains 14 indicators, the 1st seven are self-certified but will be audited by HUD, and the rest seven are pulled out from the PIC system.

Ms. Booth reported that this year there have been some improvements in one area where the agency had problems last year but some areas still had shortcomings which did not allows to gain full points.

Ms. Booth provided information on Indicator Number 1 - Selection from the Waiting List - and explained that even though no new people have been pulled out the Waiting List in the last 12 months, some new vouchers have been issued to the participants of programs (like CHESS or Chronically Homeless) who successfully completed a one year program. Ms. Booth reminded that last year the SHA lost all points on the Second Indicator - Rent Reasonableness - but this year the agency scored 15 points. In total, 25 files were pulled out and only 2 failed to have reasonable rent. Further research showed that the errors in those two files occurred right after the new Go Section 8 software was installed and was new to the staff. On the Indicator 3 - Determination of adjusted income - 40 files were reviewed and 3 contained errors like incorrect or incomplete third party verifications, rent calculation, lack of proper notices to landlords. The agency scored 92.5% on this indicator.

For Indicator 5 - HQS Quality Control Inspections - the agency hired an outside inspector to do sampling of inspections and it was done twice last year.

John Healy left the Conference Room at 4:46 pm.

In Indicator #6, the SHA pulled a random sample of failed inspections to determine if HQS standards were enforced which means that one of the following measures must be undertaken within 30 days of a failed inspection - re-inspect the unit to make sure the landlord had corrected the deficiencies or to enter into an agreement with the landlord for an extension of time to repair or to abate a part or all of the Housing Assistance Payment for the unit.

In reviewing the random sample of failed inspections it was found that the SHA enforced HQS within 30 days of the 1st inspection for only 66% of samples. Ms. Booth stated that the agency lost all points for this indicator last year and this year due to not documenting properly our response to emergency deficiencies (that must be corrected within 24 hour) or if an agreement was reached with landlords to give an extension for repairs. She explained that most landlords assume that they have 30 days to repair the deficiencies so the staff has to work with them to educate that 30 days is given to making repairs and re-inspecting the unit.

John Healy returned to the Conference Room at 4:49 pm.

Michelle Booth concluded her review by informing the Board that the agency scored 89% which makes it a Standard Performer.

Blanca Berrios provided information on the Improvement Plan which will include measures like training not only the inspectors but also the program clerks who have to monitor that the agency is in compliance with HQS and bring it to the management's attention if there are any problems; educate landlords about their responsibility to correct deficiencies; eliminate practices allowing landlords to have multiple re-inspections and extensions; better documenting if the agency enters into an agreement with landlords; develop and utilize improved tools for tracking failed inspections; conduct weekly meetings with inspectors and program clerks to more closely monitor HQS enforcement. Ms. Berrios emphasized the importance of developing more efficient communication with landlords by contacting them via email instead of mail that can be delivered with delays.

Michelle Booth added that in order to provide better training and increase efficiency and performance, it was decided to make some changes to the position of the Section 8 auditor. Hiring for this position is going on now and apart from auditing the files, the new auditor will also be responsible for training the staff to make sure all employees are familiar and in compliance with the regulations. Ms. Booth and Ms. Berrios shared their opinion that SEMAP Certification is a helpful tool to determine what needs to be done to better manage the program.

Judge Abrashkin stated that despite not scoring best points the Section 8 program is working well, providing housing assistance to many households and business to hundreds of landlords. Blanca Berrios added that HUD has recently trusted more vouchers to the agency.

Answering Chairman Thomas's question Ms. Berrios said that the RAO manages about 2900 federal vouchers and 288 MRVP vouchers. Judge Abrashkin indicated that the SHA provides assistance to over 5,000 families and serves about 10% of the City's population.

Executive Director William Abrashkin started his report by informing the Board that father of Mary Ellen Lowney's father passed away and information on funeral arrangements can be provided upon request.

Judge Abrashkin informed the Board that DHCD has updated many Regulations and the link to new Regulations will be provided to the Board members. He also stated that a meeting with Deputies Executive Director, Human Resources Manager and Executive Department manager is being scheduled to review this matter.

The Executive Director continued his report by informing the Board that Contract with Lyon & Fitzpatrick has been amended and will be brought to the Board's review at the next meeting. The revision will allow Springfield Housing Authority to save lots of money. He expressed his gratitude to Attorney Chesky for providing such a great cost saving measure.

Judge Abrashkin informed that Sean Cahillane is retiring this month and Wallace Kisiel will be retiring next month.

By Judge Abrashkin's request Michelle Booth and John Healy provided a brief update on upgrading the Rental Assistance Office. They informed that cost estimates from the architect are expected next week. Mr. Abrashkin indicated that it is planned to use Section 8 administrative reserves and part of the Capital Fund because the office is located within one of the agency's federal developments.

Michelle Booth also provided an update on Marble Street. She stated that 1st vouchers were issued and will be handed to the participants on 5/24/17. It is expected that by 9/2/17 the building will be vacated.

Judge Abrashkin finished his report by informing the Board that community group called Arise for Social Justice continues contacting residents at Gentile to inform that their subsidy can be at risk because the Contract between DHCD and SHA is expiring. He said that he had met with representatives of the group and with the tenants to assure that the Contract will be renewed and the tenants will not be displaced or lose their subsidy however the group insisted on holding a meeting with tenants at William Street which is scheduled for 5/17/17.

Chairman Thomas asked for the Board's consideration to move into Executive Session and to reconvene in Open Session as per Attorney Chesky's recommendation.

John Healy, JoAnn White, Michelle Booth and Blanca Berrios left the Conference Room at 4:45 pm.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Quinonez, it was by a roll call vote (Thomas - Aye, Labonte - Aye, Quinonez - Aye, Robles - Aye) unanimously

VOTED: To enter into Executive Session to conduct strategy session in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel and to reconvene in Open Session.


The Board reconvened in Open Session at 6:22 pm. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Quinonez, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve short-term extension to Judge Abrashkin's Agreement to from June 1, 2017 - July 31, 2017. All of the terms of Mr. Abrashkin's current contract (which expires on May 31, 2017) remain the same except that he will be an employee at-will under the terms of the Extension.

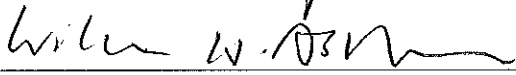
There being no further business to come before the members of the Springfield Housing Authority Board, upon a motion made by Commissioner Robles, seconded by Commissioner Labonte, it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn the Open Session of a Regular Meeting of the Springfield Housing Authority at 6:24 PM.

ATTEST:



Willie Thomas, Chairman



William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director