

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING
- OPEN SESSION -
OF THE SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY
HELD ON JULY 11, 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 July 11, 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 special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Springfield Housing Authority will be held at 4:30 PM on Tuesday, July 11, 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
July 7, 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 July 7, 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 4:30 PM, and those present upon roll call were as follows:

PRESENT

Thomas Labonte
Jessica Quinonez
Angela Robles
Willie Thomas
Raymond Warren

ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT

William Abrashkin
Michelle Booth
Nicole Contois
Howard Coro

Stephen Ethier
John Healy

The Board reviewed the Minutes of June 20, 2017. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Minutes of June 20, 2017.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to award a contract for parking lot replacement at Harry Hogan development. Howard Coro indicated that 4 contractors visited the site and 4 companies submitted their bids for this project funded by DHCD. He provided brief information about the project explaining that it includes repairing sidewalks, installing a handicap accessible ramp, replacing parking lot, repairing cracks and other damage caused by storm drain in the middle of the lot. Mr. Coro explained that the two large maple trees and stumps, growing into sidewalks and causing its rising, will be removed to prevent new cracks and eliminate safety hazard. Answering Chairman Thomas's question Mr. Coro stated that the contractor will be issued a Notice to Proceed on August 15 and it is anticipated that the project will be completed within 30 days after that.

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

VOTED: To award a contract to the lowest responsible and responsive bidder, American Concrete & Asphalt, Monson, MA in the amount of forty two thousand dollars (\$42,000.00) for 138 St. James Avenue Harry Hogan Development 689-2 utilizing the funds from Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) No.281111; appoint Executive Director William H. Abrashkin as the Contracting Officer authorizing him to execute the contract.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to approve bid rejection and contract award for Housing Quality Inspection Services. John Healy stated that 6 vendors submitted their bids and the lowest bidder was Housing Authority Inspection Group however its bid had to be rejected for not meeting the criteria - the company was in business for only 3 years while the bid required at least 5 years of experience. Mr. Healy also explained that HAIG was an one man operation and the SHA had concerns that it would not be able to meet SHA needs since there are too many Section 8 vouchers. It was decided to award this contract to the second lowest bidder - Quality Assurance Inspections, Inc. They have been in business for over 10 years and their references came back good. The SHA staff had held a meeting with them to make sure they understand the scope of work which includes conducting inspections for all SHA vouchers.

Answering Chairman Thomas's question if the current staff's wages were budgeted for FY17, Michelle Booth explained that wages of three inspectors and one inspection clerk were included to the budget and two inspectors left in early January. At that time the SHA knew about serious budget problems at the Section 8 Department with a projected deficit of \$300,000 so the staff started looking for more cost saving measures including hiring

an outside contractor to perform inspections. Some local and regional housing authorities who had switched to hiring outside contractors were contacted and provided positive feedback about using outside vendors for their Section 8 inspections. Mike Petro also confirmed that many of his clients who use contractors to conduct inspections were able to save a lot of money for their agencies. The SHA management team brought the Union representatives to advise about significant cuts to the administrative fees for the HCV program and inform about their plan on closing the deficit through contracting for Section 8 inspections. Ms. Booth explained that the current cost for scheduling, conducting and monitoring inspections with SHA staff totals \$247,000 annually and hiring a contractor will save over \$100,000 to the agency. Two employees will be offered existing vacant position at the SHA (maintenance, program specialist or receptionist) at their current rate of pay or may elect to get laid off. Answering Chairman Thomas's question Ms. Booth stated that the contract includes conducting all annual, general complaint, initial inspections and re-inspections. Blanca [Berrios, the Director of RAO] and Anna [Mitkevicius, her assistant] will be trained to conduct QA inspections if a voucher holder submits a complaint about quality of the inspection conducted by the vendor.

Answering Judge Abrashkin's question John Healy indicated that the SHA can terminate the contract any time.

In response to Commissioner Warren's inquiry John Healy confirmed that the company whose bid was rejected has been performing inspections for the SHA to fill in after two inspectors left the agency. Mr. Healy explained that even though their bid was for less than \$25,000 than the one from Quality Assurance Inspections, Inc., the SHA staff was concerned that Housing Authority Inspection Group did not have enough experience in handling so many inspections and processing all the paperwork up to HUD standards. Michelle Booth added that as being an one man operation, HAIG does not have enough infrastructure to conduct all the inspections, deal with scheduling and other clerical work so awarding them this contract could have put more pressure on the STA staff. Ms. Booth also indicated that QAI, Inc. which will be hiring locally for the SHA contract, will be potentially providing services on Saturdays thus satisfying requests from many voucher holders working on week-days.

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

VOTED: To reject the lowest bidder, Housing Authority Inspection Group, for being non-responsive to the criteria set forth in the IFB; award a one (1) year contract, with options for two additional years to be renewed annually, pending funding availability, to Quality Assurance Inspections, Inc. of 1990 North Eagle Chase Drive Hernando, Florida for housing quality inspection services. This contract will be paid for utilizing funds from Section 8 budget; appoint Executive Director, William H. Abrashkin as the contracting officer authorizing him to execute the contract.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation for contract award for site work project at Riverview Apartments. John Healy provided description of the project that includes replacing all eight parking lots, catch

basins, drainage system, lot expansion, sidewalk repair and replacement. Mr. Healy explained that the funds will come out of FY16 Capital Fund Plan. He indicated that due to large scope of work and high cost of the project the SHA had to opt for Alternate 1. The items that were included to three other Alternates do not require immediate attention. Answering Commissioner Warren's question Mr. Healy stated that after this project there will be only \$500,000 left in the FY16 CFP but there are still funds left in CFP for FY14 and FY15 - most of those funds will be spent on ADA work at Ashley Gerrish. Commissioner Warren requested an update on the Capital Funds balance to be provided by next Board meeting.

In response to Judge Abrashkin's comment that Riverview Apartments lots do not look too bad, John Healy explained that most of the problems the agency has to deal with is not visible - there are sink holes, old catch basins, tripping hazards, plus other items that needed to be fixed based on recent ADA assessments. He added that the project also includes building new handicap accessible ramps at Riverview in addition to those that were recently installed at low-rise buildings. Answering Chairman Thomas's question Mr. Healy stated that SHA has three years to obligate its Capital Funds.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Labonte, it was unanimously

VOTED: to award a contract to American Concrete and Asphalt Inc. of 127 Upper Hampden Road, Monson, MA 01057 in the amount of the base bid plus alternate #1 for a total of one million four hundred ninety nine thousand eight hundred dollars (\$1,499,800.00), contract will be paid out of the Capital Fund; appoint Executive Director, William H. Abrashkin as the contracting officer authorizing him to execute the contract.

The IT Director Stephen Ethier provided an update on the CDBG Grant that funded purchasing 60 new computers to be used at the 4 SHA computer labs - two existing labs at Sullivan and Riverview and two new labs at Duggan and Robinson Gardens. Mr. Ethier explained that the old computers with 10 plus years old software like Windows XP could not be refurbished and needed to get replaced. Mr. Ethier stated that it was a great learning experience for his staff to work on this project. In response to Judge Abrashkin's question he indicated that the SHA had applied for a little bit less than \$24,000 so in addition to the \$20,000 awarded by the City, some SHA funds from the 3 amps were used. In response to Commissioner Warren's question Mr. Ethier provided information about the security plan for new computers.

Commissioner Robles inquired how accessible the labs are for other residents aside from TRS program participants. Stephen Ethier explained that kids use the labs for after school program, and under the guidance of [ESOL/ Computer Instructor] Nathan [Bench] many adults use computer labs for job search, resume writing, Internet surfing and other useful activities. Nathan Bench holds regular classes for SHA residents. Judge Abrashkin expressed his appreciation to the IT department for excellent planning, coordinating and execution of the project.

Judge Abrashkin indicated that since the Board has to enter into discussion regarding searching new executive director, the only item on his report will be an update on the Educare program. Mr. Abrashkin reported that he had been approached by Jack Dill, a prominent figure in regional real estate, who is very devoted to early education and interested in Talk/Read/Succeed! Program. Mr. Dill is interested in bringing Educare to Springfield. Educare is a joint project involving a number of collaborators in the city, including Davis Foundation, the Education Department, the Springfield College and there are many organizations and people interested in this project including the Governor. It will be the 1st of its kind in the Massachusetts and there are 15-20 Educare projects around the country. The project will involve construction of a brand new early education facility, adjacent to the new Brookings school, and it will serve kids from birth. The facility will also serve as a best practices lab, thus creating opportunities to attract a lot of opportunities for study and research. Educare is interested in building an early education facility at Eastern Avenue where the SHA has two sites, a location where 3 SHA duplexes were severely damaged by tornado in 2011. The SHA is in the process of discussing with DHCD whether it would give a permission to dispose the sites to the City.

Judge Abrashkin reminded the Board that in accordance with DHCD requirements, the SHA had been in the process of preparing special RFP that would give a priority to a qualified bidder willing to build affordable housing on Eastern Avenue - that developer would be able to buy the site for only \$2 (\$1 for each site). If there would not be any affordable housing developers interested in acquiring the property, the SHA will be allowed to sell it for fair market value. Mr. Abrashkin explained that just before the RFP was ready to be issued it was decided to hold on until a response from DHCD regarding Educare proposal is received.

Answering Commissioner Robles's question Judge Abrashkin stated that the best way to dispose the property will be if the City takes it by eminent domain for a fair market value (about \$40,000 per site) and subsequently transfers it to Educare. In response to Commissioner Warren's question Mr. Abrashkin indicated that the lots are small and it is not possible to build more than 3 duplexes with 4-6 units in there so there are probably will not be many affordable housing developers interested in buying the property.

Executive Director Abrashkin stated that Educare project is only at its preliminary stage and more information will be provided to the Board later.

The Board reviewed a letter from Sarah Glassman, former Associate Director of DHCD with regards to Judge Abrashkin's retirement plan. Judge Abrashkin suggested the 1st step to respond to DHCD would be asking Attorney Chesky to send DHCD a copy of his At Will Agreement and also inform DHCD that the Board has been distributed a copy of the DHCD Guidelines for Executive Director Contract.

Chairman Thomas supported the suggested plan. Commissioner Warren indicated that apart from the DHCD Guidelines for Executive Director Contract, more documents need to be reviewed, including PHN-2016-41 (DHCD Guidelines for Local Housing Authorities Hiring Executive Director) and Notice 2015-17 (Executive Director Salary and Qualification Schedule). Mr. Warren

expressed his concern about certain strict rules that could complicate the process of searching a qualified executive director, specifically - that a new ED may only have a contract for one year with an option for extension. Mr. Warren indicated that this term may suppress interest to the job of many candidates. Judge Abrashkin commented that even though 75% of the SHA properties and programs are federal and DHCD funds only a small portion of the ED salary and a few state SHA programs, the SHA still has to comply with DHCD guidelines regarding hiring executive director. Commissioner Warren also expressed his concern that DHCD might not realize that hiring new Executive Director may be a long and complicated the process, involving many people and requiring so much effort and time.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Labonte it was unanimously

VOTED: to authorize Attorney Chesky to respond to DHCD by 1) including a copy of the At Will Agreement; 2) pointing out that the Springfield Housing Authority will have full-time executive director coverage and that search process for new executive director has commenced; 3) informing that DHCD guidelines have been distributed to the Board members and discussion of the steps to be undertaken has begun

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

VOTED: to enter into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining and return to Open Session.

The Board reconvened in Open Session at 6:03 pm. The Board entered into discussion regarding commencing the process of searching new Executive Director. Chairman Thomas shared information about how his former employer, West Springfield Housing Authority, used a consultant to hire their Executive Director. The consultant did all the solicitation, conducted preliminary interviewing, checked candidates' references and referred a number of candidates to the Board. Mr. Thomas spoke about placing an ad in publications of PHADA, NAHRO, a possibility of establishing a committee to review the resumes and conducting interviews and emphasized the importance of attracting tenants and including current SHA staff to the selection process. Chairman Thomas also mentioned that even though the cost of consultant services might be less than the threshold requiring procurement, it still would be helpful to issue an RFP to attract more candidates and determine the requirements and needs of the agency.

Commissioner Warren suggested contacting NAHRO or Mass NAHRO to talk to somebody who has an experience in hiring new executive directors, explain the situation, get an idea about how much approximately consultant services might cost. Chairman Thomas volunteered to contact Mass NAHRO.

Commissioner Warren emphasized the importance of ensuring that if the SHA hires a consultant, he or she understands clearly what the SHA needs are. He indicated that most consultants know what DHCD requirements with regards to hiring a new director are, however it might not necessary reflect what the Board would like to see in a new director, for example, having an

experience as a manager in public housing would be a big plus but having this requirement might preclude some good candidates from applying for the position. Mr. Warren stated that the Board shall be open to people who have never managed public housing if they have understanding of how it works and possess other important skills. He indicated that Judge Abrashkin had never worked as a public housing manager when he applied for his current job but has been an excellent executive director for the last 9 years.

Answering Commissioner Labonte's question Judge Abrashkin stated that money for hiring a consultant will come from COCC. Mr. Labonte emphasized the importance of keeping expenditures for hiring a new director under strict control.

Executive Director Abrashkin said that resumes play an important role in hiring new employees, but more attention shall be paid to the personality of candidates and to what their mission is. He stated that the right person can learn a lot. He stated that one the most important first steps shall be determining what the Board is expecting from a new ED and making a list of tasks. He expressed his regret that he has not been able to make enough efforts to develop deeper relationship with legislature delegations or to spend more time on trying to implement mixed housing development projects - he suggested including these tasks to the scope of work. Chairman Thomas requested Judge Abrashkin to provide information about his vision of the future of SHA from his prospective. Mr. Abrashkin agreed to do it and mentioned that the Annual Report will be provided to the Board in a new format this year and it will be a good start in this process.

Judge Abrashkin reminded the Board that the next Board meeting will be held in September.

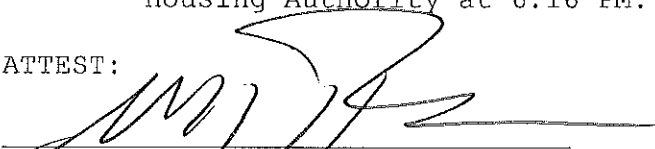
Commissioner Robles stated that it is substantial that new executive director shall not only be a good operational manager but also a leader in social services.

Commissioner Warren added that the Board shall determine how the SHA staff will be involved and suggested including Human Resources Director Kathy Hardy to the process of selecting a new director.

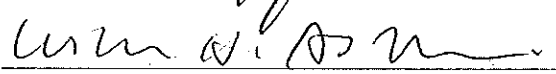
There being no further business to come before the members of the Springfield Housing Authority Board, upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles, it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn the Open Session of a Special Meeting of the Springfield Housing Authority at 6:16 PM.

ATTEST:



Willie Thomas, Chairman



William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director

