

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING
- OPEN SESSION -
OF THE SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY
HELD ON MAY 21, 2018

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 21, 2018.

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 Monday, May 21, 2018 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 17, 2018

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 17, 2018 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

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
Nicole Contois
Fidan Gousseynoff
Denise Jordan
Kathy Hardy
John Healy
Robert Sacco, Lyon & Fitzpatrick
JoAnn White

Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to enter into Executive Session to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was by a roll call vote (Thomas - Aye, Labonte - Aye, Quinonez - Aye, Robles - Aye, Warren - Aye) unanimously

VOTED: to enter into Executive Session to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel and to reconvene in Open Session.

The Board reconvened in Open Session at 4:48 pm.

The Board reviewed the Minutes of April 17, 2018. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Minutes of April 17, 2018.

The Board reviewed the Minutes of April 30, 2018. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Warren it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Minutes of April 30, 2018.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to approve updated Employee Handbook. Kathy Hardy explained that the updates are a result of work conducted by her, the Deputies and two staff members of the Employers Association who spent over 6 months reviewing the entire handbook line by line to make sure it is consistent with the practice. She provided brief information on the changes which include eliminating definition of a seasonal temporary employee, a force account employee and an exempt employee (since the agency does not have these positions anymore); deleting specific blood alcohol level; eliminating flexible work schedule which is not practiced; deleting travel policy (since it's a function of the Accounting Department); deleting language about Deputy Executive Directors having passwords to all employee accounts (since it is a function of the IT Department). It was also decided to provide not a full list but only a few examples of violations in the Standards of Conduct section of the Handbook. The updates in the Payroll Procedures part of the Compensation and Benefits section of the Handbook will reflect the switch from paper statements to online payroll system.

Ms. Hardy expressed gratitude to Commissioner Warren for his input into the Vacancies part of the Handbook. She noted that the new language will indicate that the Executive Director will not only be reviewing but also approving the recommendation for a management position.

Chairman Thomas indicated that the Board may consider tabling this item in case the newly appointed Executive Director would like to have some input.

Commissioner Warren questioned whether the Executive Director is involved into hiring foremen and for non-managerial positions and what in general the process of hiring a new foreman is comprised of. Kathy Hardy and Nicole Contois explained that when the position of foreman becomes open, it first gets posted internally and such practice is dictated by the union contract not the Employee Handbook. The Executive Director is usually not involved in hiring for all vacancies except for management positions but he is informed

about all vacancies - when a position is posted, all managers including Judge Abrashkin receive a notice. Ms. Hardy explained that hiring is always a collaboration between the HR Manager, Deputy Executive Director and the hiring department manager.

Chairman Thomas questioned whether the Executive Director shall be more involved into hiring process. Judge Abrashkin indicated that with over 150 employees it is hard to participate in the process of hiring for non-managerial positions. He suggested adding some language for the 4th paragraph of the Section C (Changes in Status of Employment) so that it will be as follows: "Director of Human Resources and Equal Opportunity Compliance hiring manager and deputy director shall conduct interviews and select candidates in consultation with the ED to the extent to which the ED determines".

Commissioner Labonte commented that the Employee Handbook does not contain any rules for a situation like the one occurred at the previous Board meeting which was attended by many employees. Mr. Labonte expressed his concern that since the meeting was held during normal business hours, the attending employees could not complete their work for that day. He recommended considering including some language about limiting a number of people from the same department or sending a representative. Ms. Contois stated that there is no protocol for this kind of situations since most Board meetings are held after business hours and for that day the management team reached out to the counsel and it was recommended that the employees should be granted a permission to attend. Chairman Thomas welcomed the management's decision to allow staff members to attend the Meeting.

In response to Commissioner Quinonez's question about eliminating flexible schedules Ms. Hardy responded that requests for having a flexible schedule for a limited period of time will be reviewed case by case.

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

VOTED: to adopt Resolution #9717 to approve the SHA Employee Handbook.

Executive Director Abrashkin thanked Kathy Hardy for all her hard work on updating the Handbook.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to adopt the SHA Affirmative Action Plan. Ms. Hardy explained that the plan was composed with the assistance from the Employers Association which had been provided with census data on the staff and the applicants (the data on applicants became available thanks to a new applicant tracking software). All the data as well as census data of the City of Springfield was analyzed and the assessment shows that there is a good representation (over 50%) of minorities and women at the SHA. There are 3 departments that are underrepresented however those are small departments (for example, only two people work for Warehouse) and no further action is recommended. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Quinonez it was unanimously

VOTED: to adopt Resolution #9718 to adopt 2018 Affirmative Action Plan.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to approve changes to Union Contracts for all units. Kathy Hardy indicated that the negotiation process was great and it took only three sessions to come to an agreement with the Union. The Union representatives recognized that there was less funding and

the maximum salary increase the management could offer them was 3%. Ms. Hardy explained that one of the major issues raised by the management was the discrepancy in salaries of the maintenance employees (mostly males) and the clerical staff (mainly female clerks at the Section 8 Department). The Union agreed to the terms offered by the management in order to correct the inequities - a majority of the employees received a 2.25% increase with the exception of some clerks who received increases up to 7%. Judge Abrashkin reminded that last year the gap started closing with fixed amount raises versus percentage raises. In response to Chairman Thomas Ms. Hardy explained what is "a red circle employee" and why Mechanic III employees salaries will remain the same. Commissioner Labonte inquired whether the Union leaders have been involved into budget discussions and Ms. Contois indicated that normally only the managers and foremen are a part of the team working on the budget. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to adopt Resolution #9719 to approve changes and execute the contracts with AFSCME, AFL-CIO, State Council 93, Local #3521, Units A, B, C & D

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to approve the SEMAP Certification for FYE 3/31/18. Nicole Contois explained that every year after the completion of fiscal year each Housing Authority has 60 days to look at different indicators and do the assessment of the Section 8 program. The SEMAP Certification was prepared by the RAO Director Blanca Berrios and the SHA scored 115 points out of 140 and it is expected that the agency once again will receive a standard performer status. Ms. Contois informed that there were 3 indicators on which the RAO did not score any points - two were the same as last year and one was new - which is a reflection of certain staff errors, lack of training and certain issues with the new inspection program. Ms. Contois explained that SEMAP is a self-assessment system however it gets reviewed every year by the auditors.

Commissioner Warren inquired whether the RAO is properly organized, staffed and managed and Nicole Contois responded that it is still facing difficulties and she, the HR Manager and Judge Abrashkin have been spending many hours in the last months to address these difficulties and most likely the staff will come with some recommendation how to best organize this department. Judge Abrashkin added that there is work in progress and the Department is operating normally though it is not where it should be. Referring to previous discussions Commissioner Warren questioned whether an issue with handling phone calls more efficiently has been addressed and John Healy responded that he and Stephen Ethier are currently working on this, collecting information on the cost and determining the scope of services.

Chairman Thomas requested to include an update on the Section 8 to the next meeting's agenda. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to adopt Resolution #9720 to approve the SEMAP Certification for FYE 3/31/18.

Kathy Hardy left the Conference Room at 5:28 pm.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to award a contract to Yardi Systems for a new software system. John Healy explained that request for proposals was sent to 6 vendors and 3 proposals were received. A steering

committee comprising of 12 people representing maintenance, accounting, property management, and purchasing, attended presentations held by each company and made their recommendation to the evaluation committee. The committee members looked at different aspects of each supplier responses, reviewed all pros and cons and came to a conclusion that Yardi offered the best proposal to meet the needs of the agency. Mr. Healy explained that the cost was not a driving force in making a decision and the organization was looking into a software that would provide most efficiency and will have an ability to generate reports, extract data, save time, give an opportunity to use mobile devices and make the staff's job easier. Mr. Healy indicated that the software is web-based, hosted by Yardi and they will be able to convert the data from old system to the new one. Mr. Healy explained that currently the agency is using two software systems - Emphasis for public housing and Elite for the Section 8 and with Yardi there will be one system. John Healy also indicated that part from the benefits of Yardi software, there were other factors that were in favor of choosing that vendor, specifically - one of other suppliers, Tenmast was recently purchased by another company and it was a little bit risky to deal with a vendor that goes through a transition period and another supplier - Emphasys does not have a very good customer service and the presentation of that company was pretty weak.

Answering Chairman Thomas's question Mr. Healy provided an approximate time frame for the project. He explained that there will be a few planning meetings in summer and the implementation phase might take up to 12 months and will include collecting information from each departments on the staff functions, determining the workflow, training, converting the data etc.

Commissioner Robles inquired about the equipment and John Healy indicated that there has not been a discussion yet on the plan to purchase new tablets or other devices but some old equipment will not be needed anymore. Commissioner Labonte questioned whether the new software will meet all the needs and will be a state of the art system or just a software that is much better than the one the SHA has been using for decades. John Healy explained that according to the feedback he received from Stephen Ethier and Mike Petro, the software is very reliable and efficient and has been used all around the country by many large housing authorities for several years. Yardi is not present in Massachusetts yet but is willing to establish itself in this region. In response to Commissioner Quinonez's question Nicole Contois and John Healy explained that Yardi staff will be providing training sessions and there will be tutorial videos that employees will be able to use while working within modules. Answering Executive Director's question Mr. Healy confirmed that switching to Yardi software will be a big step in going paperless.

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

VOTED: to award a contract to Yardi Systems Inc. for a new software system including maintenance and support, implementation design and planning, and software implementation.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to award a contract for site work project at Central Elderly and Sullivan Apartments. John Healy provided information on the project which includes replacing sidewalks at Sullivan, resurfacing the parking lot, moving dumpster, eliminating some fencing, replacing catch-basins and repaving sidewalks at Central Apartments. He explained that the site at Sullivan is very wet and a lot of curbing was

moving up and down and there are many trip hazards that needed to be addressed. Answering Commissioner Labonte's question he confirmed that the anticipated timeframe for the project is 100 consecutive days and the SHA allows vendors to work on Saturdays as long as it is safe. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Quinonez, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to award a contract to MASS-WEST Construction, Inc. of 50 West State Street Granby, MA 01033 in the amount of three hundred ninety seven thousand eight hundred eighty five dollars (\$397,885.00) for site work project at Central Elderly and Sullivan Apartments; appoint Executive Director, William H. Abrashkin as the contracting officer authorizing him to execute the contract. Contract will be paid out of the Capital Fund Grant 2017.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to award a contract for refuse compactor maintenance and servicing 14 compactors at Riverview, Saab Court and Gentile Apartments. John Healy indicated that only bid was received from the same vendor the organization has been using for the last several years. He stated that Sanitary Equipment Company is a good vendor and the quality of their services is satisfactory. The cost of their services went up 2% which is very reasonable. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to award a three year contract with up to two additional one year terms to Sanitary Equipment Company, Inc. in the amount of \$8,849.96 (each year) for refuse compactor maintenance & services.

The Board entered into a discussion about changing the month of the annual meeting from September to October due to unavailability of Commissioner Warren and Commissioner Robles. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Labonte it was unanimously

VOTED: to change the annual meeting to the month of October for year 2018; terms of office will carry over for additional month.

Judge Abrashkin started his Executive Director's report by informing that DHCD has finally approved the disposition of the SHA lots at Eastern Avenue which will go to Springfield College for Educare program. The SHA is now waiting for Attorney Chesky to review draft of deed of conveyance. Judge Abrashkin expressed his satisfaction that a new facility will be built on Eastern Avenue for a comprehensive early education program.

Judge Abrashkin continued his report by providing an update on the Vera Institute's Heading Home program which would provide an opportunity for people coming out of incarceration to reunite with their family members living in public housing. He explained that after evaluating the program it was determined that there is no need to have too many committees and there can be a simplified way to handle it. There will be an enhanced screening process with the support from the Hampden County Sheriff's Department which is actively involved into the program. The HCSD will be making recommendations for who shall be accepted to the program and will be conducting their screening (apart from the regular applicant screening conducted by the SHA) and they also will be providing supportive services to the participants. Those candidates who were approved for the program will be entering into a pre-tenancy agreement (license agreement) for 6 months and if no issues come out after that period they will become members of household. If there will be any violations, the SHA will have a right to terminate the

lease and demand that the participant vacates. Judge Abrashkin indicated that the Heading Home was a HUD initiative and he praised the support from the Hamden County Sheriff's Department.

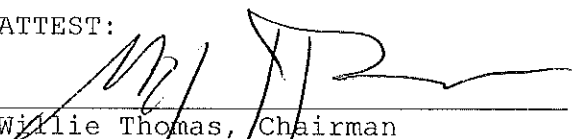
The Executive Director's report was completed by providing a review of further steps in the process of hiring of the new Executive Director. Both the Executive Director and Commissioner Warren expressed their concern that it might take a long time (60 days and over from the date of submission of the contract) for DHCD to approve the appointment of Denise Jordan and that such a long period of uncertainty will affect not only the operations of the agency but also of the City of Springfield. Judge Abrashkin quoted DHCD PH Notice that says that new Executive Director cannot start until receiving an approval from DHCD. The Board discussed what can be done to expedite the process including contacting DHCD, the state representatives and speeding up the process of negotiating and drafting the contract. In response to Commissioner Quinonez's question Ms. Jordan noted that she will remain at her current job until the transition is over.

Ms. Jordan expressed her gratitude for allowing to stay at the meeting as an observer and she shared some comments about what has been discussed. On the issue of the new software Ms. Jordan stressed the importance of attracting staff from different department to the process and inquired about technical support. With regards to the new Employee Handbook she welcomed the suggestions by Commissioner Warren and indicated that it is very important for any Executive Director to be aware about who is being hired and to monitor it. Denise Jordan indicated that she had some questions about the situation at the Section 8 Department but found it satisfactory that the problematic issues have been identified and a plan to correct those issues is in place. Ms. Jordan also expressed her opinion that eliminating the position of the Deputy Executive Director who had a lot of authority could be questionable.

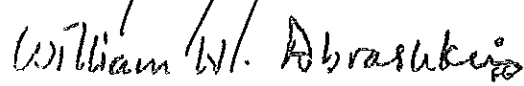
There being no further business to come before the members of the Springfield Housing Authority Board, upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Quinonez, it was unanimously

VOTED: to adjourn the Open Session of a Regular Meeting of the Springfield Housing Authority at 6:28 PM.

ATTEST:



Willie Thomas, Chairman



William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director

