

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

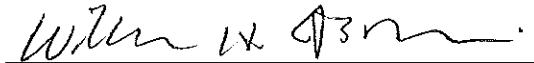
Notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 23B of Chapter 39 of the Massachusetts Laws, as amended, that a regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Springfield Housing Authority will be held at 4:30 PM on Tuesday, February 21, 2017 in the Conference Room of the Springfield Housing Authority at 60 Congress Street, Springfield, MA 01104.

SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY  
/s/William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director  
February 16, 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 February 16, 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  
Raymond Warren

ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT

William Abrashkin  
Michelle Booth (arrived at 4:35 pm)  
Nicole Contois

Stephen Ethier  
Stacey Forrette  
Fidan Gousseynoff  
John Healy  
JoAnn White

The Board reviewed the Minutes of January 17, 2017. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Minutes of January 17, 2017.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to certify that the SHA is in compliance with lead-based paint notification laws. Nicole Contois explained that this is a routine procedure and certification is required every year. Answering Executive Director Abrashkin's question Ms. Contois confirmed that all the documentation concerning lead-based paint is being processed and filed by the Districts accurately. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Quinonez, seconded by Commissioner Warren it was unanimously

VOTED: to certify that the Springfield Housing Authority is in compliance with state and federal lead-based paint notification laws.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to accept Amendment #8 to the DHCD work plan for the zone valve replacement work at Carpe Diem and Forest Park Apartments. John Healy explained that the funds are from the Public Housing Compliance Reserve to cover designer fees. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Warren, seconded by Commissioner Labonte it was unanimously

VOTED: to adopt Resolution #9679 to accept Amendment #8 to the Formula Funding Contract with an award of \$41,080.00 in funds to pay designer fees for asbestos survey and monitoring costs at Carpe Diem and Forest Park Apartments during the zone valve replacement work. The funds will come from DHCD Public Housing Compliance Reserve.

Michelle Booth entered the Conference Room at 4:35 pm.

The Board reviewed materials and a recommendation to accept the Certificate of Substantial Completion for parking lot replacement at Morgan Street apartments. John Healy demonstrated several pictures of the project, explaining what measures had to be taken to resolve problems caused by a tree growing under the building or a grade of the parking lot behind the building being too low thus resulting in water and mold accumulation. Mr. Healy also showed a picture of the newly created sidewalk. Answering Chairman Thomas's and Judge Abrashkin's questions Mr. Healy stated that the total cost of the project was about \$60,000 and the money came from the Federal Capital fund. In response to Commissioner Warren's suggestion to seed some low maintenance and durable to tough circumstances plants John Healy promised to look into that and in response to Stacey Forrette's comment promised to take into consideration that the area for planting might be used for dumping snow in winter. Upon a motion made by Commissioner Labonte, seconded by Commissioner Robles it was unanimously

VOTED: to accept the Certificate of Substantial Completion from HM Nunes & Sons Construction Inc., hereby accepting the project, effective on December 13, 2016.

The Executive Director's report started with an update on the RAO project presented by Michelle Booth. Ms. Booth provided information about recent discussions with architect Tim Murphy who is expected to give an estimate of the project within the next two weeks. She explained that the architect recommended a bump out in order to build a waiting area and meeting space. Apart from providing more convenience to the staff and their visitors, the build out would eliminate a problem of the visitors wandering in the office space. Judge Abrashkin added that location of the office on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the 8-story building creates certain limitations for re-designing the space.

The report continued by an update on the computer virtualization project presented by Stephen Ethier. The IT Director informed the Board that one of the bids for RFP came under \$20,000 and the project will be moving along. Judge Abrashkin expressed his hope that the project will provide significant time saving tools for the IT Department. Answering Chairman Thomas's question if the new system will require additional training Mr. Ethier responded that only the IT staff will need an extra training. Mr. Ethier confirmed that the new system will allow staff members (if required) to access their computers from home. Answering Commissioner Labonte's inquire Mr. Ethier stated the existing computers will be re-purposed.

Judge Abrashkin continued his report by informing the Board that the staff continues working on preparing the budget (which must be submitted to HUD before 3/31/17) to be presented at the next Board meeting. Commissioner Warren and Chairman Thomas requested to provide more time for reviewing the budget before voting. Commissioner Warren requested to provide comparative analysis of the new and old budet. It was decided that the Accounting Department will distribute the budget a week before the next Board meeting, then the Board members will discuss it and, if necessary, a Special Meeting will be called.

Judge Abrashkin reported to the Board that an agency, called Arise for Social Justice, resumed distributing flyers to Gentile residents warning them that the SHA's contract for the building is expiring and urging them to appeal to this agency for assistance in case the contract won't be renewed. Judge Abrashkin explained that he had met with the residents, contacted the Group representatives to report about his conversation with Paul McPartland from DHCD (who confirmed that the contract will be renewed) and to assure that the Gentile residents are not at risk of losing housing. Mr. Abrashkin also explained Arise for Social Justice that they cannot establish a Tenant Association at Gentile since there is an active Tenant Council. Despite all those efforts the group continues contacting Gentile residents causing their concerns and fears. Judge Abrashkin informed that a meeting has been scheduled with the Group representatives to discuss this issue. Answering Commissioner Warren's question Judge Abrashkin confirmed that it is the same group which was contacting residents at Marble Street some time ago.

The Executive Director informed the Board that the SHA has been awarded a grant from the City in the amount of \$20,000. The grant will be used for upgrading computer equipment for the residents. Stephen Ethier explained that the money will be used to upgrade outdated equipment at Riverview and Sullivan labs as well as at newly created labs at Robinson Gardens and Duggan. Mr. Ethier indicated that the labs provide the residents with an opportunity to do job search, submit employment applications, prepare for GED etc. Judge Abrashkin stated that the SHA is planning to expand TRS program to Duggan Park and is currently in the process of scheduling a meeting with the Principal of Indian Orchard Elementary School. Michelle Booth informed that one four bedroom handicap accessible apartment will be taken off-line [with HUD's approval] to accommodate the program.

John Healy left the Conference Room at 5:10 pm.

Answering Stacey Forrette's question Nicole Contois explained that funds provided through grants are restricted and to be used for specific purposes only, for example, the ROSS grant, recently awarded to the SHA, will cover two Resident Services Coordinator positions at Duggan and Riverview. The remaining balance will cover other expenses like training, travel and supplies.

The Board was informed that no major problems with the equipment were reported after the last two snow storms. In one of the Districts four snow blowers needed urgent repairs and it was recommended to the manager to check that District's budget to determine whether it is possible to purchase new equipment. In total, Richie Dagneault worked on 10 pieces of snow removal equipment. Judge Abrashkin recommended checking with Mike Petro if the Authority is allowed to include equipment replacement into Capital Fund Program.

Judge Abrashkin stated that the agency will be reviewing opportunities for using part of the proceeds from Marble Street towards upgrading the equipment and software. Michelle Booth added that it can be done only with HUD's approval.

Chairman Thomas congratulated Commissioner Labonte on his re-appointment.

Stephen Ethier left the Conference Room at 5:20 pm.

The Board accepted the DHCD Public Housing Notice regarding Mandatory Board Member Training and information regarding Board Certification Courses offered by Mass NAHRO. In response to Commissioner Warren's reference to the DHCD PHN [2017-05] Executive Director Abrashkin assured that he will be forwarding all DHCD PH Notices to all Board members.

The Board reviewed and accepted the Accounts Payable Report and Financial Statements for the month of December 2016. In response to Judge Abrashkin's question Finance Director JoAnn White explained what is Coverage Ratio in the Statement for COCC. Nicole Contois and JoAnn White also explained that mortgage payments for 60 Congress Street are recognized as COCC restricted cash reserves.

Ms. White stated that overall financial situation is good with higher profits and lower expenses than expected. She added that the Districts have been working very closely with the Accounting and doing an amazing job in generating and implementing cost saving measures.

The Board accepted the Communications and Community Relations Report.

The Board accepted the Rental Assistance Report. In response to Commissioner Robles's question Michelle Booth provided information on the foreclosures. She stated that one of the foreclosures was caused by the owner not being able to obtain a proper insurance so the staff will be provided with a training on this subject. Ms. Booth explained that the main reason for many foreclosures [through the SHA Home Ownership Program] is downsizing of households. She indicated that the staff is working on amending the Section 8 Administrative Plan to address this issue. Ms. Booth also explained the Board that the agency has been increasing the leasing percentage based upon funding (over 100% now) as it was recommended by HUD in order to reduce the Program's \$1.9 million excess subsidy reserves. She emphasized that those reserves cannot be used for salaries or operating expenses.

The Board accepted the Public Safety Report. Michelle Booth provided a summary, stating that total number of incidents decreased 17% and she praised the work of the District Managers on lease enforcement for safety related violations. She reported that there has been an increase in drug related crimes and there have been multiple arrests. Ms. Booth also reported about some staffing changes at the Department. Taking into consideration that many crimes on the SHA properties are being caused by boarders, it was decided to try a different approach and move Juan Rodriguez from the position of Public Safety Officer working on night shifts to Public Housing Fraud Investigator. Mr. Rodriguez will be working on investigating unreported income, fraud and boarders' issues in order to bring more income to the Districts and prevent many crimes by illegal occupants. Ms. Booth reminded that two more PSO staff members work as Section 8 fraud investigators. Commissioner Quiononez praised the idea of opening a position of PH Fraud Investigator.

The Board accepted the Occupancy and Waiting List reports. Michelle Booth reported that there are about 3000 people on the waiting list which is 500 more than previous year. She said that approximate waiting time is 5 years which made it necessary to close some waiting lists as it was recently approved by the Board. She expressed her hope that the lists will be re-opened in October. On the Occupancy report Ms. Booth indicated that the staff is working on reducing unit turnaround time, especially for elderly units. The managers and foremen were advised about actual income loss caused by low turnaround time.

Stacey Forrette introduced herself and referred to the latest Employee Newsletter which encouraged the staff to come out with cost saving measures. She stated how it is important to have an open dialogue not only with the managers and foremen but also with other staff members as well as to review many problems from different perspectives. She addressed issues like saving money through using maintenance staff instead of hiring contractors for painting, locksmith, and extermination

services or reducing number of transfers which puts lots of pressure on the maintenance staff. She indicated that using in-house staff could eliminate some delays with completing work orders because contractors are not always available to perform services when needed.

Commissioner Quinonez praised Ms. Forrette for attending the Board meeting to share her opinion. She explained that the Board has been reviewing different options for using in-house staff versus contractors and that number of transfer requests has been considerably growing due to increasing number of requests for reasonable accommodation. Commissioner Quinonez indicated that as a Resident of the SHA she sees on a daily basis how hard the maintenance personnel is working, especially on winter days to ensure safety and comfort of the residents. She assured Ms. Forrette that before voting on some recommendations the Board tries to take into consideration many aspects and interests and to review from different perspectives.

Michelle Booth assured Ms. Forrette that many of the issues she addressed had been raised by her foreman at the managers/ foremen meeting and the SHA has recently revised its transfer policy to make it more efficient both for the residents and the staff. She indicated that the agency receives about 200 requests for reasonable accommodation every month.

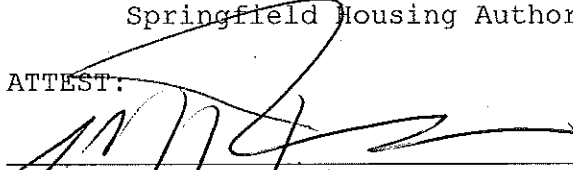
Executive Director Abrashkin commented that the agency has to follow federal and state regulations even if some of those regulations do not provide most efficient ways to resolve many problems. Referring to reasonable accommodation requests, he indicated that the agency has to process those requests and follow the civil rights laws. On the subject of using in-house services he indicated that the management is planning to discuss this issue with the union. Judge Abrashkin stated that he welcomes feedback and new ideas from all employees and will be delighted if necessary to meet personally upon request to provide more detailed information on many issues addressed by Ms. Forrette.

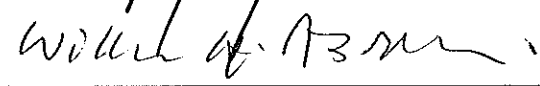
Chairman Thomas expressed his gratitude to Stacey Forrette for attending the Board meeting.

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 Warren, it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn the Open Session of a Regular Meeting of the Springfield Housing Authority at 6:10 PM.

ATTEST:

  
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Willie Thomas, Chairman

  
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William H. Abrashkin, Executive Director