

CORPORATE MINUTES - BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN OF MANCHESTER

2014

March 19, 2014

Westhill Gardens

Attending: Chairman Josh Howroyd
Robert Shanbaum
Carol Shanley
Paul Rubin
Mary Ann Murray – Interim Executive Director

- I. Chairman Howroyd opened the meeting at 6:30 PM.
- II. Public Comments – *These minutes are intended to be an overview of the comments made and are not necessarily verbatim.*

Ms. Evelyn Babela 12D Bluefield Drive addressed the Board. Ms. Babela spoke about the public housing issue again, not Section 8 but public housing. She had a conversation with someone that said the Board could change back this complex to seniors and handicapped housing and there are many senior residents that want to keep it that way. She also said that we used to have Direct TV. It is less expensive. Ms. Babela asked if it could be possible to have benches installed around the complex. Residents like to walk but some of us can't walk too far. If there were benches we could stop and sit for a bit when we tire. We have asked for the last three or four years for them.

Mr. Mike Kelly 22 D Case Drive addressed the Board. Mr. Kelly reported that his and another resident's storage bin were been broken into in the basement of his building. The police were called and a report was filled out but since there is no proof nothing can get done. He wants know what can be done. Mr. Kelly did report that a resident's nephew has been hanging around and the complex and he did see this person in the basement. He has been told by the property manager, Steve Itsou, not to sleep over his aunt's home anymore and yet this person is still hanging around the complex. Mr. Kelly also indicated that his car has been broken into, scratched and damaged. This person has also has tried to solicit residents to smoke pot and this person is not a tenant but a relative of a tenant. Several years ago he was asked by the former Executive Director not to come around here anymore, this individual does have a police record. Mr. Kelly said that he is concerned. Chairman Howroyd asked if the property manager has addressed this individual and Mr. Kelly said that a letter was sent to the resident but they denied ever receiving a letter.

Ms. Murray shared that both she and the property manager, Steve Itsou went and spoke to the tenant. The tenant did not deny that her nephew had been staying there. Mr. Itsou told her under no circumstances was the nephew allowed to stay there, and that he had overstayed his welcome. The laws and regulations of the lease were reviewed with the tenant and the tenant said she would not have him back. MHA management has checked a couple of times and has not seen this individual. MHA also talked with the police last week and found there are no current arrest warrants for this person. Ms. Murray asked residents should this person be seen on the property to bring any information to the office. Suggestion was made that locks could be put on the basement doors.

Mr. Marty Baser 27 K Bluefield Drive addressed the Board. Mr. Baser shared that there is a lot of non-resident traffic passing through this complex day and night. He has seen cars driving through, dropping off something to an individual and drive out. He has seen a known drug dealer in Manchester driving through the complex. Mr. Baser also has an issue with his upstairs neighbor. The neighbor has a child and the child runs through the unit, up and down stairs, yelling and screaming at all hours of the day and night. He has spoken to the neighbor and to the property manager but nothing has changed.

Ms. Valerie Roach 144 McGuire Lane addressed the Board. Ms. Roach said she has brought to the attention of the Board the issue of cars parking in front of the handicapped ramps on the sidewalk

several times. She has spoken to neighbors and asked that their car not be parked in front of the handicapped ramp. She has spoken to Mr. Itsou about this issue but nothing has been done. Ms. Roach said she knows there are individuals living here that are not on the lease. She was told by the property manager that we can't prove they are living here. She also shared she sometimes watches a dog and she always keeps the dog on a leash and picks up after it. Her cat is always kept on a leash when she takes it outside. Ms. Roach commented at other places she has lived the community room was used for group activities one day a week and the complex had a community garden. Residents were neighborly. Chairman Howroyd indicated the topic of a community garden and other things of that nature have been discussed. Ms. Roach did call the Town of Manchester and was told by them that MHA would be responsible for putting up no parking signs. Something needs to be done because it is not fair for those of us who have mobility issues.

Chairman Howroyd shared that he does not know how much can be done about the on-street parking other than having the courtesy of your neighbor. MHA does not have assigned spaces on the street, just in the parking lots. Mr. Shanbaum asked if we could have no parking signs posted around those cuts. Chairman Howroyd indicated that has been talked about. MHA has plans to pursue putting more curb cuts around the complex and have them painted yellow to indicate no parking directly in front of them.

Ms. Delores Kavilla 87F Bluefield Drive addressed the Board. Ms. Kavilla shared that the furnace is under her unit and about 1 month ago there was a loud banging noise coming from the basement. She called the office and told them about this noise. Maintenance came and looked at it and she was told it needed a part but that was over a month ago. The furnace is still loud and she now wears earplugs at night because of the noise. She asked that it be checked out again.

Mr. Kelly shared the idea of a community garden was brought up several years ago. The question was asked who would take care of it and water it. At that time he volunteered to water it and indicated that residents would also be caring for their plantings. Nothing ever came of the suggestion.

Chairman Howroyd shared MHA is looking into installing benches and possibly creating a walking path in the back where all the debris was removed. The issue is financial resources. We could check with maintenance about tilling the soil, possibly in the back where all the debris was removed. Originally there were plans to landscape that area and it might be an ideal spot for a community garden.

Chairman Howroyd wanted to update residents on the selection of a new Executive Director. He shared we are negotiating a contract with Mr. Joseph D'Ascoli from Springfield Massachusetts to start May 1. We will plan an open house to give residents a chance to come out and meet him, so stay tuned.

Chairman Howroyd complimented Ms. Mary Ann Murray on the great job she has been doing the last couple of months as interim director. The Board also appreciates resident's constructive suggestions and also hearing about their issues and concerns. There will always be issues and concerns and the property managers need to be very vigilant in holding people accountable to the terms of their leases.

Mr. Ron Tourville 80 Bluefield Drive addressed the Board. Mr. Tourville remarked that he has reported several times that the chimney in his building is falling apart. He said that someone is going to get hurt with the falling bricks. The bricks are falling out and he has found them on the ground.

The public hearing closed at 7:00 pm.

A. Discussion of Public Comments - None

Mr. Shanbaum asked if a restraining order could be taken against the person that is walking around the complex. Chairman Howroyd shared that MHA has a good rapport with the Manchester Police

Department and perhaps we could request more patrols through the complex or that cars on patrol could use our parking lots to write their reports. This might help deter the non-resident traffic.

Chairman Howroyd asked for a motion to add to the agenda a new business item to discuss the D'Amelia Rental Assistance Program. Motion was made by Ms. Shanley to add to the agenda a new business item. Mr. Shanbaum seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Ms. Ann Walsh shared that she works with the D'Amelia Rental Assistance program for MHA and wants to make the Board aware of some of the issues that have arisen in the past several months and offer some solutions for these issues. She is aware that decisions are not going to be made until the new Executive Director Joseph D'Ascoli comes on board. Chairman Howroyd shared he has had a couple of conversations Mr. D'Ascoli regarding some of the concerns that have been brought to his attention. Ms. Walsh described that her experience working with both state and federal section 8 housing the average case load for workers is between 275 and 350. Currently MHA workers are above that and we are having difficulties keeping up with the work load. We found some errors made by a past worker and a new person was brought on board and they have to be trained. Ms. Walsh also said she has brought many ideas to the table with past executive directors on how this program could raise revenue for MHA but it was never considered. She stated staff is at a point that we cannot continue to work at the pace we are working with the case load without some additional help or cut backs in the number of cases we are managing. In speaking with other housing authorities their program has a point person/supervisor that handles all the moves or terminations so there is some consistency and the case load for this person is lighter. Mr. Shanbaum asked about the current case load and how many cases each worker has. She said currently we have a staff of 2 and we handle about 350 cases. This program is somewhat separate from the other housing programs at MHA. This program has its own administrative plan and we need to start thinking about the future. Chairman Howroyd shared he talked with Mr. D'Ascoli about this program and he does understand this kind of program. Chairman Howroyd explained to him that MHA is caught in between, with more work than 2 people could handle and not quite enough for three. Consideration should be given to getting a part-time person would bridge the gap. It is not just the work load but also having to address errors that were made. Ms. Walsh said she shared she has worked 45 hours a week and does not get paid but she knows what needs to be done to keep the department of housing in line. The D'Amelia program is the largest in the state with 11,000 clients. She shared we can get more cases but cannot take on more without additional staff. Mr. Shanbaum asked if the D'Amelia is kind of a client bank and if we make money on each one of the people processing these why don't we have more of them. Ms. Walsh said that the administrative fee that we received is not the same as we receive from the Federal program, because D'Amelia is the middle man. Chairman Howroyd added it is not just the issue of having a new person to train but also having to deal with mistakes made by a previous worker. As re-certifications come up it is very time consuming to correct those errors and it will take about one calendar year to cycle them through.

Mr. Rubin asked how we handle this in the mean time until the new ED comes on board. Chairman Howroyd shared that we have been managing the situation with some overtime. Ms. Walsh said it can be managed and she has a lot of ideas that were never tapped into. She has worked with budgets before and can manage a budget, we could grow the program and make money for MHA and we can manage for 6 weeks until the new ED comes on board. Chairman Howroyd asked if there is anyone that worked in the D'Amelia program that could be hired on a part time basis to help with this program. Ms. Walsh said that we did have a part timer working but the last Executive Director let them go because he did not want part time workers. Chairman Howroyd will share this information with Mr. D'Ascoli.

III. Adoption of Minutes

A. Meeting of February 25, 2014

The Board reviewed the minutes and made several corrections. Mr. Shanbaum moved to approve the minutes of the February 25, 2014 minutes with the noted corrections. Mr. Rubin seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

IV. Correspondence - None

V. Accounts Payable

The Board reviewed the AP report and there were no comments.

VI. Executive Director's Report

Ms. Murray asked the Board for permission to fill out an application CDBG Town of Manchester for Capital Funding for a fixed permanent generator for Spencer Village community room. All of our other housing complexes have emergency generators except this one. The cost will be approximately \$37,802. Mr. Rubin asked if we put this out to bid for this. Chairman Howroyd indicated we will put it out to bid if we are awarded the funds. Chairman Howroyd shared we received some CDBG money two years ago and it was used for the air filtration system for the Congregate.

Ms. Murray reported she has submitted two applications for Community Improvement Grants, \$5,000 each for Spencer Village and Ada Lane to construct Community Gardens. She explained this project we need a master gardener and landscaper. A meeting has been scheduled with them and Ms. Bertrand this coming Monday to review the plans for this project. This grant is through CHFA.

The last item Ms. Murray spoke about is getting ID badges for MHA employees. She explained we had an incident where a new resident would not allow maintenance crew into their unit because she did not know them. They did not have any identification on them. The ID's will identify the person is from MHA. The badge cost is \$5.

Ms. Murray also reported before the Executive Director left, there was a conversation about mowing lawns at the scattered sites with two of our landscaping contractors; Lawn and Order and DaveScape. Last year MHA was cited by the Town of Manchester a few times for un-kept properties at several of the scattered sites where tenants were supposed to mow their lawns but didn't. The ED had one of the contractors mow the lawns at these sites. Ms. Murray shared that Ms. Bertrand has worked with the contractors and has created a spread sheet outlining the pricing. Ms. Bertrand said it was decided to have the Housing Authority take over the responsibility of mowing the lawns at 4 of the scattered sites. The work was given to DaveScape because they had done quite a bit of landscaping work at these sites. This work began in the middle of the landscaping season and the past ED decided to do just these sites but for 2014 add the remaining scattered sites. Having MHA be responsible for this would make it consistent especially with the duplexes where one tenant was doing the mowing and the other tenant was not. This would also keep us from being cited by town ordinances. At the end of last year the before the ED left, he made a verbal contract with DaveScape to do all the lawn mowing at the scattered sites and Lawn and Order would be doing the Lisa Drive lawns and both contractors agreed.

The issue now is that Lawn and Order has a PO from last year and his prices are staying the same, however, DaveScape has to go to a new contract because he has to add the other properties so his prices have increased due to the added properties. Ms. Bertrand said she went to Ms. Murray and asked who would be signing the contract and Ms. Murray suggested bringing this to the Board. Ms. Bertrand added that the conversation with the contractors took place on December 9, before the ED left. Ms. Bertrand reviewed the spread sheet and explained why the increase in cost at Spencer Village. At that complex there is a large field on the right hand side, and while it is still not certain who owns' that field and some talk that it is an easement with Botticello. MHA has always been put in the position to take care of it. So last year the cuts that DaveScape was doing at this site did not include the field but after a conversation with MHA DaveScape started cutting the field at no additional cost. This year his fee includes the field. Ms. Bertrand also mentioned that last year there was no conversation as to who would be covering the additional expense of mowing these lawns. Her question is how to handle it this year. According to the lease we can charge back to the tenant. She does not have a problem going to the tenants and explaining that this is happening and next year they will be

responsible for paying half. For some tenants this will be difficult. Chairman Howroyd commented the cost for an additional 22 cuts, which is the average for a landscaping contract, would be about \$10,000.

Mr. Rubin observed several issues. First the issue of bidding, MHA is required to put new business out to bid regardless of the fact that both companies have done business with us. The second issue is that Lawn and Order is owned by an individual who is interested running for State Legislature and there could be a conflict if that should happen. MHA needs to aware of this potential ethical conflict. The last is the tenants should be cutting the grass according to their lease. He asked if there a way to wait a certain number of days for them to cut the lawn and if they don't we charge them for cutting the lawn. Chairman Howroyd pointed out that all of these are duplexes and one tenant may mow and not the other. Some of the duplexes do not have a clear definition of where the property is divided between tenants. So administratively it is hard to decide who is responsible for what. Ms. Bertrand commented that her concern is we are now in the landscaping season and what to do. She understands having to send it out to bid and that takes time and the mowing season is rapidly approaching. Mr. Rubin said he agrees and we are still responsible for putting new work out to bid. Ms. Bertrand added MHA needs to also put out to bid for snow removal for the winter 2014 season. She observed that this will be a trial year to charge the tenants; the cost would be \$450 per tenant for the season. Mr. Rubin asked about the wording on the lease for lawn care. Ms. Bertrand said it does not specify lawn mowing but a general statement saying they are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the property.

Chairman Howroyd suggested monitoring this rather than taking on the additional expense this year. We need to be prepared to step in when a complaint happens. He said he does not want to give the tenants a free ride and some of them have been in the units a long time and there is some level of maintenance. Ms. Bertrand asked if we should charge the tenants for it, we charge them for air conditioning. Chairman Howroyd asked if we could put an addendum to the lease because all the tenants have the same standard lease. When a property is a duplex, there is a yard and some personal space that other tenants don't have, that is a benefit of the scattered sites. Mr. Rubin agreed but added that if the tenant does not do it, someone will have to do it. Ms. Bertrand commented it is a pattern that has developed and it is why we came to the decision last year and there is no way to enforce it. Question was asked of the 9 scattered sites how many don't comply and Ms. Bertrand said between 5 and 6. Suggestion was made by Ms. Walsh that an addendum could be added to the lease to clarify to the tenant that they are responsible for mowing the lawn and if they don't do it then they will be charged. Mr. Rubin agreed that we could have a fine if they don't and that money would go to the fund for lawn mowing if it is not getting done. He added the issue here is it requires staff to monitor it. Mr. Shanbaum suggested sending a letter to the tenants telling them they are responsible for maintaining their lawn and if they don't they will be billed. Mr. Rubin added that if a tenant is paying their rent and MHA goes to Housing Court to collect any additional fines or charges, the court is not going to evict the tenant for not paying the fine. Ms. Bertrand mentioned that some of the sites that are not having their lawns cut have already made comments asking why their lawns are not being cut, the word is spreading. Ms. Bertrand said going forward it would be nice to have a plan. Chairman Howroyd remarked that we don't want to get labeled in some neighborhoods as the MHA property. Mr. Shanbaum asked if leases are renewed every year and at their renewal we can raise the base rent to include this fee. He also suggested having a separate lease or addendum for these scattered site properties. He also suggested keeping the verbal agreement with DaveScape on a non-contractual basis for the time being and tell them that some point that we have to put this work out to bid. Possibly we could come up with a schedule that makes sense. The contractor will come out on the say the 15th and 30th of the month and if the lawn needs mowing the contractor will mow it. Ms. Bertrand said that Lawn and Order does not work that way but DaveScape does. Chairman Howroyd stated that perhaps we could have a conversation with both landscapers the verbal contract is through July 1st but that we will have to put this work out to bid.

The conversation went on further and Ms. Bertrand asked specifically what to do. Mr. Shanbaum stated we need to stand by the commitments that the former ED made. The Board empowered him to do that and if he made commitments to tenants then we must stand by those commitments. So Ms.

Bertrand reiterated that the four scattered sites maintained last year will be given free cutting and the other 9 sites they will pay. Ms. Bertrand remarked that it is a lot of money and the way that it is this year, MHA pay for it and next year let the residents that the practice is changing. Chairman Howroyd wondered if we could solicit DaveScape to continue doing the mowing until July while we solicit proposals for the 9 properties. It may turn out that we would get bids for less than the \$50 that we are paying now. Either way we need to make it clear to all our contractors that we will be putting out to bid the full lawn maintenance for 2015 and the plowing later this year for the 2014 winter season. Question was asked about where we will get the money to fund this. Chairman Howroyd indicated there are maintenance funds for public housing and we will be saving money that was spent last year on landscaping. It comes to about \$500 per unit, if every lawn gets cut 22 times. Mr. Shanbaum shared again the tenants have the option of taking care of the lawn themselves and we are not going to tell them that this will now cost them \$500. The four properties are a problem for the reasons mentioned and we don't want to open ourselves up to a complaint that we are discriminatory. It is important that we work on a lease addendum for next year.

Ms. Murray reported that Ms. Bertrand has been in conversation with the Eighth Utilities District about getting a Knox Box installed at Mayfair Gardens and she would like to expand this to all four properties. A Knox Box will be used by the Fire Department to get a master key to get them into residences and it eliminates the need for them to carry keys to each emergency call. The cost is \$295 for each box installed.

Ms. Murray brought up the issue of getting a Security System installed at the maintenance office. We have spoken with DuBaldo Security and got a quote of \$775 to install an alarm and about \$24 per month for the monitor system with no contract. This would be a key pad system, two motion detectors and a remote panic button. Each employee would have their own code to punch into the system to get into the building as well as arm and disarm the building. Chairman Howroyd said this was discussed at the last meeting and it might behoove us to do a more comprehensive security analysis to include some of our other properties. This gives us a ballpark estimate. If we were to package other properties together to include Spencer Village, Mayfair this main office building as well as the Maintenance facilities. We could also consider putting a video/audio in the system as well.

A. Financial Statements – No comments.

B. Vacancy Report

Chairman Howroyd commented about the importance of this report and such a great improvement over what we had in the past. Ms. Murray noted the dollar difference; this year it is \$20,600 and a year ago was \$36,300.

C. Tenant Commissioner Update

Chairman Howroyd suggested keeping this item an on-going agenda item. Ms. Murray reported she has spoken with tenant representatives and they stated they have no groups per se. Mr. Shanbaum shared we have to notify the tenants that we have a Tenant Commissioner opening and we are looking to fill the position. The bylaws says we have to do this and the sooner we do this the better. Chairman Howroyd said he would draft a letter and send to the Board members for their comments.

VII. Chairman's Report

Chairman Howroyd shared he has had several phone conversations and a face to face meeting with Mr. D'Ascoli. We have agreed in principle on a few issues and will discuss this further in Executive Session.

VIII. Old Business

A. Parking/Towing Issues

CORPORATE MINUTES - BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN OF MANCHESTER

2014

Chairman Howroyd suggested that we start with getting stickers and have them installed on the front windshield instead of side windows. This would certainly eliminate the sticker not being seen because of windows being rolled down.

IX. New Business

- A. Issues raised from Ann Walsh

X. Items for Future Agenda

Send any items to the Chairman

Chairman Howroyd asked for a motion to move into Executive Session. Ms. Shanley moved to go into Executive Session at 8:53 pm. Mr. Rubin seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

XI. Executive Session

- A. Personnel Matters –

Chairman Howroyd asked for a motion to move into Executive Session. Ms. Shanley moved to go into Executive Session at 8:53 pm. Mr. Rubin seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Rubin moved to close the Executive Session at 9:12 pm. Ms. Shanley seconded. Motion passed 4-0.

XII. Adjournment

Mr. Rubin moved to adjourn the Board of Commissioners meeting at 9:12 pm. Mr. Shanbaum seconded. Motion passed 4-0.