

The Board of Commissioners of the Niagara Falls Housing Authority (NFHA) met in a Monthly Board Meeting session on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 4:00 pm at 744 Tenth Street, Niagara Falls, NY. Chair Giancola called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

Present:

Mrs. Maralynn Giancola
Mr. James Swift
Mr. Brian Archie, Sr.
Mr. Gerald Cracknell
Mr. Earl Bass
Ms. Colleen Todd

Also Present:

Ms. Angela Smith
Mr. Roger Lis
Mr. Jason Cafarella

Absent:

At the Request of the Deputy Executive Director: George Dreer, Melissa Attfield, Jamie Allen, Maria Vitello, Brian Sarama

I. MOMENT OF REFLECTION

Chair Giancola asked for a moment of silence for Commissioner Archie's father, Shirey Archie as well as for President Myles, the father of retired manager Anne Smith and grandfather of Andrew Bullard, current employee.

II. PRESENTATION ON JORDAN GARDENS REDEVELOPMENT – BRIAN S. SARAMA, ESQ., DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR – BEACON COMMUNITIES

Mr. Sarama reported that last year, Beacon Communities was chosen as a co-developer of this project and pre-development work was done on this large project for the necessary HUD and State approvals for financing. Mr. Sarama distributed the New York State Housing Finance Agency Concept Paper to the board. A review of the concept paper was conducted as well as background information on RAD/Section 18 blend and Section 8 vouchers, which this redevelopment project will utilize. Mr. Sarama stressed the importance of working parallel with HUD and the State to ensure when closing occurs, all entities can sign off simultaneously. There is a projected closing date for mid-June 2024. Mr. Sarama stated he is in constant communication with Mr. Leonard Skrill from HCR and is very favorable of this project. Mr. Sarama stated A question-and-answer session followed. The board thanked Mr. Sarama for his attendance. Mr. Sarama assured the board he would be happy to present updates, etc. as necessary. At this time, Mr. Sarama left the meeting. Further discussion ensued.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETINGS

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Swift, seconded by Commissioner Todd and carried, the June 13, 2023, monthly meeting minutes of the Board of Commissioners was approved. On a motion duly made by Commissioner Archie, seconded by Commissioner Todd and carried, the July 11, 2023, special meeting minutes of the Board of Commissioners was approved.

Chair Giancola stated today's agenda is in a new format. Instead of a consent agenda, each subcommittee will give their respective report. Board members agreed to the new format.

IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS/RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Facilities – Commissioner Bass** - Commissioner Bass reported this subcommittee wishes to merge with the Residential Affairs subcommittee. Commissioner Swift asked if an amendment to the Bylaws would be needed. Mr. Cafarella stated the request must go through the Governance committee first, then presented to the Board of Commissioners. Upon approval from the board, then an amendment to the Bylaws would be needed.
- B. Finance – Chair Giancola** – Chair Giancola asked Mr. Lis for an update. Mr. Lis reported the finance department fell behind in reports over the summer but is caught up and the financial

reports were included in the board packet. The auditors are working on the annual audit and will be back in the office next month to complete the audit with delivery to the board in December. Patricia Barone has agreed to assist the finance department with security deposits at this time. Chair Giancola reported there are issues with KeyBank and the investment account. Mr. Dreer stated he is working with HUD on a depository agreement. New signers are needed for the accounts, and this has been completed. Monies can now be moved to other banks to acquire a higher rate of interest. Chair Giancola reported there are monies in a Northwest bank account for the Tenant Association and that Ms. Smith is working with Mr. Cafarella to move those funds into another account.

After reviewing the financial reports for July 2023, Chair Giancola made a motion to approve the reports. Commissioner Swift seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

After reviewing the write off accounts, Commissioner Todd made a motion to approve the write off accounts, Commissioner Archie seconded, and the motion was unanimously carried.

- C. Governance/Human Resources – Commissioner Swift** – Commissioner Swift reported a policy change regarding starting times for employees was brought before this subcommittee, but no action will be taken. Commissioner Swift asked when more than three board members attend a conference, it is a conflict of interest being together. Mr. Cafarella stated the comptroller's office position is that it is not a conflict of interest if business is not being conducted or discussed.

After reviewing the Personnel Action Chart and Leave of Absence Request, Chair Giancola made a motion to approve the Personnel Action Chart and Leave of Absence Request. Commissioner Todd seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

- D. Residential Affairs/Senior Living/Community – Commissioner Archie** – Commissioner Archie reiterated the merging of this subcommittee with the facilities subcommittee. Commissioner Archie reported vacancies are down at the family sites, security cameras are up and running at Spallino and Wrobel Towers, and the unit that caught fire at Cornerstone has been renovated. Commissioner Archie stated he would like to see what can be done with the Attain Lab since its closure this past May for the residents in the surrounding community. Ms. Smith stated she will reach out to SUNY to see if their computers can remain in the lab and be donated to the housing authority. Commissioner Archie stated Packard Court had a great summer session and that the eviction process will be beginning soon.
- E. Strategic Planning – Commissioner Todd** – Commissioner Todd stated this subcommittee met on August 30th and discussion was held on the purpose and duties of this subcommittee and how it can assist the authority in its projects. This subcommittee would like to receive status reports on the following items: a – Nick George properties; b – 9 vacant lots recently purchased by the authority from the city; c – having the authority create a “wish list” to assist in accomplishing items and d – who to contact when approached by the general public regarding authority matters. Ms. Smith stated there is a media policy in place and will send this policy to the committee.
- F. Occupancy Reports** – After review, this document was received and filed. Ms. Smtih asked Ms. Attfield to speak on the struggles at Center Court/Beloved Community. Ms. Attfield reported on staffing issues, the non-placement of public housing applicants, maintenance issues, etc. Mr. Dreer is in the process of working with this staff and HUD to enroll them in the PIC system for reporting. Further discussion ensued. Commissioner Archie spoke on issues the resident face daily at this site. Mr. Cafarella suggested a meeting take place at the Family Resource Building for these residents and staff.

V. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chair Giancola asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2023-61 naming Angela Smith Interim Executive Director. Commissioner Swift made a motion to approve Resolution 2023-61 naming Angela Smith Interim Executive Director. Commissioner Cracknell seconded, and the motion was unanimously carried.

Chair Giancola asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2023-62 by having the chairman become a signatory on the bank accounts. Commissioner Todd made a motion to approve Resolution 2023-62 by having the chairman become a signatory on the bank accounts. Commissioner Archie seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

Chair Giancola thanked Ms. Smith and staff for all their hard work and to Patricia Barone and Maria Vitello for coming back and assisting the authority.

Chair Giancola asked members their thoughts on this agenda format. Ms. Smith stated subcommittee reports can be included in future board packets. Mr. Cafarella stated this format encourages dialogue and makes for better governance. Commissioner Swift stated having staff members on the various subcommittees makes them more involved. Board members agreed to merge the facilities and residential affairs subcommittees and to have the governance and human resources remain as one subcommittee.

Chair Giancola stated a bid was received to conduct board training in the all-inclusive amount of \$5,000.00. Mr. Cafarella stated he is able to conduct an in-house training/retreat to provide updates and can conduct this next Tuesday or it can be rescheduled. The authority can also use an outsider trainer as well. Commissioner Archie was in favor of utilizing Mr. Cafarella. Mr. Cafarella stated he can also provide a training session in the evening. Ms. Smith stated the outside trainer is able to cover a wide range of topics and this can be conducted in 2024. Ms. Smith stated training can be offered to area housing authorities as well, which will reduce the fees of the host authority. Mr. Cafarella will submit a list of dates to the board for his portion of the training.

Chair Giancola stated the deadline for submittal of board member evaluations has passed and suggested evaluations be completed and submitted on October 31st. Ms. Smith will resend the forms to all board members to complete.

Ms. Smith reported on upcoming housing conferences. She will email the schedule to board members and to let her know if they are interested in attending any of the conferences. Ms. Smith stated the authority has a form that staff completes as to who to contact in case of an emergency. She would like to have board members complete this as well and will have it for members next month. She also spoke about the free life insurance benefit with Housing Authority Insurance and will have that information available as well.

Chair Giancola stated she received a call from Mr. Joseph Ruffolo, President of Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. He stated that Jerry Puleo and Gronk Nation cleaned up the baseball diamonds at Packard Court and asked that a thank you letter be sent. Chair Giancola stated she has done this. Mr. Ruffalo and Mr. Puleo then asked her to ask Mayor Restaino to request a new road in Packard Court due to the increased traffic. Discussion was held and was suggested that Chair Giancola suggest to Mr. Ruffalo and Mr. Puleo to bring their request before the City Council, which she will do.

VI. INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

A) Recommendation for Award – Replacement of Two Windows at PCCC

Ms. Smith asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2023-59, recommendation to award the replacement of two windows at Packard Court Community Center to Weatherpanel Inc. in the amount of \$6,084.26. Commissioner Todd made a motion to approve Resolution 2023-59, recommendation to award the replacement of two windows at Packard Court Community Center to Weatherpanel Inc. in the amount of \$6,084.26. Commissioner Swift seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

B) Approval of Policy Change – Write Offs

Ms. Smith asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2023-60 which is a policy change to the write-offs stating all uncollectible balances under the amount of \$150.00 be increased to \$300.00 as nominal and shall be considered "written off" without further approval of the Board. Commissioner Todd made a motion to approve Resolution 2023-60 stating all uncollectible balances under the amount of \$150.00 be increased to \$300.00 as nominal and shall be considered "written off" without further approval of the Board. Commissioner Archie seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

C) Updates on NFHA Matters

-Ms. Smith reported Community Day was held last Saturday and was a huge success. Over 500 were in attendance and \$10,000.00 was raised. Efforts to secure major sponsorship are being made for next year's event.

-Ms. Smith reported on this year's scholarship recipients as follows: Dominick Hickock is the recipient of the Doris Jones scholarship in the amount of \$2,500 and is attending Fredonia. Advair Valis is the recipient of the Nathaniel Smith scholarship in the amount of \$2,500 and is attending Fredonia. Crenhaw Crumpler is the recipient of the NFHA Adult scholarship and a resident of Jordan Gardens who is also attending Fredonia.

-College Planning Update – Allen Booker was able to meet with several members of the community during the Community Day event and noted his contract expires next month.

-The security guard contract has been renewed for one more year.

-A Resident Advisory Board meeting will be held on September 14th at 4 pm at Central Office in preparation for the annual Agency Plan submittal.

Ms. Smith asked for board approval to terminate the agreement with Mental Health for lack of fulfillment on their part of the agreement. Commissioner Archie suggested seeking another vendor. Ms. Smith stated there is an internal job posting for the position of Tenant Services Coordinator which will fulfill this need. Mr. Cafarella stated a motion to place this item on the agenda needs to be made.

Commissioner Swift made a motion to place the termination of the Mental Health agreement effective immediately on the agenda. Commissioner Archie seconded and the motion was unanimously carried. Commissioner Cracknell made a motion to approve the termination of the Mental Health agreement effective immediately. Commissioner Todd seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

-Ms. Smith reported the recent HUD audit cited the authority with four findings as well as observations. The findings were on the general depository agreement, utility allowances being updated, and relief of utilities, the offering of a flat rent choice, and the Section 3 program must include youth build. The authority has 60 days to comply, and items will be in compliance well before the deadline.

-Ms. Smith stated a staff brunch was recently held which was very nice and enjoyed by staff.

-People & Possibilities met and their next meeting will be on September 28th. Ms. Smith stated she is the chair and Ms. Attfield is the vice-chair.

VII. NFHA ATTORNEY REPORT

-Mr. Cafarella reported the HUD audit was toward the former executive director and was surprised at the very minimal findings that were cited.

-The eviction process is becoming increasingly faster and there are 30 evictions pending authority wide.

-Mr. Cafarella gave a status report on items presented by Commissioner Todd. Properties owned by Nick George are not being purchased by the authority since the price demand was too high. The vacant land (9 lots) is owned by the housing authority. Discussion was held on what was going to be developed on this land. Mr. Cafarella stated the land was going to be used for a homeownership program. Ms. Smith stated Commissioner Bass suggested a grocery store be built on the land.

-Mr. Cafarella stated the OCFS audit on the Livin' Large program has been completed and the program is now in full compliance. A \$1,500 fine was given, and licensing has remained in place.

-Mr. Cafarella asked if board and staff have received sexual harassment training. Ms. Smith stated the training is for staff and board and can be done in person or online. Ms. Smith will send the link for online training to the board.

-Mr. Cafarella reported he has two items for Executive Session; one is a contractual matter with potential litigation and the second matter is with potential litigation.

Commissioner Archie made a motion to enter into Executive Session. Commissioner Todd seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

Executive Session began at 6:15 pm

Executive Session ended at 7:01 pm

Commissioner Archie made a motion to return to Regular Session. Commissioner Todd seconded and the motion was unanimously carried. Regular Session resumed.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

IX. NEW BUSINESS

Next meeting: Tuesday, October 10, 2023, 4:00 pm – Administrative Office

X. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Todd made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Archie seconded and the motion was unanimously carried. The meeting adjourned at 7:05 pm.


Secretary