

**NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY
SPECIAL MEETING
SATURDAY MARCH 9, 2019 8:00AM
5 CHAMBERS STREET**

ROLL CALL TO CONVENE THE SPECIAL MEETING: 8:01AM

COMMISSIONERS:

Chairman Scott Brightman
Vice Chair Karen Hughey
Treasurer Reg Foster
Commissioner Peter Pingitore
Commissioner Penelope Kirk

NHA STAFF:

Bernhard Kirstein, Int Executive Director

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by the Secretary of the Needham Housing Authority by preparing a Public Notice dated March 6, 2019, setting forth the date, time, and place of this meeting. Said notice was filed with the Clerk of the Town of Needham and provided to persons requesting it.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Interview of Two Finalists for Executive Director Position of NHA and determination of a candidate to whom NHA will offer the ED position.

Interview 1: Carlos Lopez Start 8:03am

How will you familiarize yourself with DHCD?

Take full advantage of all trainings to continue to learn. All public housing currently changes so he's used to constantly having to learn.

What do you believe the relationship with the board should be?

There should be a good relationship with the board and the executive director. The board should trust the director and not expect him to micromanage. The executive director reports to the board.

What do you believe the relationship with the residents should be?

The ED's entire reason to be here is to increase their quality of life.

What is your experience with development?

He has experience with low to mid level rehabilitation projects and capital projects. He believes the key is active conversations with the residents and maintaining familiarity with the project.

You're a candidate for your masters. Would you continue with your education? Our meetings are in the evenings.

Yes. He is a little over half way done with his MPA. He has currently never missed an evening meeting currently. He will work with his professors in advance. He will always be available to the housing authority.

Why public housing? Why Needham?

After working in the private sector, you never get the chance to sit at the table with local and state governments to make changes in the community. Since being at Westerly, he's had the opportunity to go to the state house in order to advocate for public housing and make changes in the community.

Our housing authority has been in the news a lot lately. How do you manage a crisis?

Never let the crisis manage you. About half the time, we can prepare for a crisis and see it coming. The other half of the time, make sure you're preparing the team supporting you, make them feel supportive, inform everyone, and work collaboratively for a solution. He will never ask a team member to do something he wouldn't do himself.

What is your management style?

He will never ask a team member to do something he wouldn't do. He is very team oriented. He puts accountability first. He has his team's back as long as they are make decisions that are consistent with the mission. He wants to make sure all team members have the resources they need to do their job to the best of their ability. He strives to have a good relationship with his team and supports them. He welcomes pushback and disagreements from his team to initiate good discussions.

Are you prepared to fix the problems with the housing authority and within a year?

He has faced many types of problems and is prepared to walk in here and face them again. If you've lost residents' trust, you can't put a time line on that and it will probably take longer than a year. But he will continue to work at it as long as it takes.

The commute is 50 minutes on a Saturday. Will that be a problem?

It's about the same distance as my current commute so it won't be a problem.

How will you maintain good relationships with the community?

Before networking can occur and new relationships can begin, he has to fully understand what is going on within the housing authority. He needs to know everything that may come up while out in the community.

It seems like fixing this housing authority can take longer than a year. Would your commitment be long term?

If the conditions were right, anyone would say yes. Not only are housing authorities looking for directors, but directors are looking for housing authorities.

There are liabilities issues in housing authorities. For instance, people smoking in their apartments, which is a huge risk to people's lives. There is an expensive solution for wifi smoke detectors. Are you open to looking into high cost solutions?

Yes. Whenever you are changing a safety system, you really have to look into every aspect of the system, so he would have to do a lot of research first and report his findings to the board.

How do you feel about a Memorandum of Understanding – between tenants and housing? Do you feel as though you will need them? They're not necessarily required.

He is very familiar with MOU's but is not familiar with them at housing authorities. He does not see their place in housing authorities. He wants to work with the resident and keep open lines of communication. You have to get your team to operate with a similar mindset of you. At the end of the day though, we are here to serve the residents.

Residents have avoided the NHA office for years. What would you do to make the office more welcoming?

A lot of times, for whatever reason, residents are worried about going to the office, with fear of retaliation or something similar. Whenever a resident is sharing information with him, he almost always keeps it confidential. If there is a reason he has to share the name, he prepares the resident ahead of time. He understands what it's like to live in affordable housing, so encourages his staff to deal with the residents in the same way he does. But it does take time to rebuild trust.

How will you take on introducing yourself to the residents?

If there is a resident services person in place, he likes to work through that person to set something up – meet & greet, coffee, etc. The vision of the director of the housing authority emerges from these meetings.

A resident puts in a work order for an ongoing maintenance issue. Resident speaks with maintenance director and nothing is done. The resident goes to the executive director. How do you resolve this?

You have to look at the details of the work order. It may not get done within 2 days, depending on the priority. He can judge where work orders should be at what time for his maintenance staff. He will ask who the work order was reported to in order to see accountability and check up on the work order.

How do you feel about making housing more energy efficient?

It's a no brainer and a necessity. He implemented an energy efficiency plan in one of his previous housing complexes that resulted in a \$46,000 energy savings. You also have to work with the residents to educate them on things to keep an eye out for with regards to energy.

NHA is part of the Town but is not in the budget. They operate as a quasi independent, state and federally funded organization. How do you handle that?

I welcome input from the Town but keep an open mind. He would love to have the Town here wanting to help the housing authority, but keeps an eye on it. But the bigger focus is dealing with the issues within the housing authority.

We have a really active and stable board who is interested in further development. We have the attention of DHCD and HUD. We have a supportive, stable, well run Town who is looking to

integrate the housing authority into the Town. There is Town funding through the Community Preservation Committee.

That's really good. That increases the urgency of dealing with in house issues while these relationships are still positive so he can take advantage of these relationships.

We do not have a director of leased housing. Do you have someone to bring in?

The makeup of the team may end up changing, especially if you're looking to bring in an additional 61 units of housing.

What do you think is the single most important responsibility of the executive director?

You come in with the mentality that you're serving your team and you're serving your residents. Networking and brainstorming after hours and on weekends. You should try to get your team to do the same thing.

In Framingham you had a team of 11. How long were you there? How big was your team at the cruise line? How large was your staff at Cornerstone?

I was there for a couple years. The cruise line crew was a team of eight. At Cornerstone it was a team of 18.

End: 8:56am

Interview #2: Joe Markey Start 8:58am

What are you doing currently?

Currently works for the Middlesex Sheriff's Office 20 hours a week and is a law clerk for 20 hours a week. He manages membership of 700 reserve deputy sheriffs that do a lot of community outreach projects. It is the nonprofit part of the sheriff's office. In the law office, he handles a caseload for the managing partner. He is in his last year of law school and as a law clerk does a lot of legal research and writing. He's worked on a lot of tenant/landlord cases.

Why are you interested in this position?

He was elected to the housing authority at 19 in his town. He has loved being involved in community housing since then. It's really important that housing authorities work with communities to provide safe, sanitary housing. He is graduating law school in May and is legislative work is relevant to the needs of a housing authority executive director.

What experience do you have of leading a staff?

The 700 reserve deputy sheriff report to him. He manages the projects they do.

We are looking at redevelopment and development. Do you have experience in redevelopment?

In the Lynnfield Housing Authority, they went after Community Economic Development Coordination grant, but decided not to pursue it because they will have to pay it back. He has written grants for redevelopment. He wrote the housing reduction plan for that authority. Lynnfield has 64 4001 units and 6 89 units.

What is your management style?

He is big on education. You need to be able to give your staff the tools they need to be successful. The organization will become stagnant otherwise. He would institute weekly staff meetings to be able to track progress.

Do you have any HUD units in Lynnfield?

No.

NHA has a hybrid of DHCD and HUD funded units. What will you do to educate yourself on HUD units?

He would go to the code of federal regulations. He would use his law school training in order to educate himself on the regulations. There is a national organization that provides training to executive directors that he would look to.

Is that all you think there is? Or is there something more to it?

That's what he's been told by other executive directors. He met with other executive directors and that was the advice he was given.

How would you approach your relationship with the regulation authorities?

He has a good existing relationship with people at DHCD. He oversees the 40R district in Lynnfield. He has relationships with organizations as well.

What is your management style in terms of your relationship with residents?

You need to be open and honest with the tenants, especially about all the issues going on. Having a new director, you need to start on a clean slate and you can't hide the fact that there is a problem.

How do you manage a crisis?

You need to be fair and open about it. You can't hide things.

How do you approach officials who are a major source of your funding, who may not be informed of restrictions you are under?

He would invite them to have a roundtable discussion over any issues and restrictions. You need to educate them on the problems.

If a state representative called you asking about a candidate on the wait list, what do you do?

He would not say anything specific without a release.

We have an active local Town government, a select board supportive of this agency. We operate as a quasi independent agency, funded by state and local government. We are part of the Town but not managed by the Town. How do you manage that?

In Lynnfield, he has been able to form a relationship between the housing authority and Town. He was able to transition plowing from the housing authority to the Town. He had a good relationship with the Town Administrator.

Is there a quid pro quo when you have a Town providing a plowing service? Is there a fee? Why do they do it?

No. He thinks they have the resources and are willing to provide the service.

Are you prepared to fix the problems within NHA and what is the time frame?

With the wait list and development problem, the switch over to Champs would be is first focus. He would look for direction from the board with regards to redevelopment. Maybe the incoming number two can focus on the redevelopment with a consultant. The executive director's main focus should be fixing the wait list.

Can you be an executive director, finish law school, be a commissioner in Lynnfield, and get the PHM certification? It seems like a lot.

Yes I could. His term as commissioner ends in April. He finishes law school in May. He has been working full time throughout law school and going to law school full time and has managed his time well.

Do you have a target start date?

Middle of April. Currently only in two classes.

How long a commitment do you think it would take to solve some of the issues? Do you intend to stay on long term?

Without seeing the full extent of the problems, only from reading articles, it's hard to answer. Yes, he has would have a long term commitment to the housing authority. He was a commissioner for five years.

Residents have avoided the NHA office for years. What would you do to make the office more welcoming?

Right away he would have a community meeting open to every resident. He would have monthly meetings as well. It's important to rebuild the trust that was lost.

A resident puts in a work order for an ongoing maintenance issue. Resident speaks with maintenance director and nothing is done. The resident goes to the executive director. How do you resolve this?

He would read the work order and ask why it hasn't been done. Then he would talk to the resident about it.

Will you step down from the Middlesex Sheriff's Office? Are you going to study for the bar?

He will step down. He plans on taking the bar at the end of July. It's going to be challenging but it's nothing different. His main focus would be working at NHA and studying for the bar.

What do you think is the single most important responsibility of an executive director?
To be the chief relationship officer. Confide trust in the community. He can bring integrity to this organization.

End: 9:27am

Richard: Search Consultant to the Board. DHCD requires tenant participation in the final interviews. They give their recommendation.

Commissioner Foster would like to reach consensus from everyone on the board for this decision.

Commissioner Hughey: Carlos came across better today than the first interview, but the opposite with Joe. She feels like they need more of the experience and she likes Carlos' team approach.

Helen: She thinks Carlos is the better candidate. Had the right answers.

Richard: Undecided about both candidates. Understands NHA needs someone soon to take charge, but will defer to Commissioner Foster's judgement.

Commissioner Foster: Joe is someone who is moving up in the world and is early in his career. NHA would be a stepping stone, which could be a good thing. He does have a lack of experience though with regards to managing staff and units of families. But he could figure it out. Carlos has managed people. He has the knowledge of management that just comes from experience. He would lean towards Carlos.

The Search Committee recommends Carlos.

Commissioner Brightman: He's not completely satisfied with either candidate but knows we are under a deadline. He will rule out Joe because he is too junior for the position. He is looking for integrity and leadership, which he sees in Joe. Carlos' has enough experience to justify hiring him. If he had to make a choice, he would choose Carlos.

Commissioner Kirk: There are pluses and minuses to both of them. Joe approaches things in a cerebral kind of way. Carlos provides more of a human connection. If this housing authority wasn't in a crisis, she would go with Joe. But because of the current situation, she has to go with Carlos.

Commissioner Pingitore: The requirements for being a good executive director are enormous. One candidate expressed that this job is a calling. He believes that Carlos is an excellent candidate. He undersold himself. He relaxed when Commissioner Pingitore asked him how do to manage a crisis. Carlos had a command presence. He isn't worried about the commute because if you're dedicated to your job, you do it. He sees a commitment to public housing,

he's been there and lived it. Joe is an interesting candidate, but sees him as being a lawyer. He doesn't really have experience managing a board, managing staff, or managing tenants. He believes he is a very good candidate.

Richard: There are pros and cons to both. The second position he is currently looking for is going to be key. Joe's commitment was five years. Carlos' commitment was two to three years; he was concerned about the heavy work load and that it's not much more than he's currently making. There are no public integrity issues with Carlos. There is a tense political relationship currently in Westerly. Joe is still figuring out what he wants to do and may not stick around.

Bernie: Thinks Carlos did very well.

Search Committee vote:

To recommend Carlos Lopez as the Executive Director candidate to the board.

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster, and seconded by Commissioner Hughey, the motion to recommend was approved by the following vote: 4-0.

RESOLUTION #2019-13

To accept the recommendation of the search committee, authorize the executive director and the chair of the board to enter into contract negotiations with Carlos Lopez, negotiate a salary within the regulatory guidelines, seek to finalize the contract, and bring it back to the board for approval, subject to acceptable background checks and acceptance by the candidate of the DHCD contract. Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Hughey, the motion to approve was approved by the following vote: 5-0.

MOTION TO ADJOURN THE NHA SPECIAL MEETING:

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Hughey and seconded by Commissioner Kirk, the motion to adjourn was approved by the following vote: 5-0.