

NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY
REGULAR BOARD MEETINGS,
HIGH ROCK HOMES, LLC BOARD MEETING
MINUTES

Thursday, September 15, 2022

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Reginald C. Foster, Chair
Eleanor Evans, Vice-Chair
Ed Scheideler, Treasurer
Janice Bennett, Commissioner (remote)
Penny Kirk, Commissioner

NHA STAFF PRESENT:

Steve Merritt, Interim Executive Director
& Secretary
Cheryl Gosmon, Assistant Executive
Director
Gary Kuphal, Director of Facilities &
Maintenance
Nayda Sanchez, Director of Leasing &
Occupancy

Guest: State Representative Denise Garlick

This is a Hybrid meeting. Chair Foster called the Monthly Meeting and the Public Hearing on the State-aided Annual Plan to order at 7:19 pm. He called the roll of Commissioners with all reporting present on September 15, 2022, for the Needham Housing Authority (NHA) and High Rock Homes LLC Regular Board meeting and Public Hearing. He stated that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by the Secretary of the NHA by preparing a Public Notice dated September 9, 2022, 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. Chair Foster noted that the meeting is being recorded.

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Public Hearing on the Needham Housing Authority’s State-aided Public Housing 2022 Annual Plan.

Chair Foster opened the Public Hearing at 7:23 pm.

Steve Merritt introduced the 2022 Annual Plan, a 124-page document that details the overall operations of the housing authority. He stated that the plan includes the Capital Improvement Plan, Maintenance and Repair Plan, Operating Budget, Policies, and other elements. Mr. Merritt summarized the details of capital projects. He described the maintenance and repair plan and summarized the operating budget. Mr. Merritt stated that the Annual Plan is available on the NHA website at www.needhamhousingauthority.org and the state’s website at www.mass.gov/local-housing-authority-lha-reports.

Chair Foster opened the meeting for public comment on the 2022 Annual Plan. NHA Resident, Ross Donald – Chambers Street made the following comment:

Mr. Donald expressed a concern that there is nothing in the Annual Plan about energy. He stated that the town of Needham has a Climate Change Action Committee, and he would like the NHA to be integrated with what the town is doing. He stated that he would like to see energy issues addressed. He also stated that there is nothing about the mission statement in the Annual Plan. He stated that the mission statement must be developed a little bit further. He added that the mission statement would be a way to evaluate and analyze what we're doing and how we're doing it. Mr. Donald stated that he would like to see the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) posted as well as a list of completed CIP projects. Mr. Donald referred to CIP items that had been completed such as an intercom system and roofs. Mr. Donald stated that some of the CIP work that was planned was windows for Chamber St, in 2019 and he doesn't see that in the Annual Plan. He stated that the windows are sticky and hard to open.

NHA Resident, Rachel Crimlisk – Captain Robert Cook Drive made the following comment: Ms. Crimlisk stated that she supports Ross Donald's comments on energy issues and that the NHA should increase its efforts to promote energy efficiency.

NHA Resident, David Shubow – Chambers Street made the following comment: Mr. Shubow expressed concerns regarding windows at the Chambers Street development. He stated that some of the windows are broken and that he would like to see all the windows replaced.

Because there were no more comments from the public, Chair Foster, closed the Public Hearing at 7:58 PM and returned to the regular NHA and HRH, LLC Board Meetings.

Chair Announcements:

Chair Foster welcomed State Representative Denise Garlick. Chair Foster stated that Representative Garlick was a co-sponsor of today's celebration commemorating the Grand Opening of the Community Room at Captain Robert Cook Drive and the Cook's After School Program. Chair Foster also expressed his appreciation on behalf of Needham Housing Authority to the Needham Police Department who co-sponsor the event as well. Chair Foster also noted that the Fire Department was on hand with their Fire Truck as well as the Needham Public Library, the Needham Channel, and other town partners were on hand for this great event.

Resident/Community Input:

Sue Biasizzo, speaking on behalf of the Cooks Bridge Tenant Association (CBTA) stated that the CBTA held their monthly meeting last night with a small turnout. She stated that she distributed information on developing a Resident Advisory Board (RAB). She pointed out that the housing authority does not currently have a RAB and would like to get one started. She suggested that the RAB would have an opportunity to weigh in on NHA policies and initiatives. She stated that the establishment of a RAB is hopeful that this would encourage more residents to participate in the CBTA meetings. Sue mentioned that she will be joining a round table discussion through the Mel King Institute for Community Building. She stated that public housing residents from across the Commonwealth will attend this event. Sue thanked Steve Merritt and Gary Kuphal for initiating the installation of the stop sign and for working on getting the streetlights up and running. Sue stated that the cookout was great, and she expressed her appreciation to Representative Garlick for attending.

Carol Briggs introduced herself as well as her neighbor, Lew Garfinkel, residents of Seabeds Way. She stated that she is here in support of Mr. Garfinkel and would like to comment on the Bird Feeder Policy. She noted that the CBTA held an informal discussion regarding the policy last night.

Chair Foster stated that the Board of Commissioners has not had an opportunity to review the policy, adding that it is on the agenda for discussion only. He stated that once the Board has a chance to talk about it, residents would have an opportunity to comment.

David Shubow stated that the Jewish High Holidays are upon us. He took the opportunity to wish everyone a sweet New Year.

Ross Donald reiterated his desire to have a resident-centered approach beyond what is in the lease. He added that it is more about inclusivity in the way that Equal Justice Needham has been talking about, diversity, inclusivity, and equity. He stated that it involves things like being invited to events in both developments, Seabeds Way/Captain Robert Cook Drive and Linden/Chambers. He stated that he would like to have a discussion on creating a community that includes all residents. He stated that he hears about the CBTA resident meetings, but that the meetings are not inclusive of both developments, state and federal. He mentioned that the Center at the Heights has stepped up to fill in the gap. Mr. Donald stated that 164 Linden Street should be used as a design center to house information. He stated that he was happy to see that the snowplows have been removed from in front of the community room. Mr. Donald talked briefly about his concerns with pest control issues and made suggestions on mitigation.

Mr. Merritt mentioned the cookout at 28 Captain Robert Cook Drive. He stated that it was a great event commemorating the opening of the Community Room at Captain Robert Cook Drive and the reopening of the Cooks After School program. He noted that a similar cookout was held on August 30th at Linden and Chambers celebrating the end of summer.

A. Adoption of Guidelines for Public Comment Period and Public Hearing at Needham Housing Authority

Chair Foster opened this item for discussion. He stated that this agenda item is a carryover from last month. He recapped the Board's reaction to the proposed policy. A brief discussion followed. Commissioner Evans stated that the policy should include guidance regarding remote participation in terms of public comment. Chair Foster stated that a sentence regarding this can be added to the policy.

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Scheideler and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to approve the Guidelines for Public Comment Period and Public Hearing at Needham Housing Authority as amended.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans, aye; Commissioner Kirk, aye; Commissioner Scheideler, aye; and Commissioner Bennett, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

B. Review & Approval:

1. NHA Bill/Check Warrant

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Kirk to approve the check register listed on the Warrant dated September 15, 2022, in the amount of \$267,612.97.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans, aye; Commissioner Kirk, aye; Commissioner Scheideler, aye; and Commissioner Bennett, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

2. HRH LLC Bill/Check Warrant

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to approve the High Rock Homes, LLC check register listed on the Warrant dated September 15, 2022, in the amount of \$25,985.36.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans, aye; Commissioner Kirk, aye; Commissioner Scheideler, aye; and Commissioner Bennett, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

C. Review & Approval -- Board Minutes:

8/18/2022 NHA, and HRH LLC Regular Board Meetings

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Kirk to approve the Minutes of August 18, 2022, NHA, & HRH LLC Board meetings as submitted.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans, aye; Commissioner Kirk, aye; Commissioner Scheideler, aye; and Commissioner Bennett, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

Representative Garlick stated that there is nothing more important for her than to be present at this meeting. She referred to Chair Foster's remark on the cumbersome effort to call the rolled of Commissioners and added that it might be cumbersome to hear each Commissioner state their name and vote, but that it is wonderful to see the unity and cohesion of the Board. She also stated that it takes a team for the work we are doing and the service we provide to residents who want, need, and deserve to live in a decent, affordable, and safe environment. Representative Garlick expressed her appreciation to the Board of Commissioners, Executive Director, and Assistant Executive Director as well as the residents who are weighing in on these conversations. She stated that she is glad to be a part of this team.

Chair Foster stated that Representative Garlick has always been an extraordinarily strong supporter of public housing in Needham even before he showed up in 2008. He added that because of her support, the NHA is finally in a position to update and renovate its geriatric buildings and make this a better place for everyone to live.

D. Information & Discussion: Interim Executive Director's Report

1. Monthly Financial Report

Mr. Merritt took a moment to thank Representative Garlick for her participation in today's event. Mr. Merritt referred to the Monthly Financial Report for the past seven months. He stated that the housing authority is in good operational shape.

2. Monthly Management report

Mr. Merritt stated that the Monthly Management report outlines the NHA's vacant units through the end of August. He stated that there are seven vacant units systemwide. He stated that Nayda Sanchez, Gary Kuphal, and their teams have worked hard over the last year to reduce the number of vacancies.

3. State Annual Plan Consideration

He stated that Ms. Gosmon would capture the comments from the public hearing and will bring the State Annual Plan to the October Board meeting for final approval.

4. Linden Chambers Camera issues update

Mr. Merritt stated that his staff is working with the contractor on improving the system. Gary Kuphal stated that he has met with the contractors who are coming out to present their new plans. He stated that additional broadband will be needed for several locations. In terms of the equipment, the contractor has stated that there is no extra charge. They will swap out what they brought in for us with new updated high-power equipment at no cost. He stated that a walkthrough is scheduled for Thursday, September 22nd to determine the best sites for the power extenders.

5. RFP for Fee Accounting Services

Mr. Merritt stated that he is preparing the proposal for Fee Accounting Services. He stated that he has received three samples from our auditor on what the Request for Proposal will look like. He stated that he will bring this back to the Board for discussion at the October meeting. He stated that the NHA's fiscal year ends on December 31st.

6. Bank Issues

Mr. Merritt stated that he will give the Board a copy of the draft policy on check signing for their consideration at a subsequent meeting.

7. NHA Audit Update

Mr. Merritt stated that last month he reported that the NHA received a letter from HUD commenting on our audit. He stated that it turns out that HUD was commenting on the High Rock Homes, LLC audit. He stated that he does not have a comment yet on the NHA Annual Audit which was just filed in the past two weeks by our auditors.

8. Bird Feeder Policy Draft

Mr. Merritt stated that this item is for the Board's consideration and discussion. He stated that NHA has a Bird Feeder Policy that was written in December 2010, but he is unable to find the vote approving the policy. He added that the proposed Bird Feeder Policy includes information from the town's Animal Control Department. He stated that the proposed policy comes from issues that the NHA is having with Bird Feeders being too close to buildings and attracting other unwanted birds and other unwanted pests. He stated that when the bird seeds fall to the ground, they attract scavenger birds and other vermin. Mr. Merritt stated that the National Audubon Society recommends that birds not be fed between May and November. He also stated that he has received a number of

complaints about bird activity. He stated that the policy will help establish a guideline on how to move forward.

Commissioner Bennett stated that years ago there was an issue with bird baths. She stated that the housing authority created a policy banning bird baths. She added that she cannot think of a reason why bird feeders would not be in that policy, adding the two go hand in hand. Commissioner Bennett stated that Mr. Merritt is right, bird feeders and bird baths bring a lot of unwanted prey.

Chair Foster reiterated that no action will be taken on the Bird Feeder Policy at this meeting. He stated that this is a discussion-only item. The Policy was in the Policy Book but there is no evidence that the Board reviewed the policy or approved the policy. Chair Foster stated that it would be a good idea to have the residents and the tenant association review the policy and get their input on the policy for discussion by the Board at a subsequent meeting. Chair Foster noted that he and his family are Bird Feeder lovers and that they use the Black Oil Bird Seeds that do fall to the ground, and it makes a humongous mess. Chair Foster stated that rodents, squirrels, and chipmunks are highly attracted to fallen bird seeds. He added that this is something to be considered and something that we don't want to attract to our buildings. Chair Foster stated that it is a good idea to have a good policy written up and to have residents at both developments have a chance to weigh in.

Carol Briggs, a Seabeds Way resident asked if the tenant association needs to weigh in on this and if there will be other professional information on bird feeders for consideration.

Chair Foster stated that it is his recommendation that the tenant organization weigh in now and or before the next Board meeting.

Lew Garfinkel, Seabeds Way resident stated that he is 81 years old and has lived at Seabeds Way since January 1, 2000. He stated that he is not in good health. He stated that there have been bird feeders at Seabeds Way ever since he moved in and there have never been any issues. He stated that he started a bird feeder in 2005. He stated that he spends a lot of money on bird feeders. He added that he is very diligent about making sure everything is kept clean. He stated that all he has in his life right now are his birds and his cat. He stated that his bird feeder is mounted to a crab apple tree approximately 19 feet from his unit. He added that he enjoys sitting in his recliner looking at the birds. He stated that it helps to relieve his anxiety.

Chair Foster noted that Mr. Garfinkel has a tremendous amount of wisdom and advice and has spoken very well. Chair Foster added that he is glad that Mr. Garfinkel was able to speak up for himself. Chair Foster stated that the Board is not going to make a decision this evening on the Bird Feeder Policy but that he wants Mr. Garfinkel's input at the resident meetings that will be scheduled regarding the policy in a week or two. Chair Foster asked Mr. Garfinkel what he would like to see happen tonight.

Mr. Garfinkel replied that he would like to have peace of mind that he will not have to take down his bird feeder.

Mr. Merritt stated that he has had this discussion with Mr. Garfinkel before and that he has also had many calls about the birds around Mr. Garfinkel's bird feeder. Mr. Merritt stated that he has witnessed a couple of dozen pigeons and turkeys. Mr. Merritt stated that he is not saying to get rid of the bird feeder but that it needs to be away from the building. He stated that other residents have a right to the enjoyment of the building and the birds are impeding that.

Chair Foster reiterated that the Board would consider the policy after the residents have had a chance to weigh in.

9. Events Report

Mr. Merritt shared an update on the grand opening of the Community Room at Captain Robert Cook Drive and the reopening of the Cooks After School program. He thanked Representative Garlick for her support of the event. He stated that the Police Department, the Fire Department, and seniors from Seabeds Way came down to the event. Mr. Merritt thanked the Cooks After School Steering Committee for their fine work and continued support.

10. Any other issues/updates of NHA

E. Search Committee Status Update: New Executive Director Search

Chair Foster opened this item for discussion. He stated that Commissioner Bennett is the head of the Search Committee and Mr. Merritt is our Interim Executive Director member on the Committee. Mr. Merritt reported that the advertisement for the NHA Executive Director position has been posted on the National NAHRO website under their classified ad section. Mr. Merritt stated that he will be attending the National NAHRO conference in San Diego next week and will bring copies of the advertisement with him. He also stated that the state-wide NAHRO conference is in November and that there will be a push at that time to get the advertisement out during the conference.

F. Status Updates – External Initiatives:

1. Housing Plan Working Group

Commissioner Scheideler stated that the Working Group has been meeting and making progress. He stated that there was a discussion on the MBTA communities' guidelines which are those communities that have MBTA service. Commissioner Scheideler stated that the guidelines are now finalized, and they are looking for x number of units to be within half a mile of each public transportation station. He stated that Needham has benefitted because the number of units Needham must provide for was reduced dramatically because Needham was changed from a bus town to a train town. He added that Oscar Mertz presented an Implementation Plan and that he would distribute copies to Board members if they would like a copy. Commissioner Scheideler stated that he will not be able to attend the next Housing Plan Working Group meeting and that Chair Foster

has requested permission to have someone else attend the meeting in his absence. Chair Foster volunteered to be the alternate until Commissioner Scheideler returns.

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Scheideler and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to nominate Commissioner Foster to be an alternate member of the Housing Plan Working Group to sit in on the meeting that Commissioner Scheideler will not be able to attend.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Scheideler votes, aye; Commissioner Kirk votes, aye; Commissioner Bennett votes, aye; Commissioner Evans votes, aye; and Commissioner Foster votes, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

2. Preservation & Redevelopment Initiative (PRI)

- Report on meeting with Representative Garlick.
Chair Foster stated that we had a very productive meeting with Representative Garlick and her staff members as well as Margaret Moran from CHA. He stated that it was a very helpful discussion on the next steps for the coming year.
- CHA report is included in the Board Packet. There was no further discussion on the report.
- Linden/Chambers A/E Designer FRS – status update
Chair Foster stated that the RFS was posted on August 3, 2022, and the deadline for respondents to submit proposals was August 24, 2022. He stated that he is thrilled to receive six good proposals. Chair Foster stated that the NHA Local Designer Selection Committee will interview the firms and present a report at the October Board meeting. He stated that the NHA Board of Commissioners will make the final decision on awarding the contract.
- Chair Foster stated that a Legal Services RFS has been posted.

G. Status Update – Internal Initiatives:

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

1. Report from the Cooks After School (CAS) Steering Committee (Janice Bennett, Penny Kirk, Jessica Reese, Cheryl Gosmon, and Steve Merritt)
 - a. Meeting Minutes of August 18th and 25th and September 1, 2022
Chair Foster stated that next Monday the CAS opens after two years of extremely hard work on all our parts we were able to relaunch the program in a wonderful new facility.

Commissioner Bennett stated that she is thrilled and that the kids are so excited. She added that the kids loved the grand opening event, it was a wonderful time.
Chair Foster stated that it would be great if someone could send out a status email on how everything went on CAS's first day.

2. Plan to return Unit 42 CRCD to service - **In Process**

Steve Merritt provided an update on this item. He stated that Gary and his team are in the process of getting the unwanted items out of the unit and would begin their process of renovating this space for a family of up to eight people.

Chair Foster stated that there is a scarcity of deeply affordable housing in Needham and elsewhere, but four-bedroom units are exceptionally scarce. He added that this is a great thing that we are doing.

3. Paving Project – Seabeds Way and CRCDC.
There are no updates on this item.
4. Seabeds Way/CRCDC CCTV System Begins Spring/Fall of 2022
There were no updates on this item.
5. Resident Survey – final comments
Chair Foster stated that the Board received a copy of last year’s 2021 Resident Survey. He stated that this was the first time Angie Medeiros had pioneered a resident survey. He stated that we received some really good input back. He stated that we asked our residents how we can improve on services and programs that would help improve their experiences as residents of Needham Housing Authority and the Board was asked if there were any improvements that needed to be made to the survey document. Steve Merritt stated that he has not received any additional comments. Chair Foster stated that because there are no additional comments the survey can go out as is.

H. New Business:

1. Acknowledgement of the award of three additional Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers.
Mr. Merritt stated that this is a result of the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2022. He stated that housing authorities across the country were limited to four additional vouchers and Needham received three. He noted that officially Needham now has 123 vouchers.
2. NHA Adoption of FY2023 Fair Market Rent
Mr. Merritt stated that the FY2023 Fair Market Rents are based on the results of a local rent survey conducted in November 2021. A brief discussion followed.

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Evans to adopt the FY2023 Fair Market Rent.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans votes, aye; Commissioner Scheideler votes, aye; Commissioner Kirk votes, aye; and Commissioner Bennett votes, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

3. Write off uncollectable rent:
 - a. Federal Public Housing \$40,783.77
 - b. State Public Housing \$11,183.56

Mr. Merritt stated that this represents people who no longer live in the properties of the NHA, and we don't expect we will be able to ever collect. He stated that it does not mean that we can't continue to try to collect but that it means we get these balances of our books.

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Scheideler to write off the uncollectable rent for Federal Public Housing - \$40,783.77 as detailed in the Board Packet insert and for State Public Housing \$11,183.56.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans votes, aye; Commissioner Scheideler votes, aye; Commissioner Kirk votes, aye; and Commissioner Bennett votes, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

I. Adjournment

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Bennett and seconded by Commissioner Kirk to adjourn the NHA and HRH LLC Board meeting at 9:30 pm.

Chair Foster called the roll of Commissioners in favor of this motion:

Commissioner Foster votes, aye; Commissioner Evans, aye; Commissioner Kirk, aye; Commissioner Scheideler, aye; and Commissioner Bennett, aye.

The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.

Minutes Prepared by

Cheryl Gosmon