

**NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 28, 2022, 7:15 pm

ROLL CALL BY CHAIR FOSTER TO CONVENE THE SPECIAL MEETING

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chair Reginald Foster
Treasurer Ed Scheideler
Tenant- Commissioner Janice Bennett
Commissioner Penny Kirk

NHA STAFF PRESENT:

Angie Medeiros, Executive Director
Cheryl Gosmon, Asst. Executive Director

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

Commissioner Eleanor Evans

GUESTS:

Rick Leco, Managing Partner, D&V/Mainsail
Stephen Merritt, Interim Executive Director candidate

Chair Foster called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm and roll called Commissioners present at the March 28, 2022, NHA Special Board meeting. Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by the Secretary of the Needham Housing Authority (NHA) by preparing a Public Notice dated March 24, 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.

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AGENDA

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

A. Chair’s Announcements (matters that could not be reasonably anticipated in advance of the meeting). Chair announcements were deferred to the end of the meeting.

B. Interview – Executive Search Consultant and Interim Executive Director

Chair Foster introduced Richard Leco, Managing Partner at D&V/Mainsail, LLC, who has submitted a proposal to be our search consultant for the NHA Executive Director search; and Stephen Merritt, retired Executive Director for the Norwood Housing Authority and candidate for NHA Interim Executive Director. The Board agreed to start with Mr. Merritt’s interview.

After further introductions, the Board engaged in a series of questions with Mr. Merritt. Commissioner Scheideler asked Mr. Merritt how soon he is available. Mr. Merritt replied that he is available immediately. Mr. Merritt also responded to Commissioner Scheideler’s questions on being new to an organization and what that means to him. Mr. Merritt described what he would familiarize

himself with first; he'd seek to understand what the immediate needs are with the residents and with the staff. He stated that once a new Executive Director is in place it is important that the staff is ready to support that person. He also responded to Commissioner Scheideler's question on the merits of being an activist Board and noted that being an activist Board is a positive thing.

Commissioner Bennett asked Mr. Merritt what his top priority would be to the residents. Mr. Merritt responded that a PHA priority is to provide safe and sanitary housing. He stated that residents should feel secure in their homes, that routine maintenance gets done, common areas are in good condition, and also to know that they can speak with the Executive Director at any time. He added that there should be open communication between the office staff and the residents and that residents are treated with respect. He also stated that there are always going to be circumstances where things are not perfect but that working together to keep residents and staff safe is a priority of his.

Commissioner Kirk asked Mr. Merritt about his commitment to residents. Mr. Merritt stated that he has been involved with two modernization projects that included the relocation of residents. He spoke about the process and his sensitivity to the needs of residents. Mr. Merritt also spoke about the benefits of having a Resident Service Coordinator(s) on staff. He stated that the need for these services has grown exponentially, particularly in the last twenty years.

Chair Foster stated that at a minimum the IED will need to be sure to keep up the things that are going well and to keep the momentum going until a permanent leader is in place. Chair Foster noted that the current Resident Service Coordinator has retired, and that Executive Director Medeiros is looking to fill this position. He hoped that Mr. Merritt's experience can help with. Chair Foster noted that the NHA is complex, having five separate programs that need to be managed as well as a Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative. He stated that the NHA has hired Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) to assist with this endeavor, which is a long-term priority of the NHA. Chair Foster asked Mr. Merritt about his experience with these matters. Mr. Merritt responded that he has a long-term relationship with CHA and has worked well with them adding that he sees this process as being virtually seamless. Mr. Merritt responded to Chair Foster's questions on rebooting the Cook's Bridge After School program. Mr. Merritt spoke about a similar program in Norwood that was funded through the efforts of a Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Grant from HUD. He also spoke about the partnership between Norwood Housing Authority and the Norwood School Department. Mr. Merritt responded to Chair Foster's questions on strategies for managing alleged discrimination lawsuits. Mr. Merritt also responded to Chair Foster's question on concerns about being a halftime IED: would he have enough time to oversee the NHA. Mr. Merritt that given his experience, the good shape NHA operations and his knowledge of NHA, he was not concerned. Mr. Merritt stated that he is a firm believer in professional development and will work with staff to ensure their professional growth. Mr. Merritt responded to Chair Foster's question on the secrets of being a successful Interim Executive Director, or alternatively what the mistakes are to avoid. Mr. Merritt stated that lines of communication must be maintained or reopened if they are closed, listening to what is needed by all stakeholders, collecting rents, and doing recertifications; ensure that these issues are kept up to date. He stated that he would have a weekly staff meeting with the administration separately from maintenance and will meet with the residents frequently. Mr. Merritt shared his thoughts on helping the High Rock, Linden, and Chambers communities to organize and develop a resident organization.

Executive Director Medeiros stated that Mr. Merritt would that the NHA has a great staff of hard-working individuals. She added that it is a great team. A general discussion followed about the optimal overlap period for Executive Director and Mr. Merritt.

Chair Foster invited Mr. Leco to present his proposal to be our search consultant for finding and hiring a permanent NHA executive director.

Mr. Leco shared his background, starting as his experience at age 31 as commissioner of 31 the North Attleboro Housing Authority. He noted that the NHA Board was familiar with Mr. Leco's work as the Search Consultant that led to the selection of NHA Executive Director Medeiros. Mr. Leco stated that he is sensitive to the needs Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Mr. Leco referred to DHCD's guidelines on how a Board hires a new Executive Director. Mr. Leco stated that he had great expertise with DHCD's ED hiring guidelines, and would ensure that everything was done properly and appropriately. Mr. Leco suggested that the Board form an Executive Director Search Committee, acting as a board subcommittee and consider including residents, LTO representatives and Needham at large citizens as members on the committee. Mr. Leco went on to describe the process for advertising, as well as forecast of potential pool of applicants that would meet NHA and DHCD's qualifications. He felt sure that NHA will have several good candidates. Mr. Leco stated that he would support the Search Committee in setting up and conducting the interviews. He noted the finalist candidates would be interviewed by the full Board. He stated that the resident organization, that participated in the subcommittee process, should participate in the final interview but do not participate in the final vote. A general discussion followed about advertisements, potential candidates, and salary schedule.

Chair Foster thanked Mr. Leco and Mr. Merritt for their time. Other Board members expressed their appreciation for Mr. Leco's detailed presentation as well as the interview with Stephen Merritt. Mr. Leco and Mr. Merritt then left the meeting.

C. Discuss of the Interviews

A comprehensive discussion ensued on Steve Merritt's qualifications to be NHA's Interim Executive Director. Regarding hiring Mr. Merritt as NHA Interim Executive Director, each commissioner spoke in turn, with each stating the reasons why he/she thought that Mr. Merritt was an outstanding candidate.

Each commissioner then spoke in turn with respect to the merits of Mr. Leco's executive search consultant proposal and his qualifications for leading the search for a new permanent executive director. The consensus was that the D&V/Mainsail proposal, its methodology and Mr. Leco's experience were excellent.

Chair Foster noted for the record that the Board had interviewed Pat Grace last Wednesday 3/23/2022 to be NHA's search consultant. At the time, the Board felt that Ms. Grace and her proposal were also excellent, and that she would do a good job. The Chair further noted, however, Ms. Grace's fee was more than Mr. Leco's, she had less experience doing searches than Mr. Leco, and had declined to help find and interim executive direct. A final point: a few days ago the Ms. Grace sent an eMail withdrawing her proposal from consideration (due to over-commitment to other clients.)

D. Motion and Vote

A motion was made by Commissioner Kirk and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to engage Stephen Merritt as the NHA Interim Executive Director, and D&V/Mainsail, LLC and Rick Leco as the search consultant to help locate and hire a new permanent NHA Executive Director. The Chair is authorized to enter contract negotiations with Mr. Merritt and Mr. Leco, and to execute a contract(s) with them based on their proposal.

The motion carried 4-0 on a roll call vote:

Commissioner Kirk - Aye

Commissioner Scheideler - Aye
Commissioner Bennett - Aye
Commissioner Foster - Aye

E. Chair’s Announcements

CPA Funding Applications Updates. Chair Foster updated the Board on two letters just received from Needham Town Counsel Christopher Heep earlier in the afternoon. Mr. Heep had reviewed the NHA CPA funding applications for Property Existing Conditions Reports/Survey and half time funding for a new Assistant Executive Director position. Unfortunately and unexpectedly, Mr. Heep opined that the first CPA funding application only partially qualified for funding under the CPA and the second did not qualify at all, respectively.

Chair Foster said the CHA team has been contacted and they disagreed with Mr. Heep’s conclusions. An intense effort was underway to provide more information to Mr. Heep and rebut his conclusions. Chair Foster noted that the CPC is scheduled to make final recommendations on all the CPA funding application on Wed March 30, 2022 at 7pm, and encouraged board members to attend if possible.

F. Adjournment

Motion and Vote

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to adjourn the NHA Special Board meeting of March 28, 2022, at approximately 9:06 pm.

The motion carried 4-0 on a roll call vote:

Commissioner Kirk - Aye
Commissioner Scheideler - Aye
Commissioner Bennett - Aye
Commissioner Foster - Aye

Minutes Prepared by

Cheryl Gosmon