

**NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**NHA REGULAR BOARD MEETING,  
HIGH ROCK HOMES, LLC BOARD MEETING  
MINUTES**

**Thursday, July 21, 2022**

**ROLL CALL BY CHAIR FOSTER TO CONVENE THE REGULAR MEETING**

**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

This is a Hybrid meeting. Chair Foster called the meeting to order at 7:37 pm and roll called the Commissioners present on July 21, 2022, for the NHA and High Rock Homes Regular Board meetings. Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by the Secretary of the Needham Housing Authority (NHA) by preparing a Public Notice dated July 18, 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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**ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR: (including matters that could not be reasonably anticipated in advance of the meetings)**

Chair Foster announced that he has completed the Mass NAHRO (National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials) Commissioner Training. He stated that he finished all five commissioner training courses. He also stated that the courses are excellent and worthwhile, and he encouraged the other commissioners to chip away at them noting that it took him two years to complete all five courses. Chair Foster commended Commissioner Bennett for taking courses at the Mel King Institute for Community Building in Boston. Chair Foster stated that he will be submitting his attendance fees for each course for reimbursement under the NHA Training Policy.

**RESIDENT/COMMUNITY INPUT:**

Jessica Reese, President of the Cooks Bridge Tenant Association (CBTA) provided an update on CBTA activities for the summer. She stated that the CBTA held two roundtable community meetings this summer rather than having an official tenant association meeting because one of

the board members has been out for quite some time. She added that the CBTA will discuss new elections at its September meeting. She stated that the CBTA will resume its regular meetings in September.

Sue Biasizzo, a CBTA member stated that the CBTA will meet with Nayda Sanchez, Director of Leasing and Occupancy on Monday 10:00 am. She stated that this is a standing meeting that typically takes place after the NHA Board meeting. Sue mentioned that the Needham Community Farm meeting regarding raised garden beds at Seabeds Way was canceled.

Steve Merritt clarified that the NHA did not cancel the meeting. He stated that he received an email from Needham Community Farm member Ceilidh Peden-Spear which stated that she was canceling the meeting. Mr. Merritt stated that there are different opinions in the Seabeds Way community, and he will plan a community meeting to get a better understanding of what the residents would like.

Ross Donald stated that he has been speaking with staff members at the Center at The Heights to solicit their help in holding community meetings since we don't have a Resident Service Coordinator and Springwell does not have a person on-site as well. He also offered his observations regarding pest infestation and extermination services.

He referred to the Jon Wortman guidelines in the Board Packet and stated that there is no mention of a residents-centered approach, no roles and responsibilities define for residents in the report.

Mr. Merritt responded to Ross Donald's comments about the rat he saw, noting that this is the first he's heard of this but would follow it up. Mr. Merritt stated that he has not received any other complaints or reports community-wide of rats.

Kalpana Shaw asked about the after-school program. She asked if children from High Rock Estates can participate in the Cook's After School (CAS) program. She spoke of her contacts at the YMCA and the Needham Public Library and encouraged the CAS to foster a relationship with these groups to help the children. Kalpana mentioned the little library that was installed at Linden and Chambers and suggested that the library be moved further up into the High Rock neighborhood so that children can have better access to the books.

Mr. Merritt stated that Commissioner Kirk and Commissioner Bennett are putting together a good program and are tapping into great resources from many places. He stated that he and Cheryl Gosmon have met with staff from the John Elliot School and would meet with staff from the Newman School on ways to best support the children. Mr. Merritt also stated that the Public Health Department is donating a Van to the NHA which will help transport children from the High Rock neighborhood to and from CAS. He stated that Lisa Vergara, owner of Storytime Crafts, Inc. has organized the installations of the little libraries.

## **DISCUSSION/APPROVAL ITEMS – NHA & HIGH ROCK HOMES LLC:**

### **A. Review & Approval: NHA Bill/Check Warrant**

1. NHA Bill/Check Warrant

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to approve payment of check register roll listed on the Warrant date July 21, 2022, in the amount of \$351,946.83.

Discussion: Commissioner Kirk asked about the training invoice that was paid. Mr. Merritt explained that the invoice is for one training and the cost is coming from different budget lines. He stated that what Commissioner Kirk is seeing is the division of costs within several budgets. A general discussion followed on the breakout of the bill/check warrant.

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

Commissioner Foster approves; Commissioner Evans approves; Commissioner Kirk approves; Commissioner Scheideler approves; Commissioner Bennett approves.

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

2. HRH LLC Bill/Check Warrant

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Kirk to approve payment of the bill roll/check roll listed on the Warrant date July 21, 2022, in the amount of \$42,858.38.

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

Commissioner Foster approves; Commissioner Evans approves; Commissioner Kirk approves; Commissioner Scheideler approves; Commissioner Bennett approves.

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

**B. Review & Approval -- Board Minutes:**

6/16/2022 NHA, AND HRH LLC Regular Board Meeting.

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Kirk and seconded by Commissioner Scheideler to approve the Minutes of June 16, 2022, NHA, & HRH LLC Board meetings as submitted.

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

Commissioner Evans approves; Commissioner Kirk approves; Commissioner Scheideler approves; Commissioner Bennett approves. Commissioner Foster abstains.

**The motion carried. The vote was 4 yes, 1 abstention.**

**C. Review/Discuss Jon Wortmann Roles/Responsibilities Document**

Chair Foster referred to Jon Wortmann's email report regarding his concluding comments on the Board training over the last four months.

Commissioner Scheideler and Commissioner Bennett agreed that Jon Wortmann's report was well prepared.

Commissioner Evans stated that she agrees with Ross Donald's point in terms of comments from residents not being listed in Jon Wortmann's concluding report. She stated that in looking at the roles of the Board and its members, it would be a good idea to look at the resident association and their various roles concerning bringing their voice in representing residents. She stated that this is something of interest to the Board and to

have more resident associations established and that this was the focus of the work the Board was doing with the consultant and training.

Mr. Merritt stated that he agrees with Commissioner Scheideler and that the report is purposeful and well prepared.

Commissioner Foster stated that Commissioner Evans's point is that the Board did not completely forget the roles concerning residents and representatives of residents. He stated that one of the things that the Board agreed with during the training is that having a strong effective resident association for each development is important. He stated that there should be a resident line that would include things on how residents could resolve problems by contacting the NHA administrative staff first before contacting other town officials.

Commissioner Bennett stated that any line open to communication between residents and the housing authority couldn't be more welcomed. She added that oftentimes you find that a lack of communication is the problem.

Chair Foster suggested that Commissioner Bennett develop additional guidelines and roles/responsibilities that would facilitate communication on roles and responsibilities for residents, which could be added to the report for review at the next Board meeting. Commissioner Kirk stated she would help with this endeavor. Commissioner Foster also suggested that Mr. Merritt and Ms. Gosmon could help as well. Commissioner Foster stated that Commissioner Bennett could come back to the Board with a plan to add to the list and perhaps the Board would adopt that as a guideline to follow.

Chair Foster stated that on behalf of the NHA Board of Commissioners we are extremely appreciative of the training that we received and the opportunity for discussions that were facilitated by Jon Wortmann. Chair Foster stated that the Board is extremely appreciative of Representative Denise Garlick whose idea it was to get this setup and used her power of persuasion, her influence, and her talent in helping the NHA Board.

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

1. Monthly Financial Report

Mr. Merritt presented the Accounting Report prepared by Rick Shaw, CPA, Milne, Shaw & Robillard, P.C., as of May 31, 2022. He provided a brief report, noting that there are no significant changes.

Commissioner Kirk asked for clarification on a line item in the budget for eviction expenses. Mr. Merritt explained that when an eviction occurs the NHA absorbs the cost of moving and storage costs. Commissioner Kirk also asked for clarification on the resident services line item that was budgeted for \$10K and has a balance of \$9992. Mr. Merritt explained that the budget goes until December 31<sup>st</sup>. He stated that the budget is what we spend up to and if it is not expended it rolls into the reserves. He added that in the next year's budget more could be included for this line item.

2. Monthly Management Report

Mr. Merritt presented a historical report of vacant units over the last year. He stated that he appreciates Commissioner Kirk correcting the number on the report that should have read 17 and not 32. Mr. Merritt stated that the leasing department is working hard at getting vacancies under control. He stated that eight units are ready to be leased. He noted that there would be at least six more vacancies as of next week. Mr. Merritt responded to Chair Foster's question about providing a monthly aged rent receivables report to be included in subsequent Board packets.

3. Meeting with Newton Community Development Foundation (NCDF) Report

Mr. Merritt reported that he and Ms. Gosmon had a good meeting recently with NCDF Executive Director, Jeanne Strickland, Grace Connolly, Director of Finance and Administration, and Dina Troiani, Director of Property Management. Mr. Merritt stated that NCDF is the management company that manages High Rock Homes (HRH). He stated that the discussion included a conversation on the HRH Audit, the management agreement, and what they need from the NHA. Mr. Merritt stated that the management agreement states that the NHA would provide them with an office, which happened for a period at the HRH site, but noted that the space was not suitable for their needs. Mr. Merritt stated that the NHA will provide them with space to store routine maintenance items. Mr. Merritt noted that NHA will meet with NCDF again in September and will plan to meet once or twice a year going forward.

The conversation veered to a discussion on the building at 164 Linden Street. Mr. Merritt spoke about the work that has been done to clean up the façade of the building. He stated that inside 164 Chambers Street is an old office and that to help NCDF with their storage issues this space might be used for their storage needs. He also stated that inside 164 Chambers Street are blueprints of architectural drawings. He stated that he has embarked on a project to preserve those drawings.

Commissioner Kirk noted that 164 Chambers Street has a small kitchenette and two bathrooms. She stated that it is certainly a useable building.

4. Linden Chambers Camera Issues Update

Mr. Merritt reported that the cameras at Linden and Chambers are not working consistently and that the NHA is withholding payment until the issues are resolved. He stated that Gary Kuphal, Director of Facilities and Maintenance has been working with the contractor who is planning a site visit to go over the system to get everything up and running.

5. Bank Issues: TD Bank Signature and Santander Escrow Account

Mr. Merritt spoke about the NHA escrow accounts that were established in the early 2000s. He stated that the previous executive director had contacted the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for permission to give the money back to residents based on the original purpose of the program. He stated that out of those conversations with DHCD and the previous executive director it was determined that a resident leaving in the High Rock Estates development is eligible

for withdrawal from this account. Mr. Merritt spoke about the challenges to withdraw money from this account. Mr. Merritt will continue to sort out issues with the escrow account and notify residents listed on the account who would be eligible to use the funds towards homeownership.

Mr. Merritt stated that the TD Bank Account will require signature cards. He stated that he would prepare that paperwork for the Commissioner's immediate action.

6. High Rock Homes (HRH) Audit

Mr. Merritt distributed signed copies of the HRH Audit. A general discussion followed. Chair Foster noted that it appears to be a clean audit.

7. Mission Statement Discussion

This item was tabled for discussion at the next Board meeting.

8. Any other issues/updates of NHA

Mr. Merritt reported that he wanted the Board to be aware of a couple of behavioral issues he is working on involving residents which could have potentially litigious actions. He stated that he is in communication with the Needham Police Department on some of the issues. He stated that the issues are not widespread but limited.

**E. Search Committee Status Update: New Executive Director Search**

D & V Association – Rick Leco correspondence.

Chair Foster noted that Commissioner Bennett is Chair of the Executive Director Search Committee. He stated that she should have received correspondence from the search consultant. Commissioner Bennett stated that presently there are no candidates for the NHA Executive Director position meeting the minimum requirements of DHCD. Commissioner Bennett stated that the consultant plans to redouble his efforts and expand his search. A general discussion followed.

**F. Status Updates – External Initiatives:**

1. Housing Plan Working Group

Commissioner Scheideler stated that the next meeting of the Housing Plan Working Group is next week. He stated that he does not have anything to add to what has been going on at present. He reminded the Commissioners of the email he sent to them on the work Jean McKnight is doing.

2. Preservation & Redevelopment Initiative (PRI)

- Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) Report

Chair Foster stated that at the May 2022 Board meeting he recommended that the “Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative” name be changed to the “Preservation and Redevelopment Initiative.” He explained that the reason for the change is that the term preservation is in keeping with the language of the Community Preservation Act’s statute. Chair Foster reported that everything else is tracking slowly but in the right direction. He stated that we are anticipating, with DHCD’s support, to put out a Request for Designer Services

(RFS) for the redevelopment of Linden and Chambers, which will be posted on August 3, 2022, with proposals coming back at the end of August for evaluation by the local Designer Selection Committee.

Chair Foster stated that there has been some progress on the PRI budget and that he will have a well-thought-out format available for approving the budget and tracking budget actuals. He stated that presently it is a \$3+M budget.

**G. Status Update – Internal Initiatives:**

1. Report from Steering Committee (Janice Bennett, Penny Kirk, Jessica Reese, Steve Merritt)

Commissioner Kirk reported that she has created a Cook's After School (CAS) budget. She stated that CAS has received a donation of 300 tennis balls and Commissioner Scheideler cut them and put them on the metal chairs. Commissioner Kirk stated that Sue Young, a CAS Steering Committee member has found a plethora of items to be used in the CAS program. She stated that she is not sure how much money she has not spent but that the doors to the CAS program could open tomorrow based on all the items Sue Young has obtained.

Commissioner Kirk stated that Commissioner Bennett has been in touch with representatives from Fidelity Bank in Needham. She stated that Fidelity Bank will donate \$500 to the CAS program, and they will donate fully loaded backpacks, supplying all the materials for all the children in the afterschool program doing so by age, grade, and gender. Commissioner Kirk also stated that Commissioner Bennett has done some research on the TD Bank. She stated that TD Bank is requiring proof of a 501 c3. She stated that CAS has partnered with the Needham Community Council which is going to sponsor the CAS program. She stated that the Needham Community Council will receive the money from TD Bank and will turn it over to the NHA. She added that Ms. Gosmon will be the point person to receive the funding.

Commissioner Kirk stated that the Police Department has volunteered to host a cookout for the opening of the CAS on September 13, 2022. Commissioner Kirk suggested that teachers from the Eliot School be invited as well. Commissioner Kirk stated that CAS Steering Committee member, Jill Olive has raised \$3,000 from the Needham Bank and \$200 from Louise Condon.

Commissioner Kirk stated that the CAS budget includes the following:

Director's Salary - \$17,250 (including 16% employment taxes) for nine months, four days per week, three hours per day.  
One bench - \$200.00 (to replace the one that was thrown away)  
One Student desk - \$200.00  
Four two-door cabinets - \$900.00  
Consumables - \$1000.00  
Field trips and enrichment - \$1000.00  
**Total \$19,650.00**

Commissioner Bennett stated that she is delighted with the team that we put together and everyone contributing to the process. She stated that she knows nothing about fundraising and is learning from the ground up. She stated that the community room is coming along just fine, and it appears to be on track for the opening of the CAS program.

Chair Foster asked if the budget follows the school year. Commissioner Kirk responded that the budget for the CAS program goes to the end of May. Vice-Chair Evans asked how much of the \$19,000 has been raised so far. Commissioner Kirk stated that CAS has \$9K and the remainder would come from donations.

Chair Foster noted that the NHA will start its budget discussion at the next meeting and should include ancillary budgets in this discussion. Vice-Chair Evans asked if there had been a conversation with the employment council on the CAS Director's position. Mr. Merritt responded that he has sent an email regarding this and is waiting to hear back.

Chair Foster asked if there were any issues with the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) with starting the program and with the waiver that was issued in 2010. Vice-Chair Evans stated that there should not be an issue if the program is being operated as stated in the letter. Vice-Chair Evans asked about insurance for this program. Mr. Merritt responded that he would look into it.

2. **Restoration of Community Center at 28 CRCD - In Process**

Mr. Merritt reported on the restoration process for the Community Center at 28 CRCD. He stated that it is right on track, the flooring has been installed and the rooms have been painted. He stated that follow-up work by the electrician has been done and appliances are in. Mr. Merritt stated that Gary Kuphal is looking to have this space completed within 2 weeks. A general conversation followed on plans to have a reopening ceremony in the community room.

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

Steve Merritt reported work on this unit will begin after the work on the CRCD Community Room has been completed

4. **Paving Project – Seabeds Way and CRCD.** Gary Kuphal stated that he is working to find an engineer to design the scope of the project. Mr. Merritt stated that there will be some patching of the areas in the interim.

5. **Seabeds Way/CRCD CCTV System Begins Spring/Fall of 2022**

Mr. Merritt reported that Ms. Gosmon is working with Gary Kuphal to find a contractor and an engineer to design the project. A report on this will be given at the next Board meeting.

**H. New Business:**

Commissioner Scheideler stated that he and Mr. Merritt have been discussing a plan on how to handle residents that interrupt during the meeting. Commissioner Scheideler stated that he would like to discuss this at the next meeting.

**I. Adjournment**

**Vote on the motion**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Kirk and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to adjourn the NHA and HRH LLC Board meeting at 9:26 pm.

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

Commissioner Foster, Aye; Commissioner Kirk, Aye; Commissioner Scheideler, Aye; Commissioner Evans, Aye; and Commissioner Bennett, Aye.

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

**Minutes Prepared by**

*Cheryl Gosmon*