

**NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD MEETING
MINUTES**

Thursday, February 16, 2023

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

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

NHA STAFF PRESENT:

Cheryl Gosmon, Assistant Exec. Director
Gary Kuphal, Director of Facilities & Maint.
Nayda Sanchez, Director of Leasing & Occupancy

RESIDENTS PARTICIPATING IN CHERYL GOSMON INTERVIEW:

Jim Burke	Jessica Reese, President, Cooks Bridge Tenants Association
Ross Donald	Kampala Shah
Sue Biasizzo	Carol Briggs
Virgil Barber	Curtis Rush
Marie Celestine	Laurie Blake

ABSENT: Steve Merritt, Interim Executive Director

This is a Hybrid meeting. Chair Foster called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm. He called the roll of Commissioners with all reporting present and declared a quorum. He noted that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by the Secretary of the NHA by preparing a Public Notice dated February 13, 2023, 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.

Announcements from the Chair:

1. Penny Kirk will be secretary for this meeting since Assistant Executive Director will be busy tonight.
2. Steve Merritt took a fall last week and was hospitalized. He is recovering at home and at the advice of his doctor will not be attending this evening. His condition is not life threatening. Mr. Foster asked Ms. Gosmon if everything is going OK in the office and is she getting the support she needs and she replied “yes”.
3. The agenda tonight: at the February 11, 2023 NHA Board Special Meeting, the commissioners decided to ask that Cheryl Gosmon be interviewed tonight for the position of NHA executive director. We will do this agenda item first. When done, we'll return to the rest of the items on tonight's agenda.

Interview of Cheryl Gosmon, Candidate for NHA Executive Director

Chair Foster recapped the current status of the search process: other candidates recommended by the Search Committee have dropped out. We have been looking for a new Executive Director for 8-9 months. Finding a new Executive Director is the most important task of any board. Mr. Foster asked Ms. Gosmon if she is ready and she replied “yes”.

Please see the Attachment A for the questions and answers that took place during the interview. Questions were posed by residents, LTO president Jessica Reese and commissioners

At the conclusion of the interviews Chair Foster described the Search Committee report and recommendations, which had been previously provided to the Commissioners under separate cover. The Committee interviewed four candidates and recommended three to the full board for interview. The Committee scored the interviews with Cheryl Gosmon being the #1 recommendation. Reference checks were done by Mr. Leco. DHCD guidelines have been distributed to commissioners. She has been CORI’ed. The Executive Director worksheet was distributed. Before a motion is made, the board must understand the terms of employment: annual salary, working hours, taxable compensation (like a cellphone) etc. We need to consider a coaching system.

After Mr. Foster reviewed all the requirements; then a motion was drafted by Vice Chair Evans to include all the necessary elements of the Board's decision, as follows:

Motion #1: To offer the position of Needham Housing Authority (NHA) Executive Director to Cheryl Gosmon, effective upon DHCD approval, at a starting salary of \$91,000, four weeks vacation, with a 5% cost of living adjustment to become effective as of January 1, 2024 and with an NHA-provided cell phone, and to authorize the Chair of the NHA board of Commissioners to sign an employment contract with Ms. Gosmon in a form provided by DHCD that includes these terms.

Discussion ensued. Mr. Scheideler pointed out that there is a check list of 8 items. Mr. Scheideler prepared a matrix of qualifications. Mr. Foster asked Mr. Scheideler to summarize it for inclusion in the packet to DHCD. Mr. Scheideler said that he has sent it to everyone on the board and stated that Cheryl Gosmon has taken the two required training courses and will take the exams next week. Chair Foster asked Cheryl Gosmon asked to have these courses added to her resume. The entire board agreed.

Commissioner Kirk stated that Ms. Gosmon has much more experience than many of our previous 1st time Executive Directors and has held many positions. MS. KIRK also pointed out that the Superintendent of schools, Dr. Gutekanst offered to write a recommendation for Cheryl Gosmon (without being asked). Ms. Kirk pointed out that we have had 7 directors in the last 15 years. And that Cheryl Gosmon is the epitome of what housing is for. She was able to use it as a stepping stone, send two sons to college and one to law school. She herself was able to move out of public housing. He has “unlimited” admiration for her.

Vice Chair Eleanor Evans agreed that we should extend an offer. She said that she has known Cheryl Gosmon through Needham Opportunities Inc., something to add to the resume. E.E. and Cheryl Gosmon were both on that board together.

Mr. Foster also concurred, saying that he had learned a lot about Cheryl Gosmon's background and qualifications and supports extending an offer.

J.B. stated that she wants a commitment from R.F. that as chair he will be helpful and supportive of Cheryl Gosmon. Mr. Foster said that he has already made that commitment to Cheryl and is doing so in public now. He added that he wants to see a similar commitment from the entire board. They all concurred.

Janice Bennett made the first motion, seconded by Penny Kirk:

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Chair Foster then called the role: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye".

The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Chair Foster then said that an eMail from Bob Pelletier and Carrie Sousa reminded us that with Steve Merritt's accident and recovery period, Ass't Executive Director Cheryl Gosmon should appointed "acting" Executive Director starting from the day that Mr. Merritt was hospitalized. Eleanor Evans pointed out that this requires a separate motion drafted as follows:

Motion #2: To appoint Cheryl Gosmon as NHA Acting Executive Director, retroactive to Friday, February 3, 2023, to serve in that capacity as long as needed, and, as permitted by DHCD guidance, to provide her with a 5% increase in her 2023 Assistant Executive Director salary of \$78,759/year to \$82,688/year for the period of time she serves as Acting Executive Director.

Janice Bennett made Motion #2, seconded by Penny Kirk. Chair Foster then called the role: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye". **The motion passed unanimously 5-0.**

Other Business on the Agenda

The hour being late, and having already received substantial resident input during the interview of Ms. Gosmon, Mr. Foster made the decision to dispense with further resident input and commence with approving the warrants and minutes.

The following motions were made by Chair Foster:

3. Approve the NHA warrant of \$406,425.01;
4. Approve the HRH LLC warrant of \$34,881.75;
5. Approve the January 5, 2023 Special Board Meeting minutes;
6. Approve the January 19, 2023 Regular Board Meeting minutes.

Motion #3 was seconded by Commissioner Kirk and **approved 5-0 unanimously** by rollcall vote: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye".

Motion #4 was seconded by Commissioner Evans and **approved 5-0 unanimously** by rollcall vote: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye".

Motion #5 was seconded by Commissioner Evans and **approved 5-0 unanimously** by rollcall vote: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye".

Motion #6 was seconded by Commissioner Evans and **approved 5-0 unanimously** by rollcall vote: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye".

Mr. Foster asked Acting Executive Director to report about the FFS grant award. Ms. Gosmon explained that "FFS" meant Family Self Sufficiency and announced that our HUD Portfolio Management Specialist Caitlin Johnson had confirmed that NHA was awarded the grant of \$189,000, which will allow NHA to hire a FSS Coordinator. FSS Coordinators in each local program build partnerships with employers and service providers in the community to help participants obtain jobs and services. These services may include childcare, transportation, basic adult education, job training, employment counseling, substance/alcohol abuse treatment, financial empowerment coaching, asset-building strategies, household skill training, homeownership counseling, and more.

Next, Mr. Foster reported that progress is being made to replace Gary Kuphal. This has not happened yet, but a new maintenance man will be hired once he is CORI'd etc. The new maintenance man is schedule to start on March 6th.

Finally Chair Foster asked for a commissioner to make the following motion, commenting that it is a quite normal business practice in the private sector when there's a new CEO:

Motion #7: That the Chair be authorized find a potential mentor/coach for Ms. Gosmon for her first year as NHA Executive Director, and report back at the next meeting re: the choices available and the cost.

Commissioner Evans made Motion #7 and Penny Kirk seconded the motion. **It was approved 5-0 unanimously** by rollcall vote: Eleanor Evans voted "aye"; Mr. Scheideler

voted "aye"; Penny Kirk voted "aye"; Janice Bennett voted "aye"; and Reg Foster voted "aye".

With that, Penny Kirk made a motion to adjourn, Janice Bennett seconded it and the motion passed with a roll call vote unanimously at 10:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Penny Kirk

**ATTACHMENT A TO THE MINUTES:
NHA INTERVIEW WITH CHERYL GOSMON
FEBRUARY 16, 2023**

The interviews commenced with attendees having the first round. Sue Biasizzo asked if everyone could ask questions. Mr. Foster replied, "absolutely." He added that the minutes must go to DHCD. He also stated that we need someone to be here for the rest of the person's career.

- A. Jessica Reese, President of the Cooks/Seabeds T.O.: "How would you describe how you see the value in this position? Also, about longevity: what are your plans?"
- Answer: "Thanks for the question. I have grown up to this position. I moved to public housing in Needham in 1993. I have been a secretary, V.P., and president of the local tenant organization. In 2000 I was appointed to the NHA Board of Commissioners by the Board of Selectmen to fill a vacant seat, and after that, I was elected for two terms, serving thirteen years as a commissioner. I purchased a home in 2006 and sold it in 2021. I am now a renter living in Needham. I mention all of this to say that I have a 360-degree view of living in Needham as a public housing resident, a homeowner, and a fair market renter. My passion is for residents. My logo on my flyers when I was president of the TO was 'Your voice matters; your voice counts.' I bring that passion with me now on this side of the table in a leadership capacity for the NHA. My goal is to ensure that residents feel good about where they live, that their voices are heard, and that they are part of the decision-making process."
- B. Ross Donald: "I almost hate to do this. I asked about a meeting, and Cheryl said it was not open. The meeting was about selecting an engineering firm that responded to an RFP. Ross Donald asked, "How do we better communicate, and what information will be accessible to residents? He also asked, "How does the public access meeting materials?" He remarked, "Do we have to go to the Attorney General?"
- Ms. Gosman responded, "that there should be transparency in the overall function of the agency and that she would work hard to ensure this happens."
- C. Jim Burke: "You will be the best Director ever!"
- Answer: "I am here to serve YOU! I want to create a positive environment. I'm excited to have the opportunity to serve in a leadership role."
- D. Sue Biasizzo: "What failures have you experienced?"
- Answer: "You learn from mistakes. Mistakes are inevitable, but you must learn from them and not continue to make the same mistake repeatedly. Mistakes can be lessons. Ms. Gosman gave an example of a mistake she made while working as a bookkeeper for Needham Public Schools. She noted that she learned quickly from this, and that type of mistake never happened again. There have been other mistakes, but I have learned from them."

E. Kalpana Shah: No answer.

F. Sue Biasizzo: "Why do you want this job?"

- Answer: "Ms. Gosman referred to the time as a resident organizer working in the trenches, encouraging residents, and advocating for residents to NHA staff. It is a great feeling to bring staff and residents together. Management is a good fit for me; I play by the rules. The NHA staff is amazing. We support each other. It's a great team. I truly appreciate their support of me. I want this community to grow. Needham is a wonderful town to live in, and our NHA residents should feel happy about living here in this beautiful town."

G. Curtis Rush: "How would you make things different?"

- Answer: I would refine policies, respond to resident concerns promptly, and add new programs. We just received a Family Self-Sufficiency grant which will foster new programs and asset building for residents, bring a focus on education and become a high-performing housing agency."

H. Carol Briggs: Stated that she is aware of C.G.'s background as printed in the newsletter. She asked how C.G. would handle transportation. She mentioned the MBTA and said transportation could be complicated when you are old and disabled. She said she would like to attend a presentation about this. She is aware that the Council on Aging has limited medical transportation services.

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon acknowledged the question and said that NHA now has a van. The administration will determine usage and provide a good service for the residents. Ms. Gosmon vowed that she wouldn't let this issue go. She also pointed out that the Community Council has some transportation services that NHA residents could use.

I. Virgil Barber: He is concerned about the safety of residents in their apartments, particularly the mold situation. He said he had a problem that needed to be addressed immediately.

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon said she was sorry to hear that this was not handled well. She said she would spend money to get to the source of mold. She noted that HUD has grants that will help NHA address mold and that she plans to apply for these grants. She pointed out that mold is very serious and needs to be discussed correctly.

J. V.B. added that the roofs had not been fixed. Seniors with asthma and other respiratory issues are harmed. This happens on both sides of town.

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon said it's dangerous, and HUD has methods and plans to mitigate these concerns.

K. V.B. said it was so bad for him that he had to stop working.

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon noted that the NHA covered costs for cleaning and laundering his clothes.

At this point, Mr. Foster said that resident input would take place later and addressed Mr. Barber and that he should stick around after the meeting to hear the plans that are in place.

L. Sue Biasizzo: "What are your biggest strengths?"

- Answer: "My honesty and work ethic. I work very, very hard, and I'm empathic to the concerns of others. I feel for what Virgil had to say. I get drawn into issues in a compassionate and empathetic way. I want to make a positive impact."

M. Ross Donald: "Mr. Donald asked, what is your commitment to the formation of an L.T.O and helping with the election process? We did have a board in place within months under the former Director."

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon referred to her time as president of the LTO. She remarked on the landmark legislation, Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (QHWRA), signed into law by President Clinton, and how it reformed public housing. She expressed the importance of having an active LTO to advocate for how the reform would impact residents. She stated that it is important to go door to door to invite people to meetings. She added that, especially now with the planned redevelopment of Linden and Chambers, it is more important than ever to have resident involvement. She stated they would become more involved once you inform and educate people on the issues. She said, "You have my commitment." "We want to generate interest." "You have my commitment."

N. Curtis Rush: Asked about the Self Sufficiency Program. What should we expect?

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon noted that it is excellent to have this funding. She stated that we would develop an Admin Plan that would include programs to address breaking the cycle of poverty and asset building. We will also create programs for those willing to participate in educational programming, entrepreneurship programming, and homeownership programs.

O. Virgil Barber: Asked about the youths in the High School. He pointed out that parents don't have the money to send their children to college.

- Answer: Ms. Gosmon spoke about a program she and other mothers developed that helped bring about tutoring services, college prep, and financial aid workshops. She talked about the support she received from the Congregational Church, which donated \$10,000 in seed money. Kids went to college as a result of the tutoring. That program morphed into **Steps to Success**, a mentoring program at Needham High School that still operates today. Again the Congregational Church gave \$50,000 in seed money to get that started. She also mentioned Commissioner Kirk's work over the last 15 years to continue the tutoring program. Many children have gone on to earn scholarships to private schools and on to colleges."

At this point in the interview session, since no more residents or staff had questions, the Commissioners were invited to ask questions.

First was Eleanor Evans, who asked: "You've been Assistant Executive

Director; now, what would be the biggest challenges?"

Ms. Gosmon replied that she is doing many of the duties of an Executive Director. She stated that she is drawing down funds from HUD's Line of Credit Control System (LOCCS) and processing mandated reports from DHCD's budget reporting systems. She added that she manages the NHA's capital fund program and has many administrative duties. She said there are some challenges in addressing residents' needs, but she is mindful not to make miss-steps and to follow guidelines."

The next Commissioner, Janice Bennett, asked: "How would you handle a difficult resident?" Ms. Gosmon replied that it is important to remain calm, to listen carefully to the issue, and to try to understand what concerns are involved.

She stated that it is important to be helpful. She referred to a situation not long ago at a resident meeting where a resident was asking questions but not allowing others to speak. She stated that she pulled up a chair next to that resident and looked her in the eye calmly to assure her that her question would be answered but that other residents needed to be heard. Ms. Gosman stated that dealing with a person calmly in a way they can understand is the key."

Next up was Commissioner Kirk, who asked what your highest priority of all the priorities is before you. Ms. Gosman replied that the last two weeks have been hectic without the Interim Director, and she has had to make many decisions to keep things moving forward. She added that her priority this week was to get the Board of Commissioners packets out. She said that knowing how to prioritize is extremely important, and it is something she does well. She noted that you have emergencies that can become a priority but that it is important to know when to shift and then get back on track with daily priorities. She stated that the staff works well together; we have a phenomenal team, everyone knows their role, and they do it well. I've had many meetings.

The next Commissioner was Ed Scheideler, who asked what resources you would use about something you don't know. Ms. Gosman replied that she would do the research, reach out to someone familiar with the issue, ask for help, research, engage other people, and find information from those who know or have done it before. She is always moving forward. "I double-check on facts. Reading, researching, asking for help, and finding the details."

Mr. Scheideler then asked if she could access resources from DHCD and HUD. Ms. Gosmon replied that she could access HUD and DHCD's secure systems. She noted that these agencies are always beneficial and respond quickly to questions. She said that many tools and training are available to housing authorities. She spoke about the activities and professional development courses she has taken. I love that there is so much to learn. DHCD is phenomenal in providing public housing training and workshops. She also noted that there are groups of Executive Directors meeting with each other frequently, supporting one another. She stated that the Guidebook (regulations, statutes, etc.) are also

beneficial. She said she has a strong always be learning and growing.

Commissioner Reginald Foster was the last to ask his questions. He pointed out that the open meeting law makes some of this awkward, but he asked if Ms. Gosmon could go into more detail about her experiences as Commissioner. He remarked that for the first two years of his position as Commissioner, **Ms. Gosman mentored him**. He asked how that experience as Commissioner helps with the Executive Director role. Ms. Gosmon responded that as a Commissioner, you are working on and approving annual budgets, are involved in procurement, signing contracts, hiring an Executive Director, engaged in the redevelopment of properties, involved with grievances, developing policies, and ensuring that the agency is a good landlord. Ms. Gosmon spoke about her time as Commissioner and the Board's engagement in redeveloping its High Rock properties, which called for the construction of 20 modular duplex buildings. "I was always of the mindset of 'why not Needham.'" "I wanted more affordability to happen in Needham. She added that we are doing it again, adding more affordability to Needham. She stated that as a commissioner, I was part of a team accountable for the expenditures, hiring, and policies.

Again, Eleanor spoke, this time about supervising people. Ms. Gosmon said that people need to be treated well. Employees need to know the expectations of the job, and as an ED, I need to make sure that employees are meeting their employment expectations. She said her goal is to continue being kind to staff and encouraging them to grow and be their best selves. She said her approach is always encourage and show appreciation. She spoke about her experience supervising teaching and research assistants in the graduate programs she worked for at UMass Boston. She talked about her experience working for Needham Public Schools and the work training school secretaries on accounting procedures.

Janice Bennett was asked if she had more questions, and she replied that she did not. Penny Kirk said the same. Lightening things up a bit, Ed Scheideler said he had 20 more questions, but they were all answered among the group of others' questions.

Mr. Foster asked about Resident Services; getting the right person on board. He asked how her background would help. Ms. Gosmon replied that she is a pretty good judge of people and has a great sense of whether or not a person

would be suitable for the job. She said that she could draw on her own experiences. She added that when interviewing the current Resident Service Coordinator, she knew she would be an excellent fit for the NHA community.

Virgil Barber wanted to add a statement about people with disabilities and physical and mental illnesses. Ms. Gosmon said this subject was very important to her. She shared a story about when she lived in public housing and was a case manager for two older women who needed help with their daily routine, shopping, errands, and companionship and how important it was for her to show up every day to give these women what they needed and not be alone. She was in their lives to help with their daily routine. It's important not to let needy people become invisible. She said that the newly acquired Ross Grant would hire social workers to supply residents with the help they need.

Sue Biasizzo asked Ms. Gosman what she would do with a resident with addiction, mood swings, and a danger to neighbors. Ms. Gosmon stated that we must supply services/ community partners according to HUD and DHCD guidelines. The main concern is that health care is addressed. The Ross Grant will help a lot in this regard.

Mr. Foster asked if there were any more questions, and there were none. The interview part of the meeting came to an end.