

**NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**MINUTES**

**NHA REGULAR BOARD MEETING  
HIGH ROCK HOMES LLC BOARD MEETING  
Thursday, April 21, 2022, 7:30 PM**

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

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

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

**NHA STAFF PRESENT:**

Angie Medeiros, Executive Director  
Steve Merritt, Interim Executive Director  
Cheryl Gosmon, Asst. Exec. Director

Chair Foster called the meeting to order at 7:34 PM and roll-called Commissioners present at the April 21, 2022, NHA Regular, and HRH LLC Board meetings. The Secretary of the Needham Housing Authority (NHA) provided adequate notice of this meeting by preparing a Public Notice dated April 15, 2022, setting forth the meeting's date, time, and place. Said notice was filed with the Clerk of the Town of Needham and provided to persons requesting it.

**AGENDA – REGULAR NHA BOARD & HRH LLC MEETINGS**

**CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Chair Foster took the agenda out of order and started the meeting with Agenda Item A and then continued with Resident Input.

**RESIDENTS IN ATTENDANCE/RESIDENT INPUT:**

Chair Foster stated that residents in attendance are Sue Biasizzo, Kalpana Shaw, Ross Donald, and Maureen Callahan from Representative Garlick's office.

Sue Biasizzo stated that on April 29, 2022, the Cook's Bridge Tenants Association is sending two of its members, Janice Bennett, and Jessica Reese, to the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants Spring Convention in Marlborough. Sue Biasizzo commented that everyone has been asking her when the modernization project begins, where will residents go? She stated that residents continue to be nervous about where they will be placed when the modernization begins.

Mr. Merritt explained that anytime there is modernization involving federal or state developments there must be a relocation plan and that Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) is excellent at this. He stated that CHA will be careful and thoughtful and there will be a plan for relocation involving resident input.

Sue Biasizzo asked if the families of Seabeds Way and Captain Robert Cook Drive could receive a notice that the modernization initiative will not happen anytime soon and that there will be resident input.

Mr. Merritt responded that in the next couple of weeks newsletters will be mailed to everyone and he would be a notice in the newsletter on the modernization initiative.

Chair Foster stated that Mr. Merritt is still getting up to speed on a million different things and one of them is this, which is being thought of exactly the way Mr. Merritt has described it. Chair Foster liked Mr. Merritt's suggestion about getting the word out via the newsletter. Chair Foster referred to Article 17 in the Town Warrant, to appropriate \$1.386M for NHA Pre-development of Linden Chambers. He stated that if awarded this money can be used to do tenant relocation planning.

Kalpna Shaw stated that at the last Board meeting she had requested to receive information from the Chair on the modernization initiative and to date has not received anything. She stated that the seniors at Linden and Chambers are having anxiety episodes about the relocation of residents relative to the modernization initiative. She suggested that the Chair convene a special meeting to present to residents the modernization initiative plan. Kalpna Shaw mentioned the resident commissioner appointment discussion by the Town Manager.

Chair Foster stated that there are two more Town Meeting Warrant Articles that address the issue of tenant commissioner: Article 37 Amend General By-Laws – Needham Housing Authority Term Cycle; and Article 38 Amend Charter - Needham Housing Authority Term Cycle and Tenant Member Appointment. Chair Foster stated that right now Janice Bennett is the designated Tenant Commissioner.

Ross Donald stated that grounds have been cleaned up around Linden and Chambers. He stated that two air conditioners were thrown from the second-floor window at the backside of the Chambers Street building and left there, but someone picked them up and cleaned up the area. Ross Donald asked who he should call for routine maintenance and the community room. He stated that residents need to start talking with each other and they need sponsored community meetings.

Mr. Merritt stated that he would be hosting coffees in the community rooms at Linden Chambers and Seabeds Way. He stated that this will allow residents to meet him and socialize with one another.

Ross Donald spoke about the grounds and suggested starting a new program of care and attention to nurture the plants and trees to benefit the residents and address the health and safety concerns of the community.

## **AGENDA AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Introduction of NHA Interim Executive Director, Stephen Merritt**

Chair Foster introduced the new Interim Executive, Stephen Merritt. Chair Foster stated that Mr. Merritt will be with the NHA until a permanent Executive Director is hired. Chair Foster noted that he is personally happy that Mr. Merritt is with us. He stated that Mr. Merritt started, part-time last week, overlapping with Executive Director Medeiros and thereby ensuring a smooth transition. Chair Foster invited Mr. Merritt to introduce himself and talk about his career in low-income housing.

Mr. Merritt expressed his appreciation to the Board for their warm welcome to the NHA and to Executive Director Medeiros who he meets frequently with to communicate on all matters relative to the NHA. He noted that when Executive Director Medeiros leaves the agency, he will be ready to go. Mr. Merritt stated that he recently retired from Norwood Housing Authority on November 1, 2021. He stated that he served as Executive Director of Norwood Housing

Authority for seventeen years. Before that, he served in several different management roles at the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) for sixteen years. Mr. Merritt stated that he served as an elected member of the NHA Board of Commissioners for ten years. He also stated that he has been active in the National Association of Housing Officials, (NAHRO), during his career, serving on many committees in Massachusetts, New England, and the Regional Chapter of NAHRO, and from 2015 to 2017 had the honor of serving as the National NAHRO President. He stated that he has had some great opportunities to learn from some of the best in the business and the country. He stated that he worked with management and modernization at the CHA from the 1990s on. Mr. Merritt stated that he, Chair Foster, and Margaret Moran had the opportunity to present to the Finance Committee recently and that he is grateful for the opportunity to work with Margaret Moran again. He stated that it is kismet that he is available for Needham and that Needham is available for him. Mr. Merritt congratulated Executive Director Medeiros on her new position with the Middleborough Housing Authority. He stated that her leaving Needham has opened this opportunity to come home on an interim base and to give back to the community that has kick-started his career. He stated that he looks forward to working with everyone. He added that he has a good knowledge of the portfolio. He stated that Executive Director Medeiros has asked him to lead tonight's meeting and he is thankful for the opportunity to do that.

**B. Approval:**

**1. NHA Bill/Check Warrant**

**RESOLUTION #2022-226**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Evans to approve payment of the NHA bill/check roll listed on the Warrant dated April 21, 2022, in the amount of \$379,565.41

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

**2. HRH LLC Bill/Check Warrant**

**RESOLUTION #2022-45**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to approve payment of the HRH LLC bill/check roll listed on the Warrant dated April 21, 2022, in the amount of \$18,753.57.

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

**3. Approve Engaging Jon Wortman for Training**

Chair Foster stated that the Board had a communication training session with Jon Wortman last week. He stated that this was the result of a set of recommendations made by Representative Denise Garlick at the last Board meeting. Chair Foster stated that at the end of the training session with Jon Wortman the Board had decided that the training was useful and constructive, and the Board would like to schedule another session on May 10, 2022. Commissioner Kirk stated that she had a very positive reaction to Jon Wortman's training. She added that he did a beautiful job with the Commissioners.

**RESOLUTION #2022-227**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Kirk to approve engaging Jon Wortman in communication training and to authorize the Chair and the Interim Executive Director to enter into an engagement agreement.

**Discussion:** Commissioner Evans asked if procurement was needed. Chair Foster stated that it is not needed at this level.

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

**C. Information 12/31/2021 Performance Management Review (PMR) – DHCD**

Mr. Merritt described the PMR Desk Audit Rating Summary. He stated that the review is done annually but that due to the COVID-19 pandemic the audit was a PMR/desk audit. Mr. Merritt referred to Occupancy Rate and noted that this section received a corrective action finding. He stated that this is a major concern for housing authorities because they are not able to fill the vacancies. He stated that there are two reasons for this, one is COVID the other is because of the CHAMPS application system. He also stated that the corrective action is not what it seems, and the problem is not just with Needham. He stated that he would have a better understanding when he meets with DHCD next week.

Executive Director Medeiros stated that the Leasing and Occupancy Coordinator meets with DHCD weekly and will meet next week to talk about the occupancy rating and how she collects from the waiting list.

**D. Review & Approval of Board Minutes**

**RESOLUTION #2022-229**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Scheideler to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2022, Special NHA Board Meeting as submitted.

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

**RESOLUTION #2022-230**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Scheideler to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2022, NHA & HRH LLC Board Meeting as amended.

**Discussion:**

Commissioner Kirk pointed out a slight omission in item D, #1, first sentence, insert after new, executive director.

Chair Foster referred to item G and suggested that Cheryl Gosmon re-listen to the March 17, 2022, meeting for the exact wording on plans for the restoration of the community room and rebooting the after-school program. Chair Foster referred to item G, #7, and pointed out that the vote for this item was not recorded. These minutes will be re-issued for the Board vote at the next meeting.

**There was no action taken on March 17, 2022, meeting minutes at this time. The minutes would be resubmitted for a vote at the May 19, 2022, Board meeting.**

**RESOLUTION #2022-232**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Scheideler to approve the minutes of the March 23, 2022, Special NHA Board Meeting as submitted.

**Discussion:** Commissioner Evans did not receive March 23, 2022, meeting minutes in her Board Packet. There was a typo with her email address, which has been corrected.

**The motion carried. The vote was four yes; one abstention.**

**RESOLUTION #2022-233**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Bennett to approve the minutes of March 28, 2022, Special NHA Board Meeting as amended.

**Discussion:**

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

**E. New Executive Director Search Process**

Chair Foster reported on his conversation with Rich Leco, Executive Director Search Consultant, D&V/MainSail. He stated that Mr. Leco informed him that he didn't need the ED position description right now but that the absolute most critical path is Board approval for the wording of

the advertisement and that it is important to get them placed as soon as possible. Chair Foster stated that Mr. Leco suggests that discussion and approval of the Executive Director Position Description is a task for the Search Committee. Chair Foster stated that Mr. Leco would like the Board to consider the draft advertisement. Chair Foster summarized the document and noted areas of document for Board consideration.

Chair Foster stated that Mr. Leco would like to convene a meeting with the Search Committee to go through the process and what he would need from them. Chair Foster asked how the Board would like to proceed, and noting consensus he suggested convening a kick-off meeting for the Search Committee to get to know one another and to talk about the process.

### **Motion and Vote**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Kirk to reaffirm the five-member Search Committee, consisting of Janice Bennett, Ed Scheideler, Jessica Reese, Karen Hughey, and Steve Merritt, and delegate to them the finalization of the advertisement.

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

### **F. Status Update - External Initiatives:**

#### **1. Housing Plan Working Group**

Commissioner Scheideler reported that the Housing Plan Working Group discussed the feedback from the March 24th workshop that was open to the public and the results of a workshop poll. He stated that a draft of the Community Housing survey that has not been sent out yet is still being developed, adding that the group spent a great deal of time discussing the survey. He also stated that the group received a brief status report from the subgroup's Co-chair and reviewed a summary of next steps with Lee Newman.

#### **2. Modernization and Redevelopment Initiative**

##### **• Cambridge Housing Authority Activities**

Chair Foster asked if the Board had questions on the CHA monthly report. There were no comments.

##### **• Community Preservation Committee and Finance Committee Meetings**

Chair Foster provided an update on these meetings. He stated that we received two adverse Town Counsel opinions on two of our three remaining CPA funding applications. He stated that CHA and their experts reviewed Town Counsel's reasoning for their rejection, and we delivered two rebuttal memos to the CPC. At the CPC's March 30th meeting they approved 100% of the funding for the High Rock Estates existing conditions study, but based on Town Counsel's recommendation, rejected the funding for the Seabeds and Cook existing conditions studies. The CPC approved the second funding application for the Linden Chambers pre-development schematic design application. Chair Foster stated that he is happy to report that we received unanimous approval for both of those warrant articles going into Town Meeting. Chair Foster gave a shout-out to Steve Merritt and Margaret Moran for their expertise and support. He stated that Margaret Moran did a magnificent job of answering all the questions and conveying confidence in the Needham Housing Authority.

There were no additional comments from the Board.

##### **• Town Meeting May 2, 2022**

Chair Foster stated that Town Meeting is on Monday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and will most likely continue to Wednesday, May 4<sup>th</sup>. He stated that it looks like it is not going to be a long Town Meeting. He stated that the NHA has Warrant Articles 17 and

18 and should come up for review on Monday. He stated that it is going to be a hybrid meeting and will be televised on the Needham Channel. He stated that if Town Meeting approves Articles 17 and 18, we're in the business to redevelop Linden Chambers. He stated that this process began in 2004 and going forward the NHA will ensure that its residents are informed and that we hear our resident's input on things that affect them as we go along including the resident relocation process. A Resident Advisory Committee will be formed once the NHA receives specific construction documents particularly the design and furnishings of the apartments.

There were no additional comments from the Board.

- **NHA Designer Selection Committee Formation**

Chair Foster stated that he is still working on the Designer Selection Committee formation. He stated that he will start contacting suggested candidates for this committee next week.

There were no additional comments from the Board.

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

##### **1. Space redeployment**

- **In Process Plan to return Unit 42 CRCD to service and In-Process Restoration of Community Center at 28 CRCD**

Steve Merritt stated that being new to what's going on with the initial work for 28 Captain Robert Cook Drive/Cook's Community Room, he has met with Gary Kuphal. Mr. Merritt summarized the work that is being done now. He stated that 42 Captain Robert Cook Drive cannot be leased at this point because when it was converted to a Community Center there were two walls taken down and some plumbing will need to be reinstated for the placement of bathrooms. He stated that it is a long way from being ready to be placed back online. He added that it is going to be a slow-moving process. He stated that he would like to invite Commissioners Bennett and Kirk to meet at Captain Robert Cook Drive to talk about their vision and work up a plan. He stated that he wants to be thoughtful about this and develop a timeline to open in September. He stated that his maintenance staff will be extremely busy in the coming weeks with lawn care and preparing vacant units for occupancy. He stated that his maintenance staff is stretched out thin and we want to be able to put a schedule in place so that we can do this properly.

Mr. Merritt stated that we would like to maintain some office space at the new community room so that the rental income verification staff can meet there to do rent re-certifications etc. and we need to look at how that can be accomplished. He stated that he can meet with Commissioners Bennett and Kirk and Tenant President, Jessica Reese, to come up with a plan and report back to the Board.

Commissioner Scheideler stated that there is a motion that he presented months ago.

##### **Motion and Vote**

Commissioner Scheideler moved and Commissioner Bennett seconded the motion that all necessary improvements will be completed before the community room is determined ready for occupancy by the NHA Board of Commissioners

and that number 42 Captain Robert Cook Drive is not placed online for rental until the Cook's Community Room with the Cook's After School Program is moved into the new location at 28 Captain Robert Cook Drive.

Discussion:

Mr. Merritt stated that he doesn't have a problem with Commissioner Scheideler's motion. The goal is to do both projects in parallel: that both locations can be renovated at the same time and neither one is being used right now. In the short term, the NHA maintenance staff is very busy and it's prohibitively expensive to use 3<sup>rd</sup> party contractors. For these reasons, his goal is September 1st to complete both projects and get both spaces online.

Executive Director Medeiros added that the status for unit 42 has already been changed over in the HUD REAC system, to an active unit for occupancy. She added that the only thing missing in that unit right now is a washer and dryer hookup and Gary Kuphal will locate that. Mr. Merritt said this additional information doesn't materially change the overall goal he just stated.

Chair Foster asked Commissioner Bennett to comment as resident-commissioner: are Mr. Merritt & Ms. Medeiros on the right track? Ms. Bennett agreed that goal is correctly stated, except that her original understanding was that there'd be a need to use Unit 42 for storage during the renovation period. But after talking with Chair Foster, she now understands that other storage locations are available. She added that if Unit 42 only needs a few more simple repairs that can be quickly accomplished with a Sawzall, some copper, a few couplings, a right-angle drill, a few doors, and elbow grease, there's no need to hold up renting Unit 42. Of much more importance, Commissioner Bennett would like to make sure we establish a committee for planning purposes and community room use with an emphasis on accommodating the After School Program.

Chair Foster stated that he heard Mr. Merritt say he was comfortable with the motion. That he'd like to meet with the principals involved and get a better understanding of the details. Chair Foster asked if there was any more discussion on this matter. There was none.

**Chair Foster called the vote: The motion carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0**

Motion and Vote

Commissioner Bennett moved and Commissioner Scheideler seconded the motion to establish a committee for planning the new community room space, planning for a grand opening, and an emphasis on the afterschool program. The committee would consist of herself, Commissioner Kirk, and Jessica Reese, Cook's Bridge Tennant Association President.

Discussion:

Chair Foster asked for clarification about opening up the community room or reopening the community room for community room purposes or getting the after-school program back up and running?

Commissioner Bennett responded, both with an emphasis on the after-school program.

Commissioner Scheideler asked for clarification are you looking to make sure that #28 is set up for a community room and to host the after-school program and whatever is necessary to accomplish that. Commissioner Bennett replied, correct.

Mr. Merritt stated that he would like to be an ex-officio member of that committee and we will come up with the plan. He stated that what Commissioner Bennett has asked for is not out of range.

After several comments and questions, Commissioner Evans and Chair Foster clarified Commissioner Bennett's motion, regarding a sub-committee:

- 1) To provide input so that the new space was appropriately configured and ready to support its use as a Cooks Bridge Community Room and the After School Program.
- 2) To provide input and support for getting the After School Program back up and running by September 1, both as it existed when most successful in years past, and to consider ideas for expansion of the program.

Commissioner Bennett said this was exactly right, so we can get all our "ducks in a row"

Attempting to summarize the discussion and seeming consensus, Chair Foster made a motion to offer a friendly amendment to Commissioner Bennett's motion, and rephrase it as follows:

That the steering committee comprised of Commissioner Bennett, Commissioner Kirk, Jessica Reese, President of the Cook's Bridge Tenant Association as well as Interim Executive Director (IED), Steve Merritt as an ex-Officio member and staff support. The charter will be to:

- 1) To provide input so that the new space was appropriately configured and ready to support its use as a Cooks Bridge Community Room, the After School Program, and a small office space for NHA staff;
- 2) To provide input and support for getting the After School Program back up and running by September 1, both as it existed when most successful in years past, and also to consider ideas for expansion of the program.

Commissioner Bennett accepted the friendly amendment to her motion, as did the seconder Commissioner Scheideler.

Further Discussion:

Chair Foster stated that he would like to see an outline of a plan at the next Board meeting particularly if there are financial implications of doing this. He stated that the Board should if we can afford it, provide financial support to get this done.

Commissioner Kirk stated that as a committee we're going to have to know exactly what got thrown out from the other after school program or what's in storage.

Chair Foster stated that the steering committee and IED Merritt need to consider this question of supplies and many other things. Is new furniture needed?



What's on the overall shopping list? Where can things be stored until the facility opens? He stated that he would look to the steering committee and IED Merritt to work over the next month and to come back to the Board with a status update outlining challenges, including a proposed expense budget and fundraising plans. Commissioner Bennett added: also review what unspent funds we already have in hand (i. e...never used during the pandemic period.)

**Chair Foster then called the vote: The motion as amended carried. The vote was unanimous 5-0.**

2. **Seabeds/Cook CCTV System Begins Spring/Fall of 2022**

Executive Director Medeiros stated that she had a conversation with the consultant on the blueprint of the camera installation but that nothing has started yet.

3. **Return to In-person Board Meetings**

Chair Foster stated that almost all of Needham's Boards and Committees have returned to in-person and hybrid board meetings or committee board meetings. Chair Foster stated that he met with Roger McDonald, head of IT for Needham for about an hour and a half and learned everything he needed to know to run a successful hybrid meeting using OWL technology. Chair Foster stated that he purchased an OWL and would schedule a couple of practice meetings to work out the kinks starting with the May 19th meeting. He stated that this meeting will be an in-person meeting but will also allow for remote participation.

## **H. Information Q & A - Regular Monthly Reports**

1. **Executive Director's Report, Financial Report, Vacancy Report, Work Order Report**  
Steve Merritt reported on plans to consolidate NHA's bank accounts using one bank for all its banking services. He stated that the NHA currently uses Citizens Bank incurring over \$500 per month in service charges. He stated he would like to consolidate banking services using one bank and eliminate banking fees. IED Merritt stated that he would like to use Rockland Trust. He stated that Rockland Trust works with many housing authorities across the commonwealth, and we would not incur banking fees. He stated that he will meet with them and bring their proposal to the Board for its consideration.

IED Merritt stated that MASS NAHRO will be hosting their 2022 Annual Conference, May 22-25 at the Sea Crest Hotel in Falmouth MA. He stated that he and Cheryl Gosmon would attend the conference along with two housing managers. He stated that it will be a great experience for the staff to attend the workshops and network with other housing authority officials across the state.

IED Merritt stated that he has been meeting with staff one-on-one and getting to know them. He stated that it is a great staff, and everyone is enthusiastic and eager to learn.

2. **Ideas for Improvement or Additional Reports**

Commissioner Evans expressed her appreciation to Executive Director Medeiros for her years of service to the Needham Housing Authority and for helping the agency to get back on track during a time when it had gotten off track. Commissioner Evans wished Angie Medeiros the best of luck in her new role.

Ms. Medeiros stated that she has enjoyed working with Needham. It has given her an experience she could never get from the classroom.

Chair Foster stated that Commissioner Scheideler and Kirk have some ideas on the Board's standard of reporting. He stated that although this will not be discussed tonight, he is suggesting that Commissioner Scheideler and Kirk meet with IED Merritt and brainstorm with him on what they are doing in Norwood and other housing authorities across the state and come back with some specific suggestions for the next meeting.

**I. ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a motion duly made by Commissioner Foster and seconded by Commissioner Scheideler to adjourn the meeting at 9:39 pm.

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

**Minutes Prepared by:**

*Cheryl Gosmon*