

RUTLAND HOUSING AUTHORITY
Board of Commissioners
MINUTES
Annual & Regular Meeting
April 13, 2020

Chairman Kevin Markowski called the meeting to order at 8:12 AM on Monday, April 13, 2020 in a Zoom meeting room to which the public had been invited via the RHA website and through notices posted at RHA properties.

ROLL CALL/INTRODUCTIONS: Let the record show the following:

Board of Commissioners Present:

Chairman Kevin Markowski, Vice-Chairman Karl Anderson, Commissioner Tina Johnson, and Commissioner Jim Richards.

Rutland Housing Authority Staff Present:

Kevin Loso, Executive Director; Kirsten Hathaway, Director of Finance & Human Resources; Julie Sanderson, Property Manager; Becky Ladabouche, Section 8 Program Manager; Carol Keefe, Resident Services Program Manager & SASH Implementation Manager; and Barbara Richardson, Administrative Assistant.

Tenants and Members of the Public Present:

None.

TENANT CONCERNS

The Hickory Street tenant who requested a handicap parking spot contacted Commissioner Johnson regarding someone else parking in his spot. Ms. Sanderson will follow up with the individual.

ANNUAL MEETING

Appointment of James Richards to a Fifth Term – Commissioner Richards has confirmed his willingness to continue to serve on the RHA Board of Commissioners, and Chairman Markowski will pass that recommendation on to Mayor Allaire to reappoint him.

Election of Officers – The slate shows the commitment of Chairman Markowski and Vice-Chairman Anderson to remain in these offices. Commissioner Johnson moved to accept the slate as proposed, with a second by Commissioner Richards. The vote was unanimous to approve.

Updates to Board contact information will be made and the list will be posted this month.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES (pages 1.3 – 1.7)

A motion was made by Vice-Chairman Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Johnson to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 9, 2020. There was unanimous approval.

CONSENT AGENDA (pages 1.8- 1.16):

A motion was made by Commissioner Richards and seconded by Commissioner Johnson to approve the Consent Agenda items for April 2020, including:

Manifests: Section 8 Checks #2431 through #2433 and Direct Deposit #63711 through #63819

Manifests Public Housing #16756 through #16856
Credit Card Report 02/25/2020 – 03/20/2020
Manifests: Payroll: 03/11/2020 and 03/25/2020

The motion was unanimously approved.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

RHA Response to COVID-19

Tenant Welfare/Safety Measures – SASH Coordinators have been calling all tenants, not just SASH participants, to check on their health and wellbeing. Partner organizations in the community have stepped up to help with needed resources, especially food. All community rooms are locked, and we've issued strong encouragement to tenants to limit visitors to only those who are essential.

Operations/Lease-ups – We continue to turn over vacant apartments and make offers. Most Section 8 landlords aren't showing units or leasing up new tenants. If a landlord is willing to participate at this time, we have made procedural accommodations for safety purposes. Mr. Loso sent a letter to all Section 8 landlords to assure them that landlord Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) will continue without disruption (see page 1.17).

Staffing – All office staff now have remote server access and have been encouraged to work from home to the extent possible. Managers are limited to 16 hours per week in the office. Administrative support staff come in as needed to perform necessary operations, such as rent posting and deposits. Maintenance staff is currently on a schedule of 3 days on and 2 days off to minimize their exposure to infection, with the expectation that they are available to work if called in during their "off" hours. While at work, staff are practicing social distancing with colleagues and wear masks when they enter common office spaces. All common areas of our properties and office space are cleaned at least twice per day to reduce infection risk. The Staff Coronavirus Plan (Pages 1.18-1.19) outlines expectations related to the use of earned time off. RHA will use the guidance of employment-related federal and state regulations, and these guidelines to ensure that time off is being processed appropriately. The sick-time policy allows for staff to accumulate a maximum of 90 days. We are confident that most staff have significant enough sick time banked to weather COVID-19 related illness/child/family care if needed.

Housing Organization Meetings – The Vermont Association of Public Housing Directors has weekly conference calls with HUD's Boston Field Office to review emerging HUD guidance related to COVID-19. A Rutland COVID-19 Community Response Team (Rutland Housing Authority, Vermont Department of Health, Rutland Regional Medical Center, Rutland Mental Health Services, Visiting Nurse & Hospice of the Southwest Region, and the Department of Human Services etc.) has formed to address regional concerns. The Vermont Housing Council (nonprofit housing providers and state funders) hosts calls to provide mutual support and monitor state legislation that might impact operations and tenants. The group also hosts a weekly Property Managers call that Ms. Sanderson will join. The Rutland Emergency Housing Response Team is focused on addressing homelessness and the problems associated with securing housing during the current stay at home order.

Regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies, Maintenance Foreman Jon Jordan anticipated the need for these items and stocked up before they became too scarce. We may have an additional source of supplies through sales representatives at specific vendors. Ms. Sanderson's mother is making masks for staff which is greatly appreciated. Any staff member who has to enter a resident's unit will be in appropriate PPE.

RAD Update

Leases - After the March 13th closing, Ms. Sanderson produced new leases with very clear instructions for completion that staff distributed to all tenants. We await the return of just 30 of the 134 leases, which

are effective May 1st. Ms. Cooper is making reminder calls to those tenants that have not yet submitted their signed leases.

Inspections - Unit inspections have been indefinitely postponed as we await word from our RAD Transaction Manager regarding a HUD waiver. We have secured an Independent Entity, the Springfield Housing Authority, to conduct the inspections. We expect that they are going to give us latitude to get repairs done after the pandemic eases.

Software Conversion - Managers have been receiving guidance from our database software provider, HAB, as we approach the process of moving tenants out of Public Housing and into the Section 8 program.

Finance Concerns – Since we weren't able to close RAD before January 1, 2019, we are required to use 2020 operating subsidy and Capital Fund Program grant funds through 12/31/2020. PHAs will be receiving significant increases to both of these grants. As a PHA in the process of transitioning to RAD it is unclear if we will be eligible to receive these increases. Because of the increased costs associated with the pandemic we may need to use reserves to offset any shortfall. We await clarification from our RAD Transaction Manager, but this may take some time as thus far RAD has not been a high priority in HUD's response.

REPORTS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Finance/Administration Report

Consolidated Budget Comparison and Variance Reports for February 2020: Revenues and Expenses –

Ms. Hathaway reported that we are projecting a surplus for the end of FY 2019 – 2020. Despite tenant rents being below budget, higher than budgeted HAP and enhanced operating subsidy, more than balanced the budget. Also, most expenses have been under budget. Cash flow remained stable. The year-to-date surplus is at \$84,081 and the operating balance is at \$1,241,552.82.

Credit Card Report – Some charges, related to travel, cancelled meetings and staff clothing returns, were reversed.

Payroll Protection Program Application – This Small Business Administration program allows for 1% loans for small businesses to cover payroll expenses and other costs of keeping their business solvent during the pandemic. It comes with the possibility of full loan forgiveness. Ms. Hathaway will pursue help from our loan officer at TD bank to submit the online loan form. Mr. Loso isn't sure we will need or use the funds, but it provides RHA with another funding option. RAD may allow us to access commercial loans, as we will officially have collateral in the form of the released property.

RAD Accounts – We have three new TD Bank accounts set up for handling funds for the RAD conversion.

Check Signing Policy – For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, we have modified the procedure for check signing. Instead of requiring either the Executive Director or Finance Director and either the Board Chair or Vice-Chair to sign checks, the ED and FD will sign all checks and the Board Chair will review and sign off on a check manifest.

RHA Update (pages 2.8-2.10) – Mr. Loso shared his pride in what RHA and SASH were able to produce in these circumstances. Consistently, across the board, staff has stepped up to the plate during these trying times to keep things running well.

Property Management Report

Sites Update - Templewood Court recertifications are complete. One tenant leased up this month, and we have sent offers for three vacant units. Sheldon Towers is at full occupancy after two recent lease-

ups. Recertifications have been completed, though a handful of tenants will need to sign some paperwork after the state of emergency is lifted. One unit at Hickory Street Phase 1 is empty due to an eviction in early March and an offer will be extended this week.

Maintenance Update - Maintenance staff have been disinfecting all common areas twice per day (even weekends, thanks to Jon Jordan). Tenants are appreciative of the efforts.

Policy & Procedure Update - We have modified property management procedures for offers (a refusal at this time will not impact waitlist status), orientations (by phone or video chat) and lease-up procedures (staff in full PPE, one person in unit at a time) to safeguard the health of staff and incoming tenants. This will, hopefully affect how quickly we can fill vacant units.

Section 8 Program Report

Very few landlords are leasing up apartments at this time. There were two lease-ups this month and only one scheduled for May 1. Briefings are being conducted by phone. HUD is allowing landlords to self-certify unit inspections and RHA will inspect at a later date. We can still make voucher offers and lease up when social distancing orders are eased. RHA's landlord HAP payments have skyrocketed (up 3% in March, much more in April) because so many voucher holders have lost jobs and unemployment benefits have yet to flow. Seven more interim recertification are coming up which will no doubt negative impact the bottom line. At the end of April we'll have a better idea if we should simply hold off on further lease-ups for May in order to ensure that we stay within our budget authority. It has been reported that we may receive emergency Section 8 funding from HUD equal to two months of our regular HAP payment. Additionally, they may allow us to tap into our relatively small HAP reserve if need be.

Section 8 Project Based Voucher Award (Pages 2.14-2.15) – We received one proposal – from the Housing Trust of Rutland County (HTRC) - to our RFP for 19 Project-Based Vouchers (PBV) to be awarded as permanently supportive housing subsidies. Mr. Loso, Ms. Ladabouche and Ms. Sanderson evaluated the application and found that it exceeded requirements. This housing will be available to those who are homeless and/or have a history of inability to maintain a rental unit. Supportive services will be provided through Rutland Mental Health Services and Housing Trust of Rutland County to ensure that residents will have what they need to live independently and safely, and support self-sufficiency activities. HTRC is the only entity pursuing this type of housing in Rutland, and this project is the first of its kind.

Proposed Resolution #2020-06 to approve the Award of 19 Section 8 Project Based Vouchers for Permanently Supportive Housing Subject to the Terms of the Letter to the Housing Trust of Rutland County Dated 03/17/2020.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Vice-Chairman Anderson. There was unanimous approval.

Resident Services Report (pages 2.16– 2.27)

COVID-19 Response – Ms. Keefe reported that the support and resources from Cathedral Square has been tremendous and constantly evolving. They have supplied notices, fact sheets, posters, and links to resources, including a special COVID-19 page at SASHVT.org, all of which helps SASH sites prevent outbreaks and ease residents' anxieties. We appreciate the consistency of messages, resources and information. A weekly webinar for SASH sites features a Q&A session and workflow support for coordinators on assessing immediate needs, concerns, and referrals to agencies, HIPPA Use and Disclosure documents and participant assessments.

At RHA, starting in early March, we posted signage, and began communicating with tenants about limiting visitors and practicing the CDC COVID-19 guidelines. All face to face and group programming was cancelled. Coordinators all have laptops and have been working from home since mid-March. With shopping busses and housekeeping services discontinued, our tenants' food security is a concern. Fortunately, the usual food distributions from the Community Cupboard, BROCC, and others continue or have increased distribution, with new procedures for health and safety. In addition, the Salvation Army agreed to provide a box of food for each Sheldon Towers resident. Ms. Keefe is arranging a similar arrangement for Templewood Court.

No COVID-19 cases have been reported in RHA housing. While most residents have complied with the Stay Home, Stay Safe order, we are concerned that some tenants at Sheldon Towers are not complying. We have also installed medical-grade filters in the Sheldon Towers HVAC system. While The Vermont Department of Health (VDH) will inform property managers if there's a case in their housing, we are asking that the Department identify the individual so that we can take stronger protective measures and expand services and supports.

To further ease the burden for our elderly and disabled residents we are considering making our coin-operated laundry facilities free of charge. RHA has a significant reserve in our laundry account to cover the loss of income. We will need to monitor facilities more closely for non-resident use, and if the courtesy is abused we'll have to reassess. The Board welcomed this idea, and Mr. Loso will discuss details further with property management and maintenance staff before finalizing the decision.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS: (pages 3.3 – 3.11)

The following informational items were sent out prior to the meeting:

- A. Aged Delinquency Reports 3/2019
- B. Collections Report 3/2019
- C. Lease Violations/Evictions 3/2019
- D. Housing Occupancy Charts 3/2019

POLICIES

Temporary Telecommuting Policy (Pages 3.12-3.13)

Mr. Loso reviewed the updated policy and asked that the Board approve.

Proposed Resolution #2020-07 to approve the Temporary COVID-19 Telecommuting Policy effective April 13, 2020.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Vice-Chairman Anderson. There was unanimous approval.

Sick Bank Sharing Policy Discussion

Mr. Loso explained that during last year's contract negotiations with AFSCME we agreed to research the feasibility of a combined sick-time bank, allowing union members shared access to the unused sick days of fellow staff to help cover extended absences due to catastrophic health issues. The policy would be voluntary. Mr. Loso will provide more details to the Board at a future meeting.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

HUD Regulatory Waivers

Mr. Loso presented an overview of PIH Notice 2020-5 which provides for sweeping regulatory relief in the face of the pandemic. These waivers impact the following operational areas:

- Five-Year & Annual Plan Submissions
- Delayed Annual Examinations
- EIV requirements
- Interim Examinations
- Waiting List Opening/Closing
- HQS Inspections
- PBV Contract Inspections
- Administrative Plan
- Briefings
- Absence from Unit
- Termination of HAP Contracts
- Increases in Payment Standards
- Closeout of Capital Fund Grants
- Adoption of ACOP changes
- Community Service Requirements
- Energy Audits
- Over-Income Families
- Resident Councils
- Utility Allowances
- PHAS/SEMAP Standards
- Financial Reporting
- 50058 Submissions

Mr. Loso requested that the Board provide him with maximum authority to enact any of the waivers that would help to ensure efficient and effective RHA operations.

Proposed Resolution #2020-08 to authorize, effective April 13, 2020, the Executive Director, at his sole discretion, to enact any of the regulatory measures outlined in the HUD PIH Notice 2020-05 dated April 11, 2020 “COVID-19 Statutory and Regulatory Waivers for the Public Housing, Housing Choice Voucher, Indian Housing Block Grant and Indian Community Development Block Grant programs, Suspension of Public Housing Assessment System and Section Eight Management Assessment Program” so as to ensure the effective operation of the Authority during the current pandemic.

Vice-Chairman Anderson made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Commissioner Johnson. There was unanimous approval.

We will evaluate which waivers will work best for us and will implement those that are relevant. Mr. Loso will report back to the Board at the May meeting.

Annual & Five-Year Plans

This resolution covers RAD-related changes to the Five Year and Annual CFP Plans. Although none of the figures will change some will be reclassified into different RAD Budget Line Items.

Proposed Resolution #2020-09 to approve RAD related revisions to the RHA Five-Year Capital Fund Plans for 2018-2022, 2019-2023 and 2020-2024, and the Annual Capital Fund budgets for FY 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Vice-Chairman Anderson. There was unanimous approval.

Proposed Resolution #2020-10 to approve current and future revisions to staffing schedules so as to ensure the health and safety of residents, staff and the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commissioner Richards made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Vice-Chairman Anderson. There was unanimous approval.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion by Commissioner Richards and seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board entered Executive Session at 9:32 a.m. to discuss contractual or human resource issues, the premature disclosure of which could put the RHA at a significant disadvantage. There was unanimous approval.

On a motion by Commissioner Richards, seconded by Vice-Chairman Anderson, the Board came out of Executive Session at 9:42 a.m. There was unanimous approval.

ACTION ITEMS

Proposed Resolution #2020-11 to authorize the Executive Director to implement hazard pay increases (a.k.a. Hero Pay) for front-line maintenance staff for the period starting March 16, 2020 through May 15, 2020 as proposed at \$3.00 per hour for time spent on site.

Commissioner Richards made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Vice-Chairman Anderson. There was unanimous approval.

Proposed Resolution #2020-12 to approve submission of an application to the Small Business Administration through TD Bank for a low interest loan (1%) through the Payroll Protection Program.


Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Commissioner Johnson. There was unanimous approval.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING:

There being no other business, Commissioner Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:43 a.m. Commissioner Richards seconded the motion, and there was unanimous approval.

Date of next BOC Regular meeting: Monday, May 11 at 8 a.m. via Zoom Conference (public posting of meeting announcement to follow).

Respectfully submitted,



Kevin L. Loso
Executive Director/Secretary

Approved by the RHA Board of Commissioners



Chairman's Signature

Date

Prepared by Barbara Richardson, Executive Administrative Assistant