

RUTLAND HOUSING AUTHORITY
Board of Commissioners
MINUTES
Regular Meeting
May 11, 2020

Chairman Kevin Markowski called the meeting to order at 8:07 AM on Monday, May 11, 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, 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; Jon Jordan, Maintenance Foreman; and Barbara Richardson, Administrative Assistant.

Tenants and Members of the Public Present:

None.

TENANT CONCERNS

Mr. Loso noted that a few residents called with questions and comments about the new RAD rent statements. The Public Housing statements they are used to show only their portion of rent, while RAD Project-Based Voucher (PBV) statements show the full rent, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) subsidy, and the tenant's portion. We hope to modify this for the future after discussions with our software vendor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES (pages 1.3 – 1.10)

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

CONSENT AGENDA (pages 1.8- 1.16):

A motion was made by Vice-Chairman Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Richards to approve the Consent Agenda items for May 2020, including:

Manifests: Section 8 Checks #2434 through #2440 and Direct Deposit #63820 through #63930
Manifests Public Housing #16857 through #16944
Credit Card Report 03/23/2020 – 04/20/2020
Manifests: Payroll: 04/08/2020 and 04/22/2020

The motion was unanimously approved, including the vote of Chairman Markowski.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

RHA Response to COVID-19

Tenant Welfare/Safety Measures – There have been no reported cases of COVID-19 in our housing! SASH Coordinators and Resident Services staff continues to call all tenants to check on their health and wellbeing. There has been decent compliance at Sheldon Towers and Templewood Court with our request to limit visitors to essential persons, and we are monitoring the larger buildings at Hickory Street for compliance. However, children have breached the cordons at the Hickory Street playground, so maintenance will take steps to disable or block access to equipment.

Operations/Lease-ups – We have implemented most of the HUD regulatory waivers (page 1.19) and plan to adopt the option of biannual Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections (which has been allowed by HUD for several years now), with the caveat that if a tenant requests it or RHA believes it's warranted we can inspect more frequently.

HUD Notice to Tenants - "Addressing Tenant Concerns Regarding Rent and the Temporary Suspension of Evictions for Nonpayment of Rent." (Page 1.24) was distributed to all tenants and voucher holders in May as required by HUD. Rent collection hasn't been a problem for us because most of our tenants do not rely on employment income to pay their rent. Some other housing providers have seen up to a 30% increase in tenant account receivables due to tenant loss of employment.

Staffing – Work Transition Plan (Page 1.28) – This is our plan for getting people gradually and safely back to the office. We will be providing all staff with thermometers to check their temperatures before they come to work. Upon arrival at the office they will need to register their temperature again and certify in a logbook that they are not experiencing any of the symptoms associated with the coronavirus. The front office is the only place that requires staggered shifts. Social distancing, mandatory mask wearing in common areas and sanitizing are addressed in the policy. We will work out how to ensure that tenants comply with social distancing with staff, especially Sheldon Towers, though the office does have a second door that provides a barrier. Eventually, when we open for limited public access visitors will also be required to wear masks.

HUD COVID-19 Funding (Page 1.28 – 1.30) - We've received our special allocation from HUD for COVID-19 efforts to "prevent, prepare for or respond to the coronavirus". The PH/RAD allocation includes \$59K for Sheldon Towers & Templewood Court; and \$4500 for Hickory Street Phase 1 and \$520 at Hickory Street Phase 2. Page 1.25 lists permissible uses. The effective date is the date of the HUD notice, but industry groups are lobbying to have it moved to the date of the presidentially declared State of Emergency. Items that qualify range from home office equipment to cleaning and sanitizing supplies and a range of tenant services – it's pretty open ended and we can ask for additional waivers for questionable costs. Any unspent balance has to be returned. We are considering purchasing additional equipment for remote work (printers, phones) and foggers for efficient disinfecting of large areas. Another potential use is to provide tablets to each Board Commissioner to facilitate remote communications and meetings and save on paper, but it would require commitment on the part of Commissioners to using the devices for BOC meetings. We would hold a mock meeting to test them and for training. We will discuss this again in June.

The Housing Choice and Mainstream Section 8 Voucher Programs received \$37,408 in supplemental COVID-19 administrative funding, in that unspent COVID-19 fees must be returned, whereas our regular administrative fees can be rolled over, thus increasing our reserves. We will use this before we start using our regular admin fee funds.

Tenant COVID-19 Video Conference and Virtual Pizza Party - We hosted a Virtual Pizza Party for Sheldon Towers tenants last week. Staff, wearing masks and gloves, delivered pizza to each apartment along with instructions for joining a Zoom meeting featuring Public Health Nurse Jennifer Wedin, RN, updates from Property Management and Resident Services, and a Q&A session. Parties will be held for Hickory Street and Templewood Court this week. We will hold another Zoom meeting for tenants in June, probably minus pizza.

RAD Update

Leases – Mr. Loso recognized staff for their amazing efforts to achieve a smooth transition. At this stage we are missing just two leases and case managers are involved to ensure execution.

Inspections – We secured a waiver to postpone the initial HQS inspections for Templewood Court (due by 10/31/20). The Sheldon Towers inspections will be done after the unit upgrades are completed, with a deadline of 5/31/21.

Software Conversion – Ms. Ladabouche and Ms. Sanderson accomplished a smooth transition from Public Housing to the Section 8 Project-Based Voucher (PBV) module.

Finance Concerns – During our RAD transition period (May – December) we rely on our 2020 Public Housing Operating and Capital Fund grants to pay our PBV-HAP for Sheldon Towers and Templewood Court. Based on those grant amounts there will be approximately a \$2K per month shortfall that we will need to make up from our operating reserves.

As part of the conversion we transferred the balance of our 2018 and 2019 Capital Fund grants into a separate reserve account to be used toward the cost of the Sheldon Towers unit renovations and common area flooring.

REPORTS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Finance/Administration Report

Consolidated Budget Comparison and Variance Reports for March 2020: Revenues and Expenses – Ms. Hathaway reported that RAD HAP is \$55,058.75. Most of the expenses on the Credit Card report are COVID-19 related, and she is compiling invoices dated between the date of the Federal State of Emergency and the April 29th HUD notice date and beyond in case relief funding eligibility is adjusted to the earlier date. End of Year revenues were higher than budget, as were expenses (especially heating and employee benefits), leaving a surplus of \$29,986. The ending bank balance for March was \$1,199,499.40.

Our fee accountant has all the information he requested for year-end close out in preparation for the audit.

Leave-Sharing Policy – During our most recent contract negotiations with the AFSCME we agreed to jointly research the feasibility of a sick bank sharing policy that would, under extraordinary circumstances, provide employees with the option of sharing their accumulated sick time with an ill coworker. We are compelled to pursue this in the face of the current pandemic. We will forward a draft to the AFSCME for review and comment. There appear to be significant tax consequences that all staff will need to be aware of in both donating and receiving time.

Property Management Report (Page 2.14)

Sites Update – There are two lease-ups scheduled for Templewood Court; the third is delayed because the potential tenant has no one to help her move due to coronavirus concerns. A ramp was built at Building 7. At Sheldon Towers there is one vacant unit. In common areas, all carpets have been cleaned and new, brighter lighting was installed. We are seeking a tenant for a 2-bedroom Tax Credit apartment at Hickory Street Phase 1. The Hickory Street community gardens are open for the season.

Hickory Street Recertifications - Due to coronavirus-related office closures, it's been a struggle to obtain verifications. Fortunately Ms. Ladabouche is able to bridge some of the gaps by sharing Section 8 documents and services for RHA voucher holders residing at the site. The Vermont State Housing Authority has agreed to do the same for their voucher holders upon receipt of a signed release. This doesn't cover everything, but it helps a lot.

Sheldon Towers Unit Upgrades – Once the state of emergency is lifted, we'll put this back out to bid. When the unit renovations are complete we will put out a second request for bids for new common area flooring. Our timeline is tight and we want to get money out to local contractors as soon as possible.

Maintenance Update – Staff will start mowing this week with our new deck mower, so we know it will look better than in the past. Disinfection rounds are a major part of the daily routine, and tenants have expressed gratitude (as has staff). We currently have a good stock of supplies and PPE. Ms. Richardson and Maintenance Foreman Jon Jordan have been very effective at finding these scarce supplies.

Commissioner Richards suggested we consider buying a disinfecting defogger for each housing site, which Mr. Loso agreed is a justifiable expense. These cost approximately \$5K/unit with a supply of disinfectant solution.

Mr. Loso invited Mr. Jordan to the meeting in order to recognize him and his staff for their outstanding work under challenging circumstances. Mr. Jordan has been on the forefront of tenant involvement and product research during the coronavirus crisis, and continues to be vigilant in keeping staff and tenants as safe as possible.

Section 8 Program Report (Pages 2.15-2.16)

Very few voucher holders have moved or leased up due to the pandemic. For Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) one family at zero HAP has moved on, freeing up a voucher and Ms. Ladabouche has made two more offers. On the Mainstream side, two families leased up, one moved out and 13 others are seeking housing. Of the 35 new Mainstream vouchers issued in 2019, 18 have leased up. Mr. Loso acknowledged that Ms. Ladabouche has made every effort to ease the minds of landlords by ensuring them that it is safe to lease up her tenants. We can also use some COVID-19 relief funding for landlord incentives if necessary.

Resident Services Report (pages 2.16– 2.27)

COVID-19 Response – Ms. Keefe reported that weekly calls to all tenants will continue, but some staff check-ins will scale back from weekly to every other week. She has been producing a single SASH Flash for all SASH Sites, and we will continue with this henceforth – it's a better use of time and resources. We enrolled two new SASH participants since last month.

On the food security front, we continue to coordinate a variety of services. A lot of tenants are returning applications for the Farm Share Program, which is expected to start up in July. A corps of Salvation Army and Red Cross volunteers recently delivered grocery boxes to Sheldon Towers and Templewood Court.

Mr. Loso pointed out that SASH continues to have an impact despite the challenges we're working with at this time. The program is unique, with an unmatched suite of services. He commended Ms. Keefe and her team for making sure no one has gone hungry, lost access to healthcare or is lacking medications.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS: (pages 3.2 – 3.11)

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

- A. Aged Delinquency Reports 4/2019
- B. Collections Report 4/2019
- C. Lease Violations/Evictions 4/2019
- D. Housing Occupancy Charts 4/2019

POLICIES

Leave Sharing Policy (Pages 3.12-3.17)

Due to the tax ramifications for employees who donate time to colleagues, Mr. Loso will ask AFSCME to comment on our draft policy. The Board consented to sending the revised draft to our attorney for further development.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Modernization Cost Certificates

These documents certify appropriate allocation and expenditure of Capital Funds. The budget breakdown was as follows:

VT01P00350118

1406 – Operations	\$43,413.50
1504 – Rad Investment Activity	\$394,648.50

VT01P00350119

1406 – Operations	\$162,802.50
1504 – Rad Investment Activity	\$269,370.50

The monies under 1504 have been escrowed to cover the post-RAD conversion unit upgrades and flooring project at Sheldon Towers, which must be completed by May 1, 2021.

Proposed Resolution #2020-13 to approve the submission of Actual Modernization Cost Certificates (Form HUD-53001) for Capital Fund grants VT01P00350118 and VT01P0035019 to the HUD Boston Field Office for processing and grant closeout.

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

RAD Wrap-up

Mr. Loso reminded the Board that although the conversion took place on May 1, 2020, there are still some items that we had to postpone due to the coronavirus pandemic, include unit inspections. Additionally, we will plan a celebration of our success once we are all able to be together.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

None.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING:

There being no other business, Commissioner Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:14 a.m. Commissioner Richards seconded the motion, and there was unanimous approval.

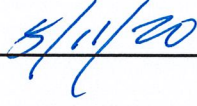
Date of next BOC Regular meeting: Monday, June 8th at 8 a.m. via Zoom Conference (public posting of meeting announcement to follow).

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