

ACTON HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
MINUTES

October 26, 2021, at 4:00pm
VIRTUAL MEETING

Present: Bernice Baran, Peter Berry, Nancy Kolb, Robert Whittlesey, and Melissa Wingfield
Also Present: Kelley Cronin
Attending: Claire Siska, Fran Arsenault, Fred Kinch, and Lisa Franklin

Mr. Whittlesey called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM via a virtual meeting platform with no Board members in physical attendance and broadcasted via Zoom virtual meeting platform.

- I. Ms. Kolb read the rules of the remote meeting and Mr. Whittlesey conducted a roll call for attendance with all Board members being present. The Board reviewed the minutes of the September 27, 2021, meeting. Ms. Kolb made a correction to the minutes. Ms. Baran made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Wingfield to;

Approve the minutes as amended of the regular meeting for September 27, 2021.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye
Nancy Kolb: Aye
Robert Whittlesey: Aye
Peter Berry: Aye
Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was approved.

II. Executive Director Update

Ms. Kolb asked Ms. Cronin to discuss the complaint made to the Select Board about the Housing Authority. Ms. Kolb explained that due to confidentiality issues Ms. Cronin is limited in what she can say in regard to the complaint. Ms. Baran asked if anyone else watched the discussion. Mr. Berry said he watched it afterwards, Ms. Kolb said she read the communication but had not watched it yet. Ms. Cronin let the Board know that the Town Manager had let her know an hour before the meeting that there was a complaint made to the Select Board. Ms. Cronin let the Board know that no previous complaint had been sent to the office or the Acton Housing Authority (AHA) Board. Ms. Cronin explained that due to State regulation 760 CMR 8, she is not allowed to discuss specific tenants and that that there were legal issues involved. Ms. Cronin said she was not comfortable, and did not think it was appropriate, for the AHA to publicly argue or disagree with a resident. Ms. Cronin said that the AHA mission is to work for voucher holders and residents. Ms. Cronin addressed the discrimination complaint. She said that the staff was all white when she first became the Director of the AHA and that the residents are very diverse, so she prioritized hiring staff who were more representative of AHA residents. She reached out to the Chinese language school and other organizations when hiring and now half the full-time staff are minorities, including three who are bilingual. Ms. Cronin also talked about how two staff people are either current or former residents of the AHA. Ms. Cronin explained that 49% AHA residents are minorities and the primary languages other than English spoken by residents are Chinese and Spanish. The AHA staff who have been hired are bilingual in Chinese and Spanish and the AHA is now better able to communicate with our residents. Ms. Cronin explained the tenant who complained said she was being discriminated against because she was Hispanic. She said

the person below her was discriminating against her when she complained about her as well. Ms. Cronin explained that there are tenants who complain about each other, a comment complaint being noise, and that the AHA tries to determine how to resolve conflicts between neighbors. Sometimes the AHA has to transfer residents to help with conflicts between residents. The resident also had complained about the condition of the unit. Ms. Cronin explained that less than 10% of units have been modernized. The AHA units' interiors have original kitchens, baths, fixtures and most units were built in the 1980's. Some of the condominium units were built before then and still have original kitchens and baths. Ms. Cronin explained that appliances are fixed and not replaced unless no longer working. Ms. Cronin explained she could not talk about the other issues the tenant raised concerning rent and her income. Ms. Kolb asked Ms. Cronin to explain how rent is determined. Ms. Cronin explained it is all spelled out in the State regulations and lease. All Housing Authorities determine rent based on income; most residents pay 30% of their income towards rent after deductions. Ms. Cronin explained all residents have to provide third party verification of income and that there is a software system used that provides worksheets for tenants. When income and rent are determined the new rent notice provided to the resident identifies the income and sources were for determining the rent. The tenant is given a written notice of new rent annually when they are redetermined and the notice spells out in writing the process for a tenant to follow if they do not agree with the rent determination. Ms. Baran mentioned that she wished the Board had been notified by the Town about the complaint and talked about how hard working she has observed the staff to be.

Ms. Cronin discussed the lack of investment and resources provided to Housing Authorities to modernize units and discussed the fact that the units are old and in need of investment. Ms. Cronin also reminded the Board that the State guidance during COVID was to only enter tenant units for emergencies and that regular work orders, preventive maintenance and inspections were suspended for more than a year. The AHA is behind and trying to catch up. Ms. Cronin said she hired an outside inspection company to do all the inspections this year so that there was an objective set of eyes looking at all the units and identifying needed repairs. The tenant who spoke at the Select Board meeting had not contacted the office in more than a year about any issues in her unit prior to complaining to the Town.

Ms. Cronin reminded the Board that the AHA has aggressively sought additional resources to supplement the small amount of capital funds the AHA receives from the State, by applying for Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds which can only be used for preservation not interior modernization. The AHA has prioritized family units for the State modernization funds and all ten of the new kitchens and baths were put in family units. Ms. Cronin explained that the family units are older and have more wear and tear. The Board discussed how to respond at the next Select Board meeting. Ms. Kolb said the complaint should have come to the AHA Board and that usually complaints against staff are discussed in private as opposed to at public meetings. Mr. Berry said he was going to speak about the fundamental lack of fairness when there is a public complaint when the agency cannot respond due to confidentiality issues. Ms. Wingfield said that Ms. Arsenault had put in the chat that she would ask Mr. Martin to put the AHA on the agenda for the next Select Board meeting. Mr. Berry offered to make a statement on behalf of the Board.

Ms. Cronin reviewed the past audit and report on Agreed Upon Procedures conducted by the auditing firm Marcum. The auditing firm reported that there were no findings or exceptions in any of their review and Ms. Cronin reminded the Board that the audit has had no findings for years. Ms. Cronin asked the Board if they could take a look at the budget guidelines, she e-mailed them because that will be the basis for submitting the 2022 budget.

Ms. Cronin reviewed the memo to the Board asking for permission to hire an outside attorney, from the list pre-approved by DHCD, to assist with tenant issues. Ms. Cronin recommended Driscoll and Driscoll who had the lowest rate and already worked with the AHA on Section 8 issues. Mr. Berry made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Kolb to;

Approve Ms. Cronin enlisting the assistance of Driscoll and Driscoll, when needed, to assist with State Housing Program.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye

Nancy Kolb: Aye

Robert Whittlesey: Aye

Peter Berry: Aye

Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was approved.

III. New Business

Ms. Cronin reviewed a proposed change to the capital plan prior to the Board voting on it. Ms. Cronin explained that the Town required decks be added to the sliding door replacement project at Windsor Green for the four handicapped accessible units. She asked the Board to approve the annual and capital plan with an amendment to allow for ramps to be added to the decks for egress in an emergency. Ms. Cronin said the architect and contractor on the sliding door project had provided an estimate of approximately \$12,000 for the ramps. Ms. Cronin let the Board know that there had been no comments received on the annual plan or capital plan since the hearing in September. Ms. Baran made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Wingfield to;

Approve the amended Annual and Capital Plan.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye

Nancy Kolb: Aye

Robert Whittlesey: Aye

Peter Berry: Aye

Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was approved.

Ms. Kolb let the Board know she spoke to Kevin McManus who said he was touched that the Board wanted to name the Main Street housing development after his wife Betty and that his family would be happy to hear the news. Ms. Cronin let the Board know that the Commission on Disabilities had discussed the units at Main Street. The Commission had questions about setting aside the units for a particular program. Ms. Cronin reviewed the concept with the Commission. Ms. Cronin also let the Board know that the State Department of Developmental Services does not believe there is a need for a live-in staff person for the program.

Ms. Cronin reminded the Board there was a Conservation Commission hearing on Main Street the following week and updated the Board on conversations with Town staff about the Dog Park related to septic design. The Board recognized Claire Siska who had her hand up and Ms. Siska provided an update on planning and potential funding for the Dog Park.

Ms. Cronin reviewed the Certificate of Final Completion for the Sliding Doors Project. Ms. Kolb made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Berry to;

Approve the certificate of final completion for the sliding doors project #002075 with L&H Construction for a final contract cost of \$138,952.17.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye

Nancy Kolb: Aye

Robert Whittlesey: Aye

Peter Berry: Aye

Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was approved.

IV. Old Business

Ms. Kolb said the Community Preservation Application was due on November 15, 2021. Ms. Cronin said the estimate for Windsor Green windows was \$270,000. Ms. Baran stated that she believes the Acton Community Housing Committee would not be applying for a lot of money this year. The Board asked Ms. Cronin to submit an application for the full amount. Mr. Berry said there were a number of housing items in the climate plan. Mr. Berry made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Baran and unanimously voted in the affirmative to:

Authorize Ms. Cronin to submit an application to the Community Preservation Committee for the Windsor Green window project in the amount of \$270,000.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye

Peter Berry: Aye

Nancy Kolb: Aye

Robert Whittlesey: Aye

Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was unanimously approved.

IV. The Board reviewed the September voucher. Ms. Kolb made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Baran and unanimously voted in the affirmative to:

Approve the September voucher as presented.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye

Peter Berry: Aye

Nancy Kolb: Aye

Robert Whittlesey: Aye

Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was unanimously approved.

V. Ms. Kolb asked if there were any public comments. Ms. Franklin was concerned the Windsor Green sliding door project was voted to be complete when her door was not accessible. Ms. Cronin explained that the Board had approved a new project earlier to make the egress accessible. Ms. Kolb asked if

there was any further comment. Mr. Whittlesey made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Berry and unanimously voted in the affirmative to:

Adjourn the meeting at 5:30 pm.

and upon roll call the “Ayes” and “Nays” were as follows:

Bernice Baran: Aye

Peter Berry: Aye

Nancy Kolb: Aye

Robert Whittlesey: Aye

Melissa Wingfield: Aye

The motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelley A. Cronin

Kelley A. Cronin

Executive Director

Documents and Exhibits Used During the **October 26th** meeting:

Minutes of the September 27, 2021, meetings, Memo Regarding legal assistance, 2020 Financial Audit and Agreed Upon Procedures reports, Sliding Door Ramp designs and estimate, Sliding Door Project

#002075 certificate of final completion, Updated Capital Plan, Annual Plan, Public Housing Notice 2021-20 Budget Guidelines, Tenant Account Receivable, September voucher