

Hudson Housing Authority Board of Commissioners
Minutes of Regular Meeting
May 12, 2021

In attendance: Chairperson Revonda Smith, Vice Chairperson Clair Cousin, Treasurer Rebecca Wolff, Marie Balle, Rebecca Borrer, Executive Director Tim Mattice
Absent: Robert Davis

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Smith at 6 p.m. It was conducted both live and remotely via Zoom teleconferencing.

Minutes

On motion of Ms. Balle and a second by Ms. Borrer, the board approved the minutes of the April 14, 2021 meeting.

Accounts Payable

Ms. Balle made a motion to approve accounts payable for April 2021, which was seconded by Ms. Borrer and approved unanimously.

Clean Energy Grant

Mr. Mattice reported that the City of Hudson was awarded a Clean Energy Communities Program grant from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to replace 53 refrigerators at Bliss Towers and Columbia Apartments with energy efficient models. The grant also had a provision for the Hudson Housing Authority (HHA) to provide educational programming for people to learn energy conservation techniques related to food production, procurement, use and preservation. He said it would reduce the HHA's carbon footprint and utility costs. All commissioners had to do was approve the agreement. Ms. Cousin made a motion to approve the contract contained in Resolution #512, which was seconded by Ms. Borrer and approved unanimously.

Mr. Mattice said it would have taken two years to implement the program, but the HHA was well ahead of that schedule. He said workshops would be provided with residents regarding food and energy conservation. There are several agencies and organizations, such as Rolling Grocer, that could be approached for assistance to satisfy the provisions of the grant.

Waiting List Policy

The board was asked to consider Resolution #513, which would amend the Public Housing and Section 8 Administrative Plan waiting list policy to include a county residency requirement for new applicants.

Columbia County is one of three counties in the state that had an open and active Section 8 list. The problem is that new applicants get to the top of the list while county residents move to the bottom. Mr. Mattice said the board had to decide how it wanted to deal with the conundrum and whether any measure should be retroactive to those on the list from now on. Ms. Balle asked if there were any unknowns the board should be aware of it decided to act retroactively. Mr. Mattice said there were none. Ms. Smith asked if there was anyone at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) who might offer assistance so people were not moved down on

the list, which she said was “dangerous for families.” Mr. Mattice doubted that HUD would have that level of involvement.

Mr. Mattice said there was a dramatic influx of New York City residents who chose to port their Section 8 vouchers. That influx is impacting the availability of housing for Hudson residents. He noted that residents with Section 8 vouchers can port out after they lived in New York City for a year.

He also was concerned about the expenses involved.

Ms. Balle suggested that the board consider a resolution to temporarily suspend the Section 8 waiting list for non-county residents until next month’s meeting. Ms. Wolff offered a second and the measure passed unanimously.

Draft Operating Budget

Mr. Mattice presented commissioners a draft operating budget proposal for 2021-2022 prior to the meeting so they could digest it. The budget is due for approval in July. He said the board might want to form a budget subcommittee to review the document and report back to the full board.

Resident Commissioner Election

There is a vacancy on the board for a tenant member. A special election will be conducted for the position, which will expire at the end of the year. Ten signatures of residents are needed to appear on the ballot. Write-ins also will be allowed. Mr. Mattice said one person was interested so far. Ms. Borrer encouraged all residents to consider becoming part of the decision-making process.

Tenant Relations Subcommittee

Ms. Cousin said no much had been done because any advancement was dependent on survey results. She did, however, advocate for a tenants’ association so residents would “be able to freely move and not have to answer to the board. As we get closer to development, it’s going to create itself.” She added that none of the commissioners were residents so they should not be involved in formation of the group.

Mr. Mattice said the group would have to apply to apply to the state to become a non-profit, which takes about two months. Tenants could decide to become a 501 (c) (3) organization, which is a non-profit that enjoys special, tax-exempt status. Non-profits can receive grants from the government and private foundations. They receive several discounts as well, from postage to advertising rates.

Ms. Cousin said the goal was to get tenants to advocate for themselves. “It’s an empowering thing,” Mr. Mattice added. “Many housing authorities have them.” Ms. Cousin said the board’s role was simple: “We want to set them up for success.”

Mr. Mattice said the tenants would first have to choose officers for the organization and take steps to form it. Ms. Cousin said tenants were either not showing up for meetings or not talking, “so this way makes sense.” Commissioners could create a committee to help tenants get the association up and running.

Ms. Cousin said the Hudson Catskill Housing Coalition survey data was completed and now available but the board would need time to study it. She said the board should meet to discuss the results and a request for qualifications. The board agreed to do so.

Off-line Apartments

Mr. Mattice said two more apartments had to be done. “Other than that, we’re doing pretty well.” He asked if the board was still planning to put each of the 14 apartments online before it started its development project. “We know where our need is—larger apartments for people to move into,” Ms. Borrer said.

Ms. Balle said getting the apartments online was included in the budget, but Mr. Mattice said the challenge was to find contractors in Hudson or the county. “They’re flat out,” he said. Ms. Borrer said the board had to deal with the issue now because the problem would only get bigger. “That’s why job development is no important,” she said. “If we don’t start talking about it now, I’m worried we won’t have enough workers for the development project.” Ms. Wolff wondered if there was any way to find a contractor who would help develop and on-the-job training program.

Ms. Balle said 14 apartments was a large liability and wondered if any local contractors handled projects of that size. Mr. Mattice said it was an economy of scale. Contractors would have to move pieces of equipment and such, which is costly. On the other hand, “remediating hazards is a good thing.” The board had to decide how much it wanted to invest in the units before making a decision about the building as a whole, he said. There are 14 off-line units in Bliss and six in the low-rise.

Mr. Mattice said Columbia-Greene Community College did not have a training program in place, but officials said they would be willing to talk to the board about its needs. Ms. Borrer agreed to compile a list of local contractors who could be contacted regarding the possibility of teaching their trade, as well as a list of the type of work that would have to be done. In the interim, Mr. Mattice said he would focus on getting the larger apartments done first.

Request for Land

Ms. Smith and Ms. Wolff approached the Hudson Community Development and Planning Agency about the possibility of including some of its land on State Street in HHA’s request for qualifications. “I’m hoping that Rebecca and I will be tearing down some walls and get an answer,” Ms. Smith said.

Resignation

Ms. Wolff resigned as treasurer, but kept her seat on the board. Ms. Borrer nominated Ms. Balle for the position, which was seconded by Ms. Wolff and approved unanimously. Ms. Balle was subsequently elected treasurer in a unanimous vote.

Public Comment

The board learned that a resident of the seventh floor had complained about cockroaches. The problem remained and was getting worse. Mr. Mattice said an exterminator was brought in each week. There is a spreadsheet on all of the apartments and the level of infestations that is used to schedule treatments. “It’s been an ongoing problem in the building,” he said.

“It’s a very difficult problem to solve,” he said, and required educating residents about what they could do to minimize the problem. A tenant said roaches had been seen coming out of electrical outlets and elevators.

Mr. Mattice said the perimeter of the building would have to be baited for rodents and such if the board chose demolition over rehabilitation. Still, there were many things inherent in the building that added to the problem, such as garbage being stored inside. Any new design

should plan on garbage being outside, he said. Another problem is pets, whose food and water are left on apartment floors. "It boils down to education and hoping that the residents do what they're supposed to do to minimize the problem."

HHA has an extensive cleaning program and sympathizes with tenants, but the problem is hard to control in a high-density building, he said, plus some tenants won't allow anyone to come into their apartments to treat the problem. Mr. Mattice said the grant for refrigerators was a good first step toward eliminating roaches because the smell of the old seals on the attracts the insects.

Another resident asked about the possibility of universal internet service in the building because many were working from or schooling their children from home and don't have full access. Ms. Smith said Unity Now came and looked at the roof, but it was not secure enough for placement of a satellite-type system. She said universal internet would be included in the RFQ.

A tenant was concerned that the public bathrooms were locked, though they understood it was probably a precaution due to COVID-19. Mr. Mattice said it was not policy to lock the bathrooms, but they could have been locked by accident.

Ms. Balle made a motion to adjourn at 7:36 p.m., which was seconded by Ms. Wolff and approved unanimously.