

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE BOROUGH
OF HIGHTSTOWN, NEW JERSEY
HELD ON WEDNESDAY February 21, 2024 AT 7:00 P.M.**

Chairperson James Eufemia called meeting to Order at 7:05PM

Open Public Meetings Act Statement: In compliance with Chapter 213 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of the annual notice published in the Trenton Times, Princeton Packet and are posted on the calendar at The Hightstown Borough Municipal Building by the Authority and posted in a public place reserved for such announcements in the lobby of the Community Building of the Housing Authority office.

Roll Call: showed that those present and absent were as follows:

Present: Allen Keith LePrevost, Executive Director, Commissioner James Eufemia, Chair, Commissioner Brent Rivenburgh, Commissioner Sean McDonnell, Commissioner Anne Studholme.

Also present: Assistant Director Chelsea Graham, Bev Asselstine, Hightstown Planning Board, Jeet Gulati, Council Liaison.

Absent: Commissioner Terry Parliaros, Commissioner Eva Teller, Commissioner Jameallah Lance

Approval of Minutes: Regular Meeting Minutes of January 17th. The minutes were motioned to be approved by Commissioner Rivenburgh and seconded by Commissioner McDonnell.
Minutes were unanimously approved.

Open Public Meeting: At this time the public is invited and encouraged to participate in open forum. It is requested by the Chairman of the Board and the Commissioners of the Housing Authority that all comments and opinions be relevant and timely and be expressed in a manner which contributes to and advances the orderly progress of the meeting and for all concerned. The Chairman or presiding Commissioner may determine that it is necessary to limit the amount of time allotted to speakers from the public.

Presentation-Bev Asselstine

- Explained that under NJ Law, each municipality must have a Master Plan updated at least every 10 years. 2024 is our year and we will be working on the document this year. We are seeking feedback from residents, committees, and boards for the document.

- Displayed the 3rd round affordable housing plan that was incorporated in the current master plan. During this round, Hightstown has accounted for more units than is required. Levels of renovation and rehab need to be clarified for the Borough. Commissioner Studholme stated the Borough needs to put money into the affordable plan. It was mentioned it currently costs approximately \$400K per affordable housing unit, and the Borough gave the developer 300 market rate units and only charged them \$250K as a one-time payment. Another bad deal by the borough.
 - Bev noted that by the end of this quarter the 4th round numbers will be available. Commissioner Eufemia stated the Housing Authority would be more than willing to add affordable senior units but need the Borough's help. Keith mentioned the problems they encountered exploring the Tax Credit program. The local school district did not rank high enough in test scores for an application to qualify.
 - Commissioner Eufemia questioned whether the Planning Board had any jurisdiction with Habitat. The screening and selection process eliminates most applicants.
 - Bev spoke on services and walking distance shopping being offered to our residents. Keith offered that most of our residents utilize Manino's but there is a lack of good quality food shopping, shoes, clothing stores except for the Wal- Mart. Bev questioned the Vaccine clinic. Chelsea added that the Blood pressure clinic today only one person showed up.
 - Bev questioned notices and information going into the community. Keith noted we should be offering in both English and Spanish. Our newsletters are only in English as this time. Chelsea is learning and practicing Spanish so hopefully we will be able to communicate with our Spanish residents without the need of a translator.
 - Commissioner Studholme spoke of the quality of housing offered at the Housing Authority and that the Borough should be proud of this place instead of the attitude they have now. She is from Princeton, and they struggle to keep their housing up, where we offer a beautiful, integrated community.
 - Bev spoke of the diversity in Hightstown and the need to accommodate the distinct populations. That is what drew her family to Hightstown, and the town needs to figure out the right mix of businesses to serve the population.
 - Bev spoke about the streets and various crosswalks in town and possible impediments to easy walking. It was noted that the Borough crosswalk on Rogers Ave is dangerous, and most people won't use it. Bev noted it is very difficult to alter or change certain things due to State limitations. The State is going through a Master Plan process, and she will participate in the public meetings emphasizing the problem with trucks in town.
 - Bev questioned if our residents use any of the recreational walking paths
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or parks. Keith mentioned most people don't even know Association Park exists! and we really don't have any recreational walkers.

- A conversation ensued about truck traffic in town and the problem the town has tried to solve, making it easier for them to turn left or right.
- Commissioner Eufemia questioned whether we would see the \$250K this year. Bev did not believe so as the developer is slowly cleaning up problems with the site and waiting for more favorable interest rates to borrow money. There was a discussion about the Willis property and the growing deterioration of the site. It was questioned what the Borough was doing or not doing to make sure the place looks presentable. Bev reiterated that the Borough is constantly making the rounds and getting homes and commercial properties clean up and better maintain their sites. Keith invited Bev to send a draft plan over to the Housing Authority and come and speak again once we have a chance to review the draft and see where we are going. He stressed the need for the Master Plan to have "actionable" items that can be accomplished and this not become a document that sits on a shelf somewhere.

Borough Council Liaison Report:

- **Jeet** gave the board an update on where we are with the sidewalks and the cooperation agreement. Little to no progress has been made with the Borough, but there have been meetings with the Mayor and Commissioner Eufemia discussing the various items.

Committee Report:

- **None**

Resident Council Report:

- **Chelsea** gave the report for the resident council. The Council met earlier today and discussed the following:
 - We need better signage on each building. Amazon and UPS drivers are saying they don't know each building and specific addresses. Chelsea and Keith will look into the situation.
 - The Easter Egg hunt has been rescheduled for March 23. The local church will be supplying several volunteers and organizing the entire event.
 - The Resident Council is making up Easter Treat bags for the kids and seniors.
 - Chelsea and the maintenance staff will work on cleaning up the bike racks again. It seems every 6 months or so we need to go through the bike racks and remove several older, partially disassembled bikes that are chained to the rack.

Resolutions:

- **None**

Discussion Items:

- **Piping Project:** Keith discussed the current project and where we are at the moment. He explained building 3 and 5 are substantially piped and the contractor wants to "charge" the hot and cold-water lines in the next week or two and begin connecting the lines. The heating lines have been run, but we are waiting for the heating system to be shut down to begin the connections. We are in constant contact with HUD Washington who is pleased with our progress and guaranteed us the balance that is needed.

Executive Director Report:

- We are currently at 98 % Occupancy. We recently renovated a 2-bedroom unit for a new tenant. This unit was previously fully renovated so all it needed was paint, wax, and cleaning. The new tenant is moving on March 1. We also fully renovated a studio unit that needed everything. It is rented for March 1. Currently, we don't have any notice to move.
- The infrastructure piping project is well underway. The contractors are installing hundreds of feet of pipe in multiple sizes. The plan is to fully energize the new piping system this month and begin the process of tying it into the existing risers. The engineer has been out and inspected the work that is being done and clarified questions that the contractor had. We are working closely with the contractor to make sure we are keeping the residents informed of the progress and giving adequate notice of any shutdowns. We continue to make sure the work they are doing will be accessible and easy for our staff to access in the future and valves and shut offs are clearly marked for future reference.
- I reached out to HUD Washington again to bring them up on the project. They appreciate the update.
- The waiting lists are open! I have been a little underwhelmed by the response, only getting 36 applications to date. Hopefully more will come in the next month or so while the list is scheduled to be open.
- We will be making changes to our ACOP(Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy) in the next several months. Changes will need to be adopted by the end of 2024. Copies will be sent to the committee to review and comment before new policies are adopted. Changes are needed to comply with the HOTMA changes that are being implemented by HUD. This will affect entrance and occupancy requirements as well as annual certifications.
- Blood Pressure clinic. The health department holds a clinic here monthly, and last month only one resident showed up. Chelsea and Lynmarie call, and we notice all the buildings, but there is only so much we can do.

Financial Update: February 2024

In review of the financial reports for the month of February 2024, the Hightstown Housing Authority completed the month with positive results. I have included a variety of reports for your review.

Income:

- Residential income has come in over budget. This is due to the new tenants having good incomes, and a couple of our existing tenants either got new jobs or increases in pay.
- Excess utility is slightly under budget for the period.
- Interest income is over budget for the period. We are now getting current rates on our accounts. Adjustments have been made in the 2024 budget.
- Other Operating receipts are under budget for the period.
- Laundry income is slightly over budget for the period.
- Operating Subsidy income is under budget for the period. We received a large amount of money from HUD to cover the first 3 months and half of April. I discussed this with our accountant, and he recommends we download the money and get it out of the Eloccs system. For January I only drew down what I felt was needed. HUD is pushing funding out, but without a federal budget. The concern is our subsidies later in the year may be dramatically cut if the budget is slashed by congress, as they are proposing.

Expenses:

- Administrative salaries are under budget for the period. We will continue to be under budget until the next 3 pay month.
- Legal expenses are over budget for the period, we are seeking more evictions and legal action to reinforce collections. More residents are having financial difficulties lately, I am not sure if it is the economy, or their personal situation.
- Travel is under budget for the period and the year.
- Telephones are over budget for the period. There are some bills from the December period that were paid in January, so they show up on the January statement.
- Sundry Administrative is over budget for the period. Pete reclassified some expenses during the transition period. Part of this expense was the purchase of 4 new chairs toner for the copier (\$680 dollars!).
- Computer supplies are under budget for the period. We will be looking to upgrade at least 2 more computers this year, we held off in '23, but we will need to do some upgrades in 2024.
- Dues and Memberships are slightly under budget for the period.
- Misc. Maintenance supplies are under budget.
- Electric is over budget for the period, we had a colder than normal January, so heating pumps were working 24 hours per day.

- Natural Gas is under budget for the period. We have had colder than normal temperatures during this period, but the new systems are working well and keeping up with demand, even in the coldest periods.
- Maintenance salaries are under budget.
- Maintenance materials are over budget for the period. In renovating units, we are purchasing supplies and materials for those units. I expect this to come into line within the next month.
- Extermination Cost is under budget. We are hopeful the bed bug situation is coming under control.
- Ground maintenance is on budget. January and February payments are shown.
- Blue Cross/Blue shield is on budget.

The enclosed financials include Income Statement for the Current Period- January 2024(VS Budget), and General Ledger Cash account for January.

The next meeting will be a 7:00PM on March 20th.