

Special Meeting Minutes
Harborview Towers
376 E. Washington Street
Bridgeport. CT
May 22, 2017

The Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Bridgeport met in a Regular Meeting at Harborview Towers, 376 E. Washington Avenue, Bridgeport, CT, on the 22nd day of May, the place, date and hour duly established for the holding of such meetings Vice-Chairperson Hadassah Nightingale called the meeting to order at 3:20 p.m.

The Recording Secretary stated that this meeting is being conducted in conformity with the Open Public Meeting Act.

Present:

Chairperson Cowlis Andrews – (via phone)
Vice Chairperson Hadassah Nightingale
Commissioner Richard Garcia, Treasurer
Commissioner Stephen Nelson – (arrived late)

Also, Present:

James A. Slaughter, Interim Executive
Deborah Woodson, Executive Operations Administrator/Recorder/Transcriber
Sean Bagot, Senior Legal and Compliance Analyst
[See attached Sign in Sheet]

The Meeting of the Bridgeport Housing Authority also known as Park City Communities will come to order. Ready for the Roll Call

[James A. Slaughter] Roll Call:

Commissioner Nightingale	Present
Commissioner Garcia	Present
Commissioner Andrews	Present

[James A. Slaughter] Vice-Chairperson we have a Quorum.

Public Comment #1 Catherine Stewart (Harborview)

We have 240 units in this building and we only have one maintenance person today.
We need coverage.

Public Comment #2 Denese Taylor Moye (Marina Village)

I would just like to say I appreciate you asking do we want to make any public comments. But we are here today for you guys and I think the comments should come after we hear some of the things that you have to say. Thank you.

[Commissioner Nightingale] I don't think so, but it might be possible, If you don't want the truth don't ask me nothing. If you don't want to hear what you won't like, don't ask me nothing. Please! Mr. Slaughter can you explain the purpose of the Special Meeting.

[James Slaughter] The purpose of the Special Meeting is to talk about the direction of the agency. To look at what we have, the existing conditions we have; talk about the challenges that we have before us. We will give you a couple of brief presentations on what might be a possible way to go and to give the board members an opportunity to make some remarks to you as staff and for you to interact with the Commissioners. That is the purpose of this meeting. I think that it is important that we have dialogue from you but then you also know not only what direction that I want to lead the agency but hear from the policymakers which are the board members.

[Commissioner Nightingale] Mr. Slaughter is there anything else that you would like to say?

[James Slaughter] Are there any remarks from Commissioners to talk about the direction of the agency and talk about the challenges we have before us as a beginning point?

[Commissioner Nightingale] Commissioner Andrews do you have something to say in reference to the general direction that the agency is going in.

[Commissioner Andrews] I would like to thank all of the staff for their hard work. Please understand that this has been a very difficult year and there have been quite a few changes in the last 12 months. We thank the staff for sticking with us and sticking with the residents. So far during my tenure I have seen the flavor of staff and the integrity of staff and want to really thank them for that. Going forward there will be a lot of changes that will occur. As you know we have a new President and a new Secretary of Housing and we have to be prepared for those changes. So, I just ask that we all remember that we are a team. Sometimes we may not break bread with each other, but ultimately we need to all be on the same team and we have to keep that in mind. Going forward, we have to work together and we have to talk to each other. If there is something going on, let's talk about it. Currently, we are in the Troubled status and we must work to get out of the troubled status. If we don't, HUD can take over and this agency could go into receivership at which time all employees would lose their jobs. But we are going to work hard so that doesn't happen.

[Commissioner Nightingale] Commissioner Garcia would you like to make a comment?

[Commissioner Garcia] Commissioner Andrews pretty much said it all. I just want to say keep pressing on. We are going to get through this. I work for Housing in New Haven and I have been there for 11 years.

All agencies are going to be going through some trials and tribulations just to try and survive. Budgets are getting cut so, we have to try and work with what we have to survive. One of the things that I will mention is that we must work together. Everyone must work as a team member to accomplish the goals we need to accomplish. I know a lot of you are frustrated. I have spoken to many of you. But I want to encourage you to hang in there. Do what you have to do, come to work, somehow find some motivation. I know with some of you guys, your motivation has been down. I know that the morale is down and we need to develop. Because that's the only way we are going to get through this. All for one and none for all. United we stand, divided we are really going to fall. We don't want the Hartford field office coming over here and taking over, because if they do, that's a dangerous situation for us. It could mean many things, like job loss, layoffs and so forth. And we don't want that. I want to see everyone working here. I don't want to see anyone lose their jobs. But we have to do our jobs and do the best we can to work with one another. I am not saying go and have dinner at their house, or go to happy hour after work, you don't have to do that. Only I do that!! But working together during the hours that you are scheduled to work it's very important. I can't stress the importance upon that. So, hang in there. Do go work, we are improving. Seon is going to talk about our recovery program. There has been some improvement, but we still need to improve more. So, that's why I am going back to what I said when I first started, which is keep pressing on! I believe towards the end of the year we will see some good things happening for us. Thank you

[Commissioner Nightingale] Thank you Commissioner Garcia.

I would like to say a few things behind the comments made by Commissioner Andrews and Commissioner Garcia. We do have to stick together. All of us residents and employees understand. We don't have to love each other or like each other but each one of us needs to stop, look and listen and decide do we want this job, do we want to fail or do you want to win. And only you can tell yourself which one you want to do. Backstabbing going around and doing things that you know are not right. Follow the policies. And please don't forget that the residents are the most important people here. So, work together!! Whatever your difference is try to solve them before you get here. The residents deserve your full attention. We deserve your help. Like Commissioner Garcia said, somethings have improved, not much, but some. So, we are looking at a bleak future especially with Trump as President we don't know what his budget is going to be. So, we need to stop and think and check ourselves, to make sure we are doing the best we can.

[Commissioner Nightingale] Finance/Personnel. Mr. Slaughter will speak generally on finance.

[James Slaughter] Alan is not here today, but I can make a general statement regarding Finance. I think in terms of our finance we have to really look and see how we can turn our things around. By making sure we have HAP contracts, so that we can be subsidy. Without operating subsidy and administrative subsidies, we are not going to survive. I think those are the most important. We need to receiving our money when it comes to leases. I appreciate all of you came out and went through the Inventory/PRQ training. We are going to have to do more work in terms of visual homes. I think that we have to think comprehensively as a unit. It goes beyond one particular property whether its Greene, Trumbull. If we have one property that's failing it takes us all down. We have to think smart. Residents are first and foremost. You know I have said

this constantly without residents, we don't have jobs. I think we also need to understand that the residents have to work with us. The RAB has been working with us giving us suggestions. We have to learn how to think out of the box on certain items. So, in terms of general finance, we have been running a deficit. And I don't have the details. Unfortunately, Alan Cashmore went home sick. We will be supplying you with that information. It's important that we need to be looking at this cooperatively and jointly and figure out how we can generate more revenue. That will help this agency survive.

[Ray Collette, Finance] So this year we are at an 85% proration. And instead of getting \$16 million dollars in operating subsidy from HUD we will be receiving less than \$14 million. The proposed budget for the fiscal year of 2018 is supposed to have a 9% additional cut. Which means another 1.5 million dollars will be lost in operating subsidy. In addition, the capital fund budget will be cut by two thirds, this has been used to support the operations in Public Housing. With that kind of deficit, it really impossible with the kind of money that we are laying out to get out of a deficit. My question is so what kind of policies are the board putting together to allow us to maintain operations. Going forward not only to 2018 but 2019. We can't serve residents if we are not going to have employment contracts to work. So, what policies can the Board put together to address these financial problems.

[Commissioner Nightingale] That is something that we will have to discuss and review. At this moment, we can't say. We need to find out exactly what funds and how much funds we will be getting. We will have to sit down and decide and do a lot of thinking, what's important, how do we do this and how do we build up our reserves and who do we use our money, capital, grants otherwise. There are a lot of things that we will be able to do as a board and there will be some things that we will not be able to do. And we must but priority first. So with the help of everyone here maybe we can come up with a solution. In some places, we will be able to do more and in some places, we will not be able to do much. So, it's team work that's what it has to be for now own, teamwork so that HUD will want to help us.

[Commissioner Garcia] If I may add, we have a recovery program that if we don't meet up obligations HUD will continue to hold back money. But as we do better I believe HUD will start to release more funds monthly. And I will be the first to tell you that they are not giving us what they are suppose to be feeding us monthly. Because we have a recovery program that hasn't been accomplished yet. If you don't already know it, we have been declared a Troubled Agency. We have to get out of that status and get back into good standards so that we can recover a lot of those funds that they have been holding back from us. That's an area that needs to be looked at. Commissioner Andrews, Nightingale and I have been meeting and we are going to come up with a solution to this problem. It's not going to happen tomorrow. It's not going to happen in thirty (30) days. It's going to be a work in progress and we get hope to get there sooner than later.

[Commissioner Nightingale] We have to be working towards that. The most important point out of the recovery is that we have to move faster. My point is we are just getting along and we need to do things that will help improve our record with HUD, so that we can have more money to have a few more things.

[Denese Taylor Moye] Especially listening to some of the financial problems going on here, having a deficit. As employees, how can you move forward helping residents if you don't have the money to get paid, buy materials that's needed for the guys to make repairs in different complexes. There's a whole lot to that, even working together. If you are losing money than you are going to continue to lose money. So, where does the it start, no money no team. It's just as simple as that no money no team. You can't put something together when you don't have the financial stability to make something happen. We may all have opinions on what we may do things to change things. We say make residents pay their rents on time. If they don't pay their rent on time, then you have someone pushing a paper under your door saying that you owe housing money; or that you are late with your rent. So if you are going to follow the same playing field that has been played for years that got us into this troubled status, then there's still no money, no team. And that's the one thing that I wanted to say and thank you so much for sharing information and being honest with us about the deficit. Because a lot of times we don't get that information. We are banging our brains out trying to find out what can we do to stabilize this situation. I am sitting here thinking is this a meeting for me? I am glad that I am here hearing this, but I know as a Resident Advisor of the RAB whatever my opinion is, will it save our troubled complex. I could go on and on, but I am not. I'm going to sit down.

[Commissioner Nightingale] May I say something? Yes, we are losing money. The money has been lost, it should not have been. But what we need to do now is plug in the holes. Money is being spent foolishly and there is no account of how the money is being spent, or what it's being spent for. Of course, there are bills we need to pay to keep things running. There are things that we need to get, but we must get our priorities straight. We need to make sure that we are paying the people we owe that are vital to us and that provide us with vital services. Because when the elevator breaks down and you call and they say they can't come out because you owe us money. We need to find out where the leaks are and seal them up. And everyone sitting here shaking their heads, we know there are leaks. So, help us find the leaks, understand. Where is, the money going?

[PCC Employee] Money is going to Administration.

[Commissioner Nightingale] We need to look into Administration. Wait a minute!! I am agreeing with you. I said help us find the leaks, then we can start doing something. What did I just finish saying??

[Cowlis Andrews] The leaks that Hadassah was referring to starts from the top. It starts with Administration. It effects all of us. Currently, we have a lot of new people at the top and they know who to do their job and they do their jobs well. Some people are just going in the wrong direction and they are not doing their job. People are not being held accountable and to the frustration of everyone. If we fail, we fail together. When HUD comes in and privatizes the agency, from the maintenance aid, janitor to the manager, Staff of Section 8 to the Executive Director, Secretary and Director of Asset of Management to everyone. At the end of the day. The board members will just be here to manage reports.

[Alex Guzman] I would like to speak for the majority of employees in this room. A lot of the frustration that we feel is coming from previous administration and they dropped the ball and at

the end of the day, as employees we are suffering the consequences. Because we are working short staffed and underfunded. The frustration also comes from failed policies from the previous administration. We tried to help by giving some creative ideas on how to work together to help execute some of the policies. We have seen gross funds spent on vacant units and we suggested that we use inside maintenance staff to do some of the work and it didn't happen. I have seen hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent on using contractors to turn over vacant units that we could have done ourselves. That kind of overspending is the reason that we are low on funds now. I know there is a difference between capital funds and operations but in the past it was done. We just want to work with the present administration and get it done. We have faith in the agency under Mr. Slaughter's leadership and we are just asking for the opportunity to submit creative ideas and make it happen.

[Karen Bracey- Trumbull Gardens] I have a problem with Administration, it's always about administration, but it's about us residents. I agree with one of the employees that said it starts at the top. We continuously tell Administration that we need more maintenance workers and yet nothing gets done. But yet is still an Asset Manager gets hired and now we hear that you are looking to hire an Assistant Asset Manager. If the Director of Asset Management that you hired is not doing the job. Then heck get rid of her and hire someone else. I just don't understand this, you are asking us as residents to hold on, be together. Why?? You are not doing anything or Ms. Gottlieb who thinks we should have quality instead of quantity.

[Commissioner Garcia] Did we hire someone for Assistant Director of Asset Management?

[James Slaughter] No.

[Boka Benson] We are in a serious situation and we need to solve this problem. We are talking about the recovery plan. Most of us don't know what the recovery plan is. A lot of us have ideas, which we can interject with this plan. Instead of management putting a monopoly of ideas together why not involve all employees and the field. This way everyone is familiar with the recovery agreement.

[Erick Vazquez] If you look around there are approximately 30 maintenance workers in the room to take care of how many units. We can't do the work by ourselves and be expected to work miracles. I signed off to be a maintenance mechanic and not a magician. We cannot keep up with the high demand of work. I keep hearing that we need to do this and that, but at the end of the day, nothing is happening. I feel like we are just meeting and hearing the same things over and over. When I first started working here, the whole room used to be filled with employees. And now the room is not even half full and you want to tell us to work together, if you don't you are going to bring contractors in. I feel like you are using scare tactics. And if you really think about it we already have contractors that do most of the work. And when we ask for help, you guys say we don't have the money, yet you are paying contractors. An apartment that we can do for \$5,000 you ask a contractor to do for \$25,000. And we still have to go behind the contractors and finish the work. If the money is disappearing, then where is it going?

On top of everything else, you have taken the manpower, you have taken our overtime before you know it, you will be taking our benefits away. What's next??

[Commissioner Garcia] Can I take this maintenance staff to New Haven? Because in New Haven everything is about contractors. And other agencies, everything is about contractors. You guys said you don't want contractors and that you want to do the work, will if that is the case, we need to look into giving overtime. At the end to the day, we have to complete those vacancies so that we can get subsidies. A lot of work has to get done, so I am going to recommend here that we go back to overtime to get a lot of this work done. I appreciate your input on this. That's what I am looking at, that's why I want to see. If you are showing me that you are hungry then I am going to do what I can to help you to succeed and get what you need. Alex I appreciate what you said as well. I like what Boka brought up about establishing a team to put ideas together.

[Alex Guzman] For overtime purposes, we were turning over units in the past and the capital funds are being dumped into contractors that are not from Bridgeport and they do a lousy job. We have expressed this over and over, and but nothing is happening.

[Commissioner Garcia] I am going to recommend that we look into this.

[Bettie Cook] This is what I was saying at the last two board meeting that we need to hire more maintenance people. Now when the contractors come in our maintenance guys still have to come into the units to do additional repairs, ask me because I am nose! I call Hadassah and tell her what's going on.

[James Slaughter] When I became the IED we were down to 83 people on the staff. We added on the janitors that were previously working as Temps. We have been working with both the assistant managers and 2311. We are going to have them take the maintenance test which is a written and a work test. We are trying to work with staff and get together periodically. The seven day work week was done by previous administration and we all realize that this is not working. We have to have further discussion this matter to.

[Dean Stevenson] We have already had several discussions and meetings already. It's taking too long.

[James Slaughter] We are ready to put a lot of things on the table. All three Unions need to agree on this.

The seven day work we had been put in place a long time ago and we are not getting anywhere with it. At Greene Homes and Trumbull janitors work half a day. I gave you and Darlene calculations on how much it would cost to go back to the Five Day Work Week. It would cost \$125,000 to go back to the regular work week. We are losing manpower with the seven-day work week. We need to go back to the five-day work week and return the use of trucks. We lost over 20 maintenance men, where's the funding for those guys? (Spreadsheet provided)

[Commissioner Garcia] It's been noted. I am going to look into it. Let's move on because we don't want to be here all day.

[Denese Taylor Moye] Some of the guys are not getting the work orders in a timely fashion, so that work is not getting done, especially on the weekends. So, I am sitting here and I understand everything going on, especially what the employees have to go through. That should have been your first meeting should have been with your employees. To find out what their needs were.

[Commissioner Nightingale] Denese we have to move on.

I will move on when I finish saying this. As a resident, I shouldn't be hearing this.

[Commissioner Garcia] We have to move on. We have already heard quite a bit. We still have a lot left on the Agenda before we end this meeting today.

[James Slaughter] Not only are we a troubled Agency, we are under "0" threshold. Which means every single bill, payroll has to be submitted and approved by HUD. Sometime the turnaround is quick sometimes it's not. All expenses, salary has to be approved by HUD. Sometimes we pay our HAP to landlords and contractors late because of this. Until we get out of the Troubled status they hold the cards. But everyone need to understand the process.

[Seon Bagot] I think that most of you have heard of have knowledge of the Recovery Agreement. Several years ago the PHA entered into an Agreement with HUD. The Agreement outlined all of the goals we need to accomplish as a Troubled Agency. By statue the PHA has two years to be compliant. And HUD is looking to see that we are making progress in certain areas. There areas that we need to make progress in are Finance, Safety and Security, Occupancy, TAR's and rent. Healthcare that we have right now maybe changed and we have to save money. Our goal is to pay less and at the same time get good healthcare. We are spending a lot of money on healthcare. The goal is to do better as a PHA and get out of Troubled Status.

[Dave Ghio] PowerPoint Presentation on Boston Commons

[James Slaughter] PowerPoint Presentation on Capital Projects

Meeting Adjourned 4:45 p.m.

