

**NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

September 30, 2021

MINUTES

ROLL CALL TO CONVENE THE MEETINGS

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Chair Reg Foster
Vice-Chair Eleanor Evans
Treasurer Ed Scheideler
Commissioner Penny Kirk
Commissioner Janice Bennett

NHA STAFF PRESENT:

Angie Medeiros, Executive Director
Deb Tambeau, Resident Services Coordinator

GUESTS: Jessica Reese, President of the Cooks Bridge Tenant's Association (CBTA)
Janice Bennett, Commissioner, and Treasurer of CBTA
Richard Dey, Resident, Seabed's Way

Chair Foster called the second part of the Needham Housing Authority Special Board meeting to order at 5:02 pm. Chair Foster rolled called the Commissioners and declared a quorum. He stated that adequate notice of this meeting had been provided by the Secretary of the Needham Housing Authority (NHA) by preparing a Public Notice dated September 14, 2021, setting forth the date, time, and place of this meeting. Said notice was filed with the Clerk of the Town of Needham and provided to persons requesting it. He stated that the session is being recorded and conducted via Zoom per Open Meeting Law.

Chair Foster stated that Angie Medeiros is attending the meeting but cannot join by video because of a family emergency, but can listen in. Chair Foster noted that Deb Tambeau is present at this meeting. Chair Foster also recognized the following guest: Jessica Reese and Richard Day.

AGENDA

Cooks Bridge After-School Program Reboot -- Discussion & Next Steps

Item #4 Review/Discussion of Questions/Issues (current and any new)

Item #5 Next Steps

Chair Foster began with Item #4 and reviewed the September 29, 2021, meeting. He stated that Angie Medeiros ended the September 29 meeting by noting that she would like the Commissioners to consider offsite office space for Needham Housing Authority (NHA) staff. He added that the four-bedroom unit at

#42 Captain Robert Cook Drive (CRCD) that is currently offline and is used as a community room be brought back online and offered to one of the 22 families currently on the waiting list.

Commissioner Scheideler stated that he looked at family housing vacancies for both CRCD and High Rock in June. There were five vacancies in June, six in July, 12 in August, and six in September. He stated that he failed to see the rush to put unit #42 CRCD back online. He noted that the NHA office is currently occupying what was originally the community room for families at CRCD. He added that if the office were to move offsite, that space could be restored to families, and #42 CRCD could be offered to a family on the four-bedroom waitlist.

Commissioner Bennett stated that High Rock is currently clearing space for an afterschool program and community room. She added that if #42 CRCD is put back online, the community at Captain Robert Cook Drive would be without space for the current programming. She added that the alternative would be for NHA to move offsite.

Chair Foster stated that he is not against the NHA office staff moving offsite. Chair Foster asked the Commissioners to think about the pros and cons of having a four-bedroom unit offline. He noted that more than 20 families are on the waitlist for a four-bedroom unit and reminded the Commissioners of the NHA mission statement to provide affordable housing to families in need.

Commissioner Bennett responded that a four-bedroom unit could house four or five children but that a community room could provide more children with over 10 or 15 years of an opportunity to go to college. She added that the community room at Seabed's way is not an option, it is not set up for families and is not an adequate alternative.

Commissioner Scheideler noted that if the NHA staff should move out of the building they are in and return that building to the families of Captain Robert Cook Drive to use as their community room, the problem would be solved. Chair Foster noted that there is space around Needham for rent. Commissioner Bennett pointed out that Ms. Medeiros mentioned moving the NHA office to another location within the Town in a previous conversation.

Commissioner Kirk stated that she is not against moving the Captain Robert Cook Drive community room into the current NHA office space. However, she added that the NHA office space would need to be reconstructed and reconfigured to accommodate the needs of the families and for programming.

Vice-Chair Evans expressed that she hadn't realized until recently that the NHA office was formally the community room for the families of Captain Robert Cook Drive. She added that it makes sense to move the NHA office offsite. She also added that she assumes there are no requirements that the NHA office be on the Captain Robert Cook Drive property. Chair Foster noted that there is also a budgetary concern in terms of leasing space.

Chair Foster invited Jessica Reese to weigh in. Ms. Reese stated that she agrees with the Commissioners. She added that she would not want to take housing away from anyone. Ms. Reese also noted that the NHA office would need to be reconstructed and reconfigured to accommodate the community's needs. Chair Foster agreed with Ms. Reese's sentiments and recounted the history of the space when he first came on board as a commissioner. Commissioner Bennett pointed out that the area used to house a daycare.

Chair Foster asked Deb Tambeau to weigh in. Ms. Tambeau stated that returning the NHA office space to the community and putting unit #42 CRCD back online makes sense. Chair Foster responded that giving the office space back to the community and putting #42 CRCD back online would be a win-win situation but that some research would need to be done. He added that finding suitable office space should be relatively quick and obtaining a rough idea of costs is needed as well. Ms. Medeiros stated that she has been looking for space around Needham. She also stated that the community should have their own

community room, and she should be able to house a family that needs housing. Ms. Medeiros also agreed with Chair Foster that the space should be reconfigured to suit the community's needs and programming.

Vice-Chair Evans suggested that housing authority office space be added to the modernization plans on the NHA property if it is more cost-effective than renting. Chair Foster stated that he agrees completely. He went on to describe how that would fit into the plans.

Chair Foster invited Richard Dey to weigh in. Mr. Dey stated that residents at Seabed's Way are handicap in one way or another. He stated that we are in wheelchairs, and use walkers, we have impaired hearing and impaired vision, we have various mental illnesses, we have language barriers, and many use the parking lot to walk around and to smoke. He added that when children are their riding their bikes they are hazards to the residents and to drivers or when they are using the community room for birthday parties, they are loud and running all over the place. He stated that the idea of using the Seabed's Way community room for a daycare or birthday parties is not empathic to the needs of the community at Seabed's Way.

Chair Foster brought up the issue of licensure and yielded the floor to Vice-Chair Evans to summarize what she uncovered about licensure. Vice-Chair Evans stated that the Mass Dept. of Early Education and Care (EEC) licenses childcare programs, and there are many detailed license requirements if one is subject to licensure. She stated that there are a number of criteria that a program can fall under to be exempt from licensing. She added that to be exempt from licensing, the entity has to apply, and EEC has to approve their request. Vice-Chair Evans described programs that would meet the exempt qualifications. She stated that a drop-in program would be suitable to the Captain Robert Cook Drive community.

Commissioner Kirk stated that she has also been in touch with the EEC and spoke with Megan Meehan. Commissioner Kirk mentioned that a copy of an exemption that was filed thirteen years ago might be on file in the NHA office. She added that if she is able to find the document, it would be an easier route than applying for licensure. If the exemption is not found, then the next step would be to reapply. Commissioner Kirk explained that reapplying is an arduous process but could be done. A general discussion followed on background checks and specific policies that would need to be in place to keep children safe. Vice-Chair Evans stated that she has a contact at EEC that she could reach out to who could provide further guidance. Chair Foster noted that he would be in favor of Vice-Chair Evans cross-checking this with a senior person at EEC. He stated that he is looking to call programming enrichment rather than after-care programming. He added that he appreciates the stories from Commissioner Bennett and Ms. Reese on the benefit to children from afterschool programming. He stated that it makes a lot of sense to him that children of families that qualify for housing need programs such as Head Start and other programs to make up for things that parents are not able to provide or do not have the time to provide.

Chair Foster referred to the primary mission of the NHA and the enabling legislation for the creation of housing authorities. He went on to talk about the idea of bringing in a third party to provide the services relative to an afterschool or enrichment program. He asked the Board for their opinion on this concept.

Commissioner Bennett asked what would happen to the tutors and their work-study program? She stated that we already have tutors in place. Chair Foster noted that he would like the Commissioners to consider another option should licensing become a blocking factor.

Commissioner Scheideler read a portion of the NHA mission statement which includes the following, "...To also include offering program and resources to improve the quality of life of residents, program participant, and the broader Needham community." He also referred to the HUD policy section 964, paragraph 12, "The HUD policy on the Tenant Opportunities Program. HUD promotes Tenant Opportunities Programs to support activities to enable residents to improve the quality of life and resident satisfaction and obtain other social and economic benefits for residents and their families. Tenant Opportunities Programs are proven to be effective in facilitating economic uplift as well as improving overall conditions of housing communities." Commissioner Scheideler stated that financial assistance in the form of technical assistance grants is available to prepare and manage activities in public housing

developments. He added that there are other opportunities to try to find assistance in the form of grants. He stated that if the NHA were to use a third party, it would be paying a substantial amount of money for them to manage programming instead of using in-house costs that are very manageable. He stated that there had been volunteers that have raised a considerable amount of money for the programming that has taken place, noting that there has been minimal dollar cost to the NHA. Commissioner Scheideler stated that he senses a great effort to kill the afterschool program that many of us want, which is terribly unfortunate. Chair Foster stated that an effort to kill the program is not coming from him and that he wants to understand all the issues. Chair Foster indicated that he is trying to get to a point where something can be done. A discussion followed on examples of why a third-party solution should be considered. Commissioner Scheideler stated that he would always favor doing in-house if it can be done, which should be examined first before going to a third-party option. Commissioner Kirk stated that when an in-house program works, it would be encumbered upon us to develop it and support it.

Vice-Chair Evans stated that she is in favor of looking at all options. She added that she is not outright opposed to looking at a third party. She noted that Commissioner Kirk has a background in early childhood education and setting up childcare programs and volunteers is something that she can oversee. She added that she wouldn't suggest bringing in a third-party because we can, but rather to look at running the program based on the previous model as well as consideration of a third-party model.

Ms. Reese stated that to stay in-house, even just to start, for cost reasons would be a good idea. She asked if programming could take place under an umbrella licensure from a third-party, but it would be our own program run by our parents? Chair Foster responded that when he checked in with the Needham Extended Day Program (NEDP), a parent-run program, he was told that they also had to obtain EEC licensure and that it was an arduous process to get and to renew. He stated that NEDP also has to receive approval from Needham Public Schools to run their programs by putting out an RFP every three years. Chair Foster stated that the Director of NEDP would welcome the opportunity to speak with the Board if they have any questions. He stated that NEDP receives vouchers from the stated as well as \$60K in scholarship revenue as a result of fundraising that has taken place over the years. He added that there are five or more NHA families that are using their program this year.

Commissioner Scheideler noted that there are two rates for the NEDP. One is for \$570/per month, and the other is \$540/per month. He stated that the \$540/per month covers older children, and \$570/per month covers kindergarten and first grade. He also pointed out annual costs and transportation costs that would apply to NEDP versus using an in-house program, adding that the cost of NEDP would be totally prohibitive. Chair Foster stated that the Executive Director of NEDP mentioned that it is not an issue for low-income families to want to use their program. Commissioner Scheideler suggested that Chair Foster ask if 10 or 11 NHA families wanted to use the program would NEDP be able to provide that much support. Chair Foster stated NEDP gives out \$60K in scholarships in addition to vouchers. There are approximately 80 children in each of the Needham elementary schools using the services of NEDP and many of them, including NHA families, receive vouchers and or scholarships.

Chair Foster turned the conversation to parent support. He commended Ms. Reese on the work she did in obtaining parent surveys. He added that he would encourage getting more parents to respond to the surveys. Ms. Reese stated that three families have high school students she didn't speak with them regarding the program. She also stated that a lot of the older kids are first and second-year college students. She stated that she could definitely get more information on high school students but that most of the participants will be younger.

Chair Foster stated that he loves the idea that was brought up at the beginning of this meeting about the NHA office space being restored to a community room for the families of Captain Robert Cook Drive. He added that it is a win-win no matter what. He stated that he would like to propose as a next step that the NHA staff weigh in on what lease/rent options would look like as well as to think about any issues we haven't considered in terms of the office being offsite.

Chair Foster stated that a critical next step would be getting more information on the license exemption, which will hugely influence the direction. He stated that doing a nuance survey based on the discussion that has taken place over the past two meetings, September 29 and 30, to see if we can't get a better sense of what nearly all the parents would be looking for. Chair Foster stated that one of the things he heard from the meeting yesterday was that the parents don't want the NHA and the school system to do anything. He stated that this tells him that we should not be doing anything, and he is not entirely sure of what that statement really means. He stated that getting more and better information in this area is essential.

Commissioner Scheideler stated that the statement that parents do not want the NHA involved is not an accurate statement. He stated that there is a tremendous distrust among the residents for the office. He stated that the real meaning of that statement is not that they don't want programming on the premises, they don't want the office involved. He stated that an indication of the level of distrust from the residents to the NHA office is when many residents are required to go to the office, they take someone with them to be a witness because they don't trust what happens in that office. He added that this is a fundamental distinction to make that we are not saying that the parents don't want an afterschool program they don't want the office involved. Chair Foster stated that based on the proposals that were received yesterday, it is his understanding that parents want a parent run program where space is provided for them and they want to be left alone to do their own thing.

Commissioner Kirk read aloud a written statement relative to Deb Tambeau's interpretation of damage in the CRCD community room was not correct and that if she would like to report back to her Commissioner Kirk would be glad to listen.

Chair Foster asked the Commissioners if they had any next steps besides the ones he summarized. Commissioner Kirk stated that she liked his summary of next steps. She also stated that at some point, we would need to consider if we are going to start this program or not. She added that it is clear to her that the program should be restarted.

Commissioner Bennett stated that next steps should include finding out quickly about the licensure. She added that she thinks we will be okay if Commissioner Kirk can find the exemption certificate.

Commissioner Scheideler stated that he would like to set a date for the next meeting and make it a special meeting devoted to the afterschool program again.

Chair Foster stated that he would like to see how fast Vice-Chair Evans can get the information about the licensing, and the staff can get information about lease/rental options as well as costs. He added that this would be a good time to build this in the budget cycle with the upcoming budget meeting. He stated that it is a win-win situation to use the office as community room space and putting unit #42 CRCD back online. Chairman Foster stated that there are four next steps: move the NHA office off site; follow-up on the EEC licensure requirements, obtain more parent information if possible, and schedule another special meeting on the afterschool program.

Commissioner Bennett noted that there are two or three vacant 3 bedroom apartments that could produce an additional six or eight children that could possible participant in afterschool programming.

Chair Foster stated that he looks forward to getting more information on the three next step action items as soon as possible. Chair Foster adjourned the Needham Housing Authority Special Meeting at 6:40pm.

Minutes Prepared by

Cheryl Gosmon

