

**MINUTES: HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE TOWN OF NEWTON, NJ
February 12, 2018**

“In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice of this public meeting was given to the newspaper of record and posted on the official bulletin Board on December 28, 2017.”

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Commissioners for the Newton Housing Authority was held on Monday, February 12, 2018 in the Community Room at Liberty Towers. The meeting was called to order by Secretary Iozzi at 5:35pm and roll call was taken. Chairman Nannery, Commissioner Capinjola (Excused), Cmsr. Leonardo, Cmsr. Fiedorczyk (absent), Cmsr. Jack Durkin (Excused), Cmsr. Vrahnos and Cmsr. Bitondo. Also present was Executive Director, Kimberly Iozzi, PhD.

Minutes of the December 11, 2017 regular monthly meeting were reviewed. Minutes could not be voted on because there were not enough qualified votes.

Bills for the period 12/1/17-12/31/17; \$59,504.73 for normal operating. Motion made by Cmsr. Leonardo; seconded by Cmsr. Vrahnos to approve payment of bills. Motion approved. Bills for the period of 12/30/17-2/2/18 were reviewed. \$70,931.22 normal operating. Motion made by Cmsr. Vrahnos; seconded by Cmsr. Nannery. Motion approved.

Communications:

Treasurer’s Report: Account balances as of 12/31/17: general ledger balance \$2,263.95; tenant security/escrow \$54,521.83; and \$64,508.40 NJ Cash Management Fund; NHA Post Employee Benefit Cost, \$47,588.63 Motion made by Cmsr. Nannery; seconded by Cmsr. Leonardo to accept the Treasurer’s report. Motion approved. Account balances as of 1/31/18: general ledger balance \$12,697.28; tenant security/escrow \$54,718.29; and \$64,506.21 NJ Cash Management Fund; NHA Post Employee Benefit Cost, \$47,588.63 Motion made by Cmsr. Leonardo; seconded by Cmsr. Nannery to accept the Treasurer’s report. Motion approved.

Secretary’s Report/ Old Business:

RESIDENTS: The rent re-certification process began last month.

BUILDING/GROUNDS: A new dumpster was ordered and placed at the rear of the building for regular household trash. The recycling dumpster was moved next to the new dumpster. Pickup has been changed to once a week, as a result of having a larger dumpster. We no longer have the cost of two people to move dumpsters to and from the building, sanitize the dumpsters and room, or the cost of routine and emergency repairs. Not only has this helped our operating budget, it will reduce our liability for insurance purposes. Residents who are unable to take out their own trash have reached out to friends within the building or their caregivers for assistance. The office has only received 2 formal complaints from residents who indicated they are unable to take their own trash out and have not made arrangements to have it taken out for them. A handful did complain that it was too cold to go outside to remove their trash during the snow and ice storms. We urged them to wait until the snow stopped and the ice treated before venturing outside. There have been two incidents when the snow removal company did not remove snow from the top of the lids. This was addressed with the company after we learned of the problem.

Several walls and doors have been repaired as the result of scooters and shopping carts banging into them. Shopping carts that I had secured in 2003 or 2004 were left on the front porch to assist tenants with groceries, but the carts are too hard to maneuver through the glass doors without banging the walls or doors. Residents do not put them back properly and instead, leave them to roll into the front windows when they are done. They use the carts to push open the doors. They scratch the floors and track salt throughout the building, causing additional cleaning and repairs. Cmsr. Leonardo asked for them to be returned or that we look for new wheels

for them. However, that still won't prevent them from banging into the walls and doors. Most residents have purchased their own carts. Those with large shopping orders have requested the use of our flat carts. Two plastic carts have been left in the community room for tenant use so that they do not have to struggle moving the carts through the front entrance.

The Newton Housing Authority survived record-breaking temperatures. Taking a proactive approach to the pending weather, I purchased as many space heaters as I could find and issued them to tenants who did not have any. I provided extra units in the community room to create a warming station for tenants in lieu of relocating to the firehouse if they were cold. The Office of Emergency Management Officer and fire marshal inspected the building to determine the safety of our approach and to verify that we did everything in our power to stay warm. We took temperatures in every apartment to determine whether, in fact, no heat calls were legitimate. Many "no heat" calls turned out to be heat of 67 degrees. So, in fact, we had heat, just not enough. One tenant had an exhaust fan in their window, while two others had window air conditioners in, both complaining to be cold. Fire department personnel took out one air conditioner. The other was wrapped. The boilers ran at 100% capacity until one blower blew itself out. Still, the other boiler remained functioning throughout. Tenants were reminded to dress warmly, while most continued to dress as normal. They were reminded to pull curtains and blinds to retain heat, as the windows are not well-insulated.

The same tenant with the fan in their window uses the public men's room as his primary restroom. Unfortunately, the tenant routinely has issues with his ability to utilize the restroom in a sanitary way and defecated from the bathroom all the way to the elevator. Another tenant cleaned it up, as we had just put the new flooring in. This incident is one of many that have taken place in both the men and women's rooms. We have had to clean feces off the walls, floor, sink and door handles. Unless food is being served by the housing authority, resident association or other group that rents the private room, public restrooms are not required in the building. In response to the continued abuse, the bathrooms were locked after coffee, meetings and when the public is invited in for a community event, such as Zumba. In addition to Cmsr. Leonardo, two tenants complained; one because she drove for an hour and a half and couldn't make it to her apartment and urinated in her pants. The other didn't realize that it would be unlocked during coffee and recanted the complaint. Shortly after the doors were locked, a small group of tenants began to gather in the community room and expressed that they didn't feel they should have to go to their apartments. On their behalf, Cmsr. Leonardo asked that they be reopened. We did. However, going forward, the attorney will work with the NHA to charge tenants with disorderly conduct and move toward eviction for the offense. Both men and women have damaged the restrooms in the past. Irrefutable proof has to exist in order to move to evict. Since the doors have been unlocked, there have been no messes.

Unfortunately, one of the people suspected of abusing the restrooms has been seen washing soiled clothing in the laundry room. The tenants are livid. While I asked him to rinse his soiled clothing before using our machines, our attorney indicated the law does not allow me to prohibit him from doing his laundry on site, unless I also prohibit everyone else that is incontinent, which on so many levels, is inappropriate and illegal.

The annual apartment inspection took place on January 31st. Subsequent work orders are being grouped by specialty and will begin this month. Tenant charges will apply for those items that are beyond normal wear.

We have received numerous complaints about an abandoned vehicle on our property. It belongs to the primary caregiver of one of our tenants. He is a registered sex offender and he was arrested offsite. Since he has been identified as the primary caregiver, he has not trespassed. We have worked with the police and family to have the vehicle removed. If it is not towed beforehand by family, the police will notify him that he is to get it off our premises immediately following his release. If the Housing Authority tows it, we may be responsible for storage costs and any subsequent loss incurred.

ADMINISTRATION: A meeting was held with Morris County Housing Authority to determine the feasibility of partnering for rent calculations and accounts payable/receivable. Due to vacation schedules, we were unable to reconnect for training purposes until mid-month, which put us in the middle of re-certifications for the 2nd

floor. As a result of the timeframe, I asked that we continue to look at the matter with the intent of taking some action after re-certifications are complete.

I contacted Mr. Thomas S. Russo, Jr., Town Manager, Mayor Wayne Levante and Deputy-Mayor Kevin Elvidge about the possibility of designating Liberty Towers as a senior center for the Town of Newton, whereby senior programs and services could be run from our facility on a regular and permanent basis. This partnership would depend on the ability to repair and expand our parking facility once the Town's drainage infrastructure is repaired. I also asked, again, if we could move forward to reinstate the shared service agreement for work done by the engineer and water department.

As per our insurance agent, we have been advised that the long-standing and HUD-encouraged practice of employing residents to perform light work does not supersede the inherent cost of potential claims and threats to tenant relations. We are vetting outside vendors for the work. So far, we are pleased with their performance. While we have 30 days to address any non-emergency work order requests, tenants are accustomed to having a response within 24 hours. We are grouping work orders by type and profession required.

While working to update our policies and procedures to align with current regulations, we are updating our lease and resident handbook. Several recommendations have been made and are ready for review and discussion before the board approves them. Once the amendments are made, the books will be reprinted and a mandatory meeting will be held with all residents that will be required to acknowledge receipt and acceptance of the new terms.

FINANCE: The Housing Authority has received operating subsidy for January and February. We were unable to payout accrued absences in December as a result of not having enough money left in our account to do so. As shown in the treasurer's report, we had less than \$3,000 in the bank at that time. With the collection of rent and subsidy, we have returned to a normal level of funding. Tenants will not be charged for heater usage in January. Cmsr. Leonardo questioned whether the Board previously authorized no heater charges for the 2nd floor apartments indefinitely. She was informed that we don't charge if we are unable to maintain heat for any apartment, regardless of location and that we would address it on an as needed basis.

PERSONNEL: There are no personnel matters at this time.

COMMISSIONER ITEMS: Cmsr. Rick Bitondo joined our board as the Governor's appointment. His term expires in January 2021.

NEW BUSINESS: The Board discussed streamlining administrative regulations for programs administered by Public Housing Agencies. Cmsr. Leonardo made a motion to approve streamlining provisions, seconded by Cmsr. Vrahnos. Motion approved. The Board reviewed the compensated absences accrued in 2017. Cmsr. Vrahnos made a motion to authorize payments; seconded by Cmsr. Nannery. Motion Approved. The Board discussed amendments to the Liberty Towers Handbook enforceable by the lease. The amendments are as follows: Tenants will be charged a per-incident lockout fee of \$20 or can purchase a lock box for a one-time fee of \$35. The original charges were \$10 and \$25 respectively. Cmsr. Leonardo suggested that all new tenants be required to purchase a box as part of their initial fees to the agency. Executive Director explained that some people would continue to be eligible for a reasonable accommodation. The other amendments include the following: Toilet clog charges will be billed to the tenant if clogs are the result of negligence (excessive paper, diapers and wipes). If a tenant has work they would like done in their apartment that is not covered by the NHA, they can request a contractor for that purpose, as long as they are insured, licensed and registered to do business in New Jersey. Otherwise, our contractor can be used and the same charges will apply. (Examples, assembling furniture, hanging large pictures and mirrors, moving furniture in our out, etc...) Next, all work order requests must be written. Finally, if a resident puts in a request for a work order and is given a date of the contractor's arrival, the resident needs to be home or make arrangements for someone to be home when a contractor is called. If a tenant refuses to provide the contractor access to the apartment, the tenant will be

responsible to pay the contractor's callout fee. Access to the apartments must be granted in the event of an emergency, including bleeding valves. Failure to provide access during an emergency is a violation of the lease. Motion made by Cmsr. Vrahnos to approve the amendments; seconded by Cmsr. Leonardo. Motion approved. Cmsr. Vrahnos had two issues for new business. The first is that Sussex vocational School needed clear direction about what project we'd like them to work on. It was determined that building a cornice was a suitable project. The Verizon antenna on our roof is a voice only antenna and is obsolete. Cmsr. Vrahnos went on to explain that Verizon plans to build a new one on the Merriam Ave School and therefore, our rent will discontinue, resulting in a loss of approximately \$24,000 per year.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC "At this point in the meeting, the Board of Commissioners welcomes comments from any member of the public on any topic. To help facilitate an orderly meeting and to permit the opportunity for anyone who wishes to be heard, speakers are asked to limit their comments to 5 minutes. If reading from a prepared statement, please provide a copy and email a copy to the Main Office of the Newton Housing Authority after making your comments so it may be properly reflected in the minutes. Josephine Sorin, Apt. 5G reiterated the difficulty in bringing trash outside to the dumpster and asked if we could have our janitorial contractor take trash out twice a week. Director Iozzi explained that the contract and insurance for the work would not cover that and explained that our tenants routinely deposit needles and medical waste into the trash and even when trying to put trash containers closer to the building, that tenants, some that were in attendance at the meeting, disregarded the signs and threw recycling in the trash, left bags open, did not rinse cans, etc... Director Iozzi explained that all of the other apartment buildings in Newton have dumpsters and that residents find a way to take out their own trash. Cmsr. Leonardo asked how many had a trash chute within it. The only one may be Brookside Terrace. However, Director Iozzi drew attention to the fact that over the years, we have tried everything to make the tenants comply with the rules and time and time again, they broke the machine and nearly caused fires as a result of their negligence. Director Iozzi then asked how Mrs. Sorin removed trash from her apartment before she lived at Liberty Towers and she indicated a friend. Director Iozzi suggested that the tenants rely on caregivers, family and friends and stressed the need to act like a community and support one another. Resident Tenzer, Apt. 2K, explained that there is a lip on the one dumpster that makes it easy to open, but not the other. Cmsr. Leonardo explained that we will continue looking for alternatives. Cmsr. Leonardo asked that the shopping carts will be put back out front or if they should stay in the community room. She also recommended having some type of cushion or padding put on them so they didn't do as much damage. Director Iozzi explained that once the location of the bus pick-up was decided, that the carts may be relocated accordingly. Resident, Anne Wills, Apt. 5N, asked if there could be a payment plan for the lockboxes because people don't have extra money. Director Iozzi agreed. Mrs. Sorin, Apt. 5G addressed the Board again reiterating her concerns about the public restrooms and laundry room and wanted to ban one tenant from the use of both. Director Iozzi explained that it is not appropriate or legal to ban a single tenant from using the laundry because of known-incontinence or everyone that is incontinent from using the facilities should be banned and that is not feasible at a senior building. Most of the discussion that followed was an expression of the tenants' frustration with one tenant. Several questions and comments were about one tenant and their rights versus the rights of the residency. Director Iozzi explained that what they were asking was legal in nature and could not or would not be able to address it with them at that time.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, Motion was made by Cmsr. Vrahnos; seconded by Cmsr. Leonardo. Motion approved, meeting adjourned at 7:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Iozzi, PhD, Secretary to the Board