

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JULY 15, 2020

1. Roll Call

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Vermont State Housing Authority, held via ZOOM, was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Chair Caprice Hover; and upon roll call, the following Commissioners were present: Mary Miller, Vice Chair; Caryn Feinberg, Alex Farrell and Jo Ann Troiano by ZOOM phone. Cory Richardson was absent.

Staff personnel present: Richard Williams, Secretary/Executive Director; Kathleen Berk, Director of Housing Program Administration; Kelly Pembroke, Director of Finance and Information Systems; Arlene Shorten-Goodrich, Director of Human Resources and Administration; Susan Kuegel, Director of Property and Asset Management; Tyson Leno, Director of Maintenance; Tyler Maas, Program Director, ADU program; and Bethany Lunn, Intake Coordinator.

2. Meeting Agenda

There were no changes to the Agenda.

3. Public Participation

Nathan Schmechel, Federation Chair.

4. Minutes – Regular Meeting – May 27, 2020

Minutes were moved by Troiano, seconded by Miller. Hover called for any changes and there being none, called for a vote and all voted in favor.

5. Secretary's Report - June/July, 2020

Williams mentioned that the Governor has extended the emergency order to August 15th. Eviction moratoriums will extend until September 15th. This means that landlords cannot evict someone for non-payment of rent until 30 days after the emergency order has lifted. The earliest the eviction process could start is September 15th. Executive Orders could extend until Labor Day which would push evictions until October.

Federal moratoriums expire at the end of July. There are talks of extending that as well. There is a House Bill to extend that until March 2021 before you can evict someone from a Federal Housing Program for non-payment of rent. Williams stated that we are watching what the country is doing along with Vermont's actions.

Williams provided a brief description/update on the Rental Housing Stabilization Program that VSHA is administering. The program went live on July 13th and in the first hour of the day, we received 75 applications, and by 4:00 p.m. we had 400-500 applications.

The first day all three call center lines were busy but by the second day things quieted down a bit. As of July 14th, we had received 900-1000 applications, a combination from tenants and landlords. We will have to match up the tenant application with the landlord application.

The Rental Housing Stabilization Program has been a focus of our agency. This is an office-wide program that VSHA is doing for the State of Vermont. All staff is on deck to help with this process. The call center lines are open Monday-Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. We will adjust the hours depending on the call volume. The first day was a 2 ½ million-dollar day; however, the applications are not finalized. It is too early to tell if we will have enough money.

Governor Scott's Administration put forth a 42 million-dollar program. Vermont Legal Aid and Vermont Landlords Association proposed a 50 million-dollar program. In the final

hours of the Legislature, there was a change of 30 million to 25 million for VSHA for the Rental Housing Stabilization Program and 5 million was given to Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) for Mortgage Relief Program.

The Legislature comes back August 25th. We will be making reports back to the Legislature. They will want to know if we are going to spend the money given or if we will need more.

We are working closely with Vermont Legal Aid and Vermont Landlords Association and making referrals to both organizations to either assist tenants or to assist the landlords. Vermont Legal Aid has agreed to assist any renter not just low-income; and Vermont Landlords Association will assist any landlord, not just their members.

Locally, we have been working closely with our Congressional representatives - Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders, and Representative Welch on fully funding the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. If the program could be fully funded, we could have 500 more additional vouchers.

Hoover inquired if vendor rental payments were still being honored during COVID-19. It is under our understanding that the payments are still being made.

There being no further updates or discussion, Hoover called for a motion. Miller moved the Secretary Report, Feinberg seconded, and all voted in favor.

6. Financial Report – June 30, 2020

Pembroke mentioned that there are not many changes from the April Financials to those she sent from June 30th. She was hoping to have a budget for this meeting but that will have to wait until September.

Concerning the special allocation of CARES administrative funding, there is still no further guidance.

Salaries are under budget due to several vacant positions, no overtime, and no temporary employees. We might see a bit of a change in the next few months as we have people working overtime for the Rental Housing Stabilization Program and we have called in some temporary help as well.

Administration category is down as we have more people working from home. We have less traveling and no trainings.

Office Facility category included an additional \$5,000 a month to have the building cleaned a few times a day and sanitized, so cost went up in that area. This additional cleaning and sanitizing have now stopped.

Benefits are under budget as no doctors were open so people could not use their Health Reimbursement Accounts. Now that doctors are opening back up, we anticipate that will increase.

General expenses are over our annual budget due to new Software, COVID-19 related expenses and the Rental Housing startup cost.

We are over budget in Equipment due to purchasing two new copiers. We are also anticipating this will increase as we purchased furniture and equipment for VSHA to follow the social distancing guidelines in the office. All building projects, such as bathroom renovations and painting have been placed on hold.

Troiano inquired if we were keeping track of the COVID-19 administrative costs separately. Pembroke stated that we were.

Hoover called for a motion to accept the Financial Report through June 30, 2020. There being further discussion Troiano moved; Miller seconded, and all voted in favor.

7. Housing Program Administration

Berk had one action item to present to the Board for consideration – Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Preference for Homeless Families Impacted by COVID-19.

Berk is requesting a modification to the Homeless preference that is currently part of our Administrative Plan. She would like to use Mainstream Vouchers for homeless families impacted by COVID-19. There are 74 or so to be allocated.

There have been conversations with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) and the Agency of Human Services (AHS) for a partnership to use vouchers in motels and hotels. Berk stated that vouchers are for permanent housing, not transitional month-to-month but for a 12-month lease.

Williams mentioned that VHCB received 32 million dollars, 26 million for new housing and 16 million to upgrade shelters.

Berk and Williams are meeting with VHCB, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and VHFA later today.

Hover asked for further questions/discussion, there being none, called for a motion. Troiano moved the preference, Farrell seconded, and all voted in favor.

In other updates, regarding spending and leasing, Berk stated that the budget is tight, but they are doing a great job managing it.

Maas provided an update on the Rental Housing Stabilization Program. The program has been live for 2 ½ days. We have received a ton of questions and inquiries. This has been identified as a need in the communities, and this will be a successful program. Maas stated that there are a lot of partners on board. Next week there will be 1,000 plus applications to process and we have 10 days to respond back to people. Many of the applications are not complete. The call center staff is calling the people with incomplete applications back to give them further guidance. Once these applications are complete it will give us an idea of how much money will be spent.

July 31st the extra \$600 unemployment benefit ends, and we anticipate that the need in the Rental Housing Stabilization Program will go up in August.

There is a meeting scheduled with Office of Economic Opportunity on July 16th to discuss programs for first, last months and security deposits.

A lot of press has been reaching out, staff are pitching in and the office is somewhat stressful. Hover offered kudos to the staff.

In other projects, Maas has also taken over some projects that were unfinished when our Housing Development Specialist departed the office. Maas is working on the Colodny Building in White River Junction. This project is taking longer than anticipated, it should have been completed by now but is looking to be done by September. There is a site visit with the town and engineers on July 16th.

Another project is Deepwoods, working on a forestry management grant for the 84 acres.

The ADU program paused back in March. Maas stated that there were four projects that were supposed to start in April. Things are coming back on track. One project is complete, a second one is almost done and two are in the process. People are showing an interest in the program.

Lunn introduced herself to the Board and gave a brief update on her work in the Intake Department.

8. Property and Asset Management

Leno has been working on projects at Lauredon and Mobile Acres. Lauredon Phase I is almost complete.

Depot II has a water drainage issue. Bids have been received for this project but are over what they have planned. Leno stated that he is reaching out to other excavating companies to invite them to bid on the project.

Leno stated that there have been zero COVID issues at the properties. As things loosen up, we can get back into the buildings. All kinds of bids are coming in for outdoor parking lots, sealing, marking and for carpet replacements.

He has been visiting all VSHA properties and keeping his staff up with the general maintenance.

Leno stated that he plans on sitting down with the residents of senior housing before any projects are done to keep them informed and to get their input. He wants them to feel like they are part of the decision process.

He believes that by the end of summer all work will be caught up.

Kuegel said that all RD budgets have been submitted. She stated that a rent increase for Brightwood House has not been received. The money from Housing and Supportive Services (HASS) has been received.

She mentioned that her staff is helping with the Rental Housing Stabilization Program, mostly nights and weekends.

Kuegel mentioned that she is working on the applications from HFI regarding the Rental Housing Stabilization Program. She believes that there are around 160 applications.

9. Other Business

Shorten-Goodrich mentioned that originally, we wanted to bring a presentation to the Board on changes to the retirement plan but due to COVID-19, this was placed on hold. The hope for these changes would be for more transparency and reduced fees. Looking to discuss this at the meeting in September.

Williams briefly discussed the recent public records request and that we are working with our attorney on this issue. An extension for providing documents has been requested.

Schmechel inquired about the VSHA visioning plan. Hoover stated that she suggested a short survey with the staff to provide feedback to the Commissioners. The Board is working on the Vision Plan, determining what skills they have appreciated, what are the core values and principles and what is the broad future of VSHA. A meeting is scheduled for August 26th.

Hoover suggested that HFI come to the meeting in September.

At 12:15 p.m. Farrell motioned to enter Executive Session to discuss the contract with HFI in that premature general public knowledge would clearly place VSHA or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage (1 VSA 313 (1) (A)); motion seconded by Feinberg. All voted in favor.

All staff and public left the meeting except for Williams.

At 1:00 p.m., Farrell motioned to leave Executive Session, seconded by Feinberg; and all voted in favor.

No action was taken during Executive Session.

There being no further business, Hoover entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion made by Miller, seconded by Troiano and the Chair adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,


Richard M. Williams
Executive Director/Secretary

