

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY
OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE
AUGUST 17, 2020

The Commissioners of the Housing Authority of the City of Seattle (“Seattle Housing Authority” or “SHA”) met in Regular Session on August 17, 2020, via teleconference. Board Chair Paul Purcell called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. Kimberly Garrett performed a roll call for Board Commissioners in attendance. Commissioners present and absent were as follows:

Present: Paul Purcell, Chair
Michael Diaz
Robert Crutchfield
Twyla Minor
Debbie Thiele
Dr. Paula Houston, Vice-chair

Absent: Gerald Smiley

Public Comment

None

Consent Agenda

Commissioner Purcell presented the Consent Agenda, which included approval of minutes for the Regular Board Meeting of July 20, 2020 and, approval of the Expenditure Certification Report (Authorization to Pay Outstanding Obligations of Salaries and Claims for the Period of July 1 to July 31, 2020.)

Commissioner Crutchfield moved to approve the Consent Agenda and the motion was then seconded by Commissioner Minor. Hearing no questions or comments, Commissioner Purcell called for a vote. The Consent Agenda was approved unanimously among the members of the Board present at that time (5 yes; 0 no).

Regular Agenda

COVID-19 Recovery Planning: How are SHA Staff Doing?

Executive Director Andrew Lofton introduced the presentation to the Board which is intended to brief them on impacts to residents and staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and steps that are being taken and introduced to mitigate these instances. Human Resources Director Marc Nilsen reported out on how staff is holding up during the pandemic, the challenges and **hard work that they're** currently facing, and the processes and steps to aid staff to be able to work effectively. He feels that staff is forming a new level of teamwork during these difficult times in their attempts take it all on, and **he's** proud of their progress. In monitoring staff leave usage, he reported on absentee rates, detailed scripts and guidelines from King County Public Health (in accordance to when it is best for staff to stay home and what to do to mitigate exposure), and the creation of a federal leave program (i.e., paid emergency sick leave up to 80 hours, additional leave for child care needs.) to aid staff, when necessary. Childcare resources were a main focus in helping those staff with children to be able to work while ensuring proper care for their kids. This is an on-going effort in hosting forums with staff to check-in and make sure that they are getting the support needed.

Mr. Nilsen touched on SHA staff related COVID positive and negative cases, a difficult situation where HR will need to **reach out staff to trace the cases (with an 'abundance of caution')** in order to mitigate any potential exposure to others going forward. So far, there have been seven confirmed cases, with all but one person having recovered from the virus.

COVID-19 Recovery Planning: COVID Statistics for SHA Buildings

Housing Operations Director Rod Brandon reported out to the Board that Housing Operations has been tracking cases where people report that they, or their household members have tested positive for COVID-19 since March 2020, when tracking began. A tracking system was put in place to protect this data and the **residents' privacy**. SHA relies on residents to self-report their diagnosis, which is are likely to be an undercount. The numbers are fluid, things are moving fast, and numbers change on a day-to-day basis.

The 63 COVID-19 cases that were previously noted in meeting materials have now climbed to 75, with the highest number found at NewHolly, and we have lost five residents to date. Mr. Brandon gave a demographic breakdown, with numbers that show there is a

disproportionate COVID-19 impact for Black, Asian and Hispanic, those of whose diagnosis SHA was made aware of. SHA partnered with Neighborcare Health to offer testing to the Pinehurst Court after a number of residents tested positive and is working with Neighborcare Health and others to offer free testing at HOPE VI/Choice communities over the next month. Mr. Brandon gave kudos to Housing Ops staff, (Community Services, Property Management, Maintenance) and reported that strong allegiances have been formed with KC Public Health, as well. Wellness calls continue to be made to residents, with a special focus to Jefferson Terrace where a number of residents of the Respite Program tested positive, leading to efforts to test the residents of the entire building, testing being voluntary to residents.

First Steps in Recovery Effort: Resumption of Initial Inspections

Mr. Lofton introduced Rental Assistance Programs Director Alice Kimbowa gave the Board a brief background of this effort. At the end of March 2020, the HCV Department suspended all physical inspections. In lieu of physical inspections for new move-ins, self-certification inspections were implemented. No issues have been reported at this time. As part of the department's phased recovery plan, the HCV department recommenced conducting physical unit Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections on August 3, 2020.

In order to be able to suspend annual inspections, SHA used its MTW authority; this waiver does not apply to the Mod. Rehabilitation program. In the HCV phased recovery plan, initial inspections are prioritized because they were determined to pose minimal COVID-19 risk. If successful with the initial inspection process, Mod. Rehabilitation unit inspections will be phased in and projected to occur at the end of August.

The process for Requests for Tenancy Approvals (RFTA) remained the same. Once a RFTA packet is received, the inspector reaches out to the housing provider to schedule an inspection. Some of our housing provider partners may not be at a place to resume physical inspections due to the COVID-19 risk. In those cases where a physical inspection is not possible, the inspector will provide the option for a virtual inspection. As the last resort, if neither a physical inspection nor virtual inspection is a viable option, we will accept a self-certification inspection. Risk of conducting physical inspections of units remains a challenge, so protocols

have been put in place such as completion of a Pre-Inspection Questionnaire (prior to the inspection, to determine COVID-19 risk), standard Unit Entry Protocol for inspectors to follow consistently, as well a Post Inspection Protocol for inspectors to ensure inspector safety upon returning to field offices after inspections have occurred. As the COVID-19 situation remains on-going and ever-changing, inspection policies and practices may be adjusted further to help keep all our staff and participants as safe and healthy as possible.

The Board expressed their appreciation in regard to these stringent inspection efforts of the Housing Choice Voucher Program staff.

COVID-19 Recovery Planning: Resumption of Leasing in Certain Portfolios

Mr. Brandon addressed the Board on resumption of leasing efforts in various portfolios. After a pause in leasing in mid-March after the pandemic spiked, we ramped up wellness calls, food delivery service and other ways that we could support our residents during such an unprecedented time. SHA resumed leasing in early June 2020, using a three-tiered approach and strategy based on CDC and Public Health Guidance:

- Tier 1 (Current Tier): Leasing in units with external entrances to the street, such as single-family homes in Scattered Sites and townhomes in HOPE VI
- Tier 2: Mid- and high-rise communities with interior hallways
- Tier 3: SSHP and special populations

Staff collaborated with other PHAs and internal staff to identify best practices, with a primary goal to conduct leasing with minimal in-person contact and keeping safety for all at the forefront. We prioritized the safety of our staff and residents and embraced innovation to modify existing practices and procedures. The agency also applied an equity lens to this work through consideration of disparities in technology access and how COVID-19 may be affecting applicants' situations while making certain that no one was being overlooked.

SHA screens for COVID symptoms when any in-person interaction is needed and delays the process for 14 days if symptoms are present based on CDC guidance and unit showings are conducted with no in-person contact. Applicants drive by the property prior to unit showing to ensure location is amenable

and are encouraged to view units alone and wear face coverings. Common areas and property facilities are excluded from visit, with high touch areas of the unit being disinfected after viewing. The applicant will accept, or decline the unit offer by phone, and initial certifications and leases are conducted remotely. This does slow down the process, but also minimizes additional in-person contact. If the applicants deem that they are not comfortable moving during such times, so an exemption policy has been put in place to address a “good cause” unit turn down. This allows applicants to decline a unit offer without consequences of losing their waitlist spot if they do not wish to do so or are not able to move during the COVID-19 crisis. A slight drop is reported since 2019 in move outs, excluding transfers, due to decreases in resident-initiated move outs, with most residents moving out due to death, or health-related reasons.

Mr. Brandon gave kudos for outstanding work to Denille Bezemer (Housing Operations Deputy Director) in organizing/moving forward with leasing, Richard Ady (Impact Property Services Program Administrator) with great staff coordination with move outs, and Lisa Wolters (Intergovernmental Relations Director) for her intergovernmental work with partners during this process.

Executive Director Report

Commissioner Purcell informed the Board on the resignation of Commissioner Michael Diaz, effective immediately, and Mr. Lofton outlined the process of appointing a new resident commissioner to the SHA Board. Mr. Purcell then made mention of the passing of Emily Abbey, a former SHA resident Commissioner who made great contributions to SHA during her tenure. Contributions and donations to the Campus of Learners Foundation were requested by her family in lieu of flowers.

Mr. Lofton brought to the Board’s attention the SHA departmental reports, as well as agenda items being brought to the Board in September 2020 (2021 MTW Annual Plan, as well as the 2021 Budget). He urged the commissioners to complete the online pre-retreat survey in preparation for retreat sessions to be held in September, as well.

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 situation, General Counsel James Fearn announced his retirement plans, which were put on hold due to the pandemic; a search firm has been hired and the process for a new hire will be underway shortly. He thanked Mr. Fearn for staying with the agency during this time and postponing his retirement.

Commissioner Purcell then asked if there were any further questions or comments from staff, or from his colleagues on the Board. Hearing none, Commissioner Dr. Houston moved to adjourn the meeting, then Commissioner Minor seconded the motion. It was moved that the August 17, 2020 Regular Session of the Board be adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Secretary-Treasurer