

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
SECAUCUS HOUSING AUTHORITY
700 COUNTY ROAD
SECAUCUS, NEW JERSEY

July 25, 2024

This is condensed transcription of taped minutes taken on Thursday,
July 25, 2024, The Elms - 777 Fifth Street, Secaucus, New Jersey.

ROLL CALL

Chairman Michael Harper
Commissioner Raj Pardasani
Commissioner Richard Fairman
Commissioner Patricia Mondadori
Commissioner John Bujnowski

Absent: Commissioner Michael Schlemm
Commissioner Antonio Suarez

Also Present: Executive Director Christopher Marra
Stephen J. Natoli, Esq.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS NOTICE

“Adequate notice of this meeting is required by the Open Public Meeting Act, has been provided by the filing of an Annual Meeting Notice with the Municipal Clerk, the posting of said notice on the official bulletin board in the Municipal Government Center, and delivery of same to the Jersey Journal on December 15, 2023. This body wishes to advise you that, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 26:3D(1), et seq. (Smoking in Public Buildings), smoking is prohibited while this body is in open or closed session.

FLAG SALUTE

Chairman Marra introduced two recently graduated students, **Aminata Niang and Felipe Pena Toledo, Jr**, who received 2 scholarships from NJNAHRO under the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Aminata Niang thanked Board Members explaining she will be attending Clark University, Wooster, Mass. studying Psychology. Her mother is a single parent and Aminata has one brother. The scholarship check of \$2,500 will help her very much. **Felipe** thanked Board Members explaining he will be studying at Montclair State University majoring in Business Administration and Business General Finance. His mom is a single parent raising three children. The scholarship check of \$2,000 will help greatly.

Chairman Harper congratulated both of the recipients on behalf of Secaucus Housing Authority Board Members and the Town of Secaucus, and are very proud of them. Their reward is well-earned and well-deserved. Keep up the good work.

MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING – June 27, 2024 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve June 27th minutes made by Chairman Harper; 2nd by Commissioner Pardasani.

VOTE: AYES/All Present Commissioners (5)

Absent: Schlemm/Suarez

PAYMENT OF CLAIMS – JULY 2024

Motion to approve bill list made by Commissioner Mondadori; 2nd by Chairman Harper.

VOTE: AYES/All Present Commissioners (5)

Absent: Schlemm/Suarez

REPORT BY ED MARRA:

This past Tuesday with thanks to Chairman Harper's assistance, in Town Hall Mayor, Gary Jeffas, and Michael Harper were able to arrange to meet with Frank Mazza, Director of Hudson County Department of Family Services & Re-Integration along with his Assistant Tamika McReynolds. Back in May I discussed needing more help with certain problems. County has a lot of Assistance they can provide us. We learned at this meeting not only have they gone to County, but also set up 20 off-site offices including sharing an office of Assemblyman William B. Sampson in Bayonne, NJ, They go out meeting people at least 1 time a week for hours to service them for such things as: housing, EBT cards or SNAP or Medicaid. Lisa Stedeker was also there. I brought Angie and Kayla with me. They are now going to set up an office in Lisa Stedeker's offices on Front Street. Chairman Harper is going there tomorrow.

Now when all these people come to our Mayor, me or Lisa, they can go directly to Hudson County to get assistance that we sometimes don't know how to provide them. Also disclosed to us they have a telephone number, Constituent Telephone. Mr. Mazza is trying to change things. If we called that County number, no one would answer the phone, not even going to voice mail. Now they've set up a Constituent's Office where people can just call in to ask questions. There is one mayor in North Hudson who consumes about 80% of that office's time, Mayor of Union City, which is another number we can use. We learned about some of their programs; a project being done with Jersey City and one they might do with us with our voucher program; some people living in Secaucus using Temporary Rental Assistance, which could last 12-18 months. If we knew about those people we could allow some of our vouchers to come in at end of that time, scooping up these people so they don't end up homeless again or have a problem paying rent.

Also at the meeting were representatives from North Hudson Community Action Corporation, an organization everybody knows about, but we can't figure out how to access. We now learned they have 21 sites servicing 3 counties, but that 60% of work is involved in health care. Eleven of those 21 sites have to do with providing health care: vaccinations, anything you could think about including accessing if you have Medicaid but don't have a way to get prescriptions or way to pay less: i.e. PAAD (for people over 65), families with no prescription plan. Also providing other assistance including security deposits, immigration, other issues of housing; helped women apply for WICK (women with children or are pregnant). We met a woman in charge of Outreach, already sent her an email this morning as we would like them to come here and invite people who have a voucher – not all at one time – to see if they would be interested in coming to learn about what services North Hudson Community Action Corp. actually offers, doing half of voucher holders at a time; perhaps one meeting specific to seniors. Seniors already have built-in Medicare Program;

maybe it's not as relative. We need to keep contacting them as it's an important thing. When SHA talks to the Mayor, we need help, his answer is: I'll call Joan Quigley, Executive Director. We need to establish a relationship with someone to find out about handling security deposits or immigration issues, for example. Mike, Gary and the Mayor were very relevant in creating that meeting and getting it set up.

Chairman Harper: I'm happy to be the bridge as Secaucus in Hudson County is a forgotten town. We've never relied too much on the County, but there are a lot of things we're leaving on the table. They provide many services that Secaucus doesn't get its fair share of and I'm happy to help in any way for more efficient services here in Secaucus.

Commissioner Pardasani: If I get a call from a resident who lost his job and might be homeless, what can he do? I get this a lot; I call Lisa or the Mayor. Can I refer them to this number you are getting? ED Marra: Plan is these people would be here one time a week for at least 3 hours. They have it down to a routine, it's very organized. If he calls you on Monday, they're coming Thursday, you want to refer him to go to this meeting on Thursday to see how they can help him. Housing issue is where there's an availability of money comes into play; there's what kind of housing they need; if you're homeless, County does not take care of you if you're homeless. They refer you to another not-for-profit agency – Garden State Episcopal Services, for one. They may be able to put you into a hotel temporarily until you figure out how to get yourself back together again. When person is evicted from a house, and you find a new place to live, County can provide you with security deposit and 1st month rent for that new location – specific thing they do. When SHA has someone with a voucher and goes to rent a 1-bedroom for \$2,000, and person wants 1-1/2 month's security (\$3,000), many times we send them to North Hudson. Over the years we've learned that a person who has Social Security Disability, North Hudson won't fund them, telling them go to the County, they will fund you that security deposit because County's got relationship through Social Security Disability Program; you probably have Medicaid at that point. What you learn about this is all of these groups get funding; if they're getting \$50 million to do this, they don't get it on January 1st, they get it in increments and occasionally, like North Hudson, if you send someone there in July, they might get security deposit, but if at end of quarter, they might not have any money.

When this becomes permanent, I'll send information to Commissioners noting what day this will be at what offices, etc. When we have meeting with North Hudson Community, I'll make sure Commissioners are aware of that as well.

REMARKS OF CITIZENS

SUE GASSER - #511 – Has bug infestation in her apartment; ED Marra has been there and other people, the exterminator too. Mouse box doesn't kill centipedes nor beetles or lantern flies. My windows are taped shut, can't get fresh air and going on since October 2023. I have anxiety and agoraphobic, I don't leave my apartment or this building unless going to a doctor. Other people are also bringing this problem up. Bugs coming through my A/C. I caulked the concrete side. I called Deforest. I bought screens, taped them; bugs are biting my face. I had to go to dermatologist, showing photos to ED Marra. It looks like I had chicken pox. Other people have same problem and getting bit also. My quality of life is diminishing. I need help and so do other tenants. Last week I killed 5 centipedes, a beetle came out of my closet and from under my couch. My cat found a beetle coming out from under my TV. This happens in any room. There were beetles in my cabinets when I moved in. Maybe there's a crack in the foundation and I need help.

ED Marra: I told Sue if she found an exterminator on her own, we'd pay for it. The one she found was not interested in doing anything with A/C. In last day or so, I've had 2 residents who live on left side of building, all of a sudden bring up issue about gnats in their apartments. One is 2 stories below Sue (311) and one is further down the other way. Whatever is happening in back part of building where there is a steep slope, over the years we've had weeds up there and weeds hold back the dirt; they get cut down, but perhaps exterminator should spray that area instead of working inside at the apartment. Even last year we cut down branches that were close to where Sue lives in 511, that temporarily helps us. If ENG doesn't do that kind of work, we'll find another company to do it.

Sue was told the bugs are called No-See-Ems or midget bugs as gnats don't bite. Her camera is on at night and you can see them flying around in both rooms.

SUE - #511 - There is a visitation sleepover rule 10 times/year. Children are sleeping over and grandchildren are sleeping over. Kids run in hallways and in the lobby. I'm afraid they might run out front door and get hit by a car. ED Marra: Rule still in effect. Someone has to report it: boyfriend, girlfriend, daughters, sons – but no one reports grandchildren. It has to be reported.

CAROL STUART - #216 – She informed Board she was on Board of Directors of North Hudson Community Action for 5 years. There are many programs. Re: Homeless, they are put in a hotel temporarily, given a food voucher, but it's the County that has to get them jobs through job program; there are 20-25 different programs for homeless.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

BANK BALANCES through 6/30/2024 – 2 CDs matured – one at Bayonne Community Bank, other at Valley National Bank. One was 11 months, one a 12 month CD, starting off at 2-40. Both went over \$250,000, so banks sent me 2 checks - \$25,000, going back to Account #4. We renewed one at 9 months and one is 12 months – Valley and BCB. In September money will come out of Account #1, put into CDs either at Providence or TD Bank when TD's mature in September, we'll put it into Account #4 and take it out of Account #1. Account #4 is where all Housing Choice Voucher payments go every month, and where all administrative fees go every month. Those funds are not flexible, can only be used for HCV payments and admin fees. If you take \$500,000 from Account #1, earn \$25K of it over a year, you can take that \$25K and use it for a project.

Commissioner Fairman: Two observations: re: I think TD is considered a systemically important bank, basically on list – can't fail. As an individual Commissioner, I would be comfortable going above that limit to maximize returns. ED Marra: I would have to ask the bank what's their obligation going above \$250K, are they going to be required to do collateralization, what is the cost to them to do that? If we opened up 2 CDs at \$240K, then it's \$480K, you're at \$230K over the rating. What's the obligation of the bank? Will they be audited at some point? Commissioner Fairman: Good questions. I continue to recommend that monies be taken out of this \$2 million in Operating Funds and place them in similar CDs. ED Marra: Account #1 is part of that; you'll definitely see that in September.

Last year JIF reappraised everybody's property, which is first time since I've been here. You have a new appraisal value of SHA 3 properties, which will have an impact next year on our premium. Obviously, all of this liability insurance throughout the U.S. is going through the roof to pay for insurance. These 3 buildings are not flood zones, but sent a good summary we

might discuss another time or committee meeting. They appraised The Elms before we made repairs. Building was declared old or slightly in disrepair. It will hit home when we get premium for 1/1/2025. Buildings were appraised during RAD project, but that was to make the loan. JIF didn't take that appraisal in their considerations. I've been here 13 years; there was a time when SHA wasn't part of JIF. Bill Snyder, who created JIF, would RFP the liability property insurance; company from Newark would come in under JIF. Hurricane prior to Sandy was when that company could no longer beat JIF prices. It was somewhere in 2011-2014 timeframe.

Audit was completed yesterday; Chairman Harper and Commissioner Fairman were there. Headlines: no findings in audit. Chairman Harper: One thing that stood out to auditor was SHA made major investments last year and capital improvements, a relatively strong cash position in no small part thanks to Commissioner Fairman's stewardship of that aspect. Thank you, Commissioner Fairman. Commissioner Fairman: Mr. Policari made some favorable comments about staff as to work and quality of work they've been doing. ED Marra: Bill Katchen's office mentioned too, particularly Andrew and Neala, who visit here every quarter or month for our books. October meeting we could have the audit and pass it then.

Commissioner Fairman: When will you know the JIF hike, largely from a budgetary point of view? ED Marra: We'll know in November when Mr. Katchen visits. Our 3-year membership with JIF is up, which we'll discuss in September. We have to renew it via resolution.

POLICY COMMITTEE

We are not passing resolution on this tonight, but it's the Updated Employment Handbook Non-Civil Service back-dated to June 1, 2023. Minor changes had to be made. We're doing that and they only update every few years. Changes made and will be handed out. There are personnel changes coming in next 6 months.

SMOKING POLICY – While on vacation I spoke with WIND; they're sending me a company to help me interact with Verizon to set up Wi-Fi in The Elms so we can establish this WIND equipment that we talked about. You'll be updated over next 60 days. No bid needed on this.

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS

Report received today that jack has been pulled out of elevator at The Elms. New jack going in; anticipated elevator will be up and running by August 1st. Our consultant will go there Monday to go through punch list making sure that whatever we thought needed to be done or they thought, is done; so they understand this jack was installed correctly. Town inspects it or the State does that. The Elms has effectively had 1 elevator for 4-1/2 months.

At September we'll bid for new lighting in the hallways and interior painting The Elms.

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM (HCVP)

Commissioners have report from May-July. SEMAP Score letter on Agenda, but we didn't receive it yet.

REMARKS OF CITIZENS

MATTIE OTERO - #212 – I previously had an encounter with tenant here. Mr. Natoli and Mr. Marra know this, been back and forth to Court with her. She was away for a while and now back to her old antics and acting up. I do not want to go through what I went through last year. It made me sick and had anxiety. What can I do for my safety here? She does everything with no cameras around or no people. I volunteer a lot of my time here, so I'm all over the 1st floor. Chairman Harper: There are certain legal issues in a public meeting. We're not all familiar with ins/outs of this. Speak to Mr. Natoli and Mr. Marra after the meeting.

Commissioner Pardasani: I get a lot of these Section 8 issues, 5 people this month – not accepting. One found out it's legal to say no, but to other means they say no. ED Marra: You can't be a landlord and say "I don't accept Section 8. You can say anything else that you want; also if you actually get caught on video or whatever saying 'I don't accept Section 8', the only people who can prosecute that is State of N.J. Local government doesn't prosecute it; County doesn't prosecute it.'" 18 months ago there was a big series in Bergen Record about this – the lack of State prosecuting landlords on that because it's too difficult of an absolute case to take; what you have to do is you have to unfortunately keep looking. It's not an easy thing to find landlords who are willing to take these vouchers. Right after Covid people were willing to take them; thought they were more secure. Everybody thinks they have a \$4k rental right now – 1 bedroom or 3 bedroom. Voucher has a fair enough amount. SHA taking \$2,500 for 2 bedroom; more than \$3,000 for 3 bedroom. Everyone complaining about same thing. HUD monitors all this, in the system with their own software to analyze. Your pool gets smaller and within that pool who just won't take it. It's stereotypical thing – related to taxes. We send a 1099 at end of year about what we sent you. We need to have more landlord recruitment orientation meetings. These meetings have to happen every other month on a set date/set time. We need to learn how to do it, so people can watch online. Some landlords live 30 minutes away, come here for 35 minutes and then go back home. If they could sit at their computer, listen to it, they'd be willing to do that.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Mondadori; 2nd by Commissioner Pardasani.

VOTE: AYES/All Present Commissioners (5)

Absent: Schlemm/Suarez

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah L. Alvarez
Secretary/Transcriber