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**Newark Housing Authority
Board of Commissioners
October 11, 2023**

Summary of Meeting (Virtual Meeting) Minutes

Opening:

The regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 5:00 PM by the Chairperson, Nikki Lane.

I. Roll Call:

The Chairperson made a request for Roll Call. Board of Commissioners present: Nikki Lane, Paul Tillman, Jerry Clifton, Kelly Tompkins, Emile Brown and Abeo Lucas. Marene Jordan (Executive Director) and Attorney Donald Gouge Jr. were also present.

Absent Commissioners: Keith Moone Sr.

II. Visitors and/or Petition:

The Chairperson asked if there were any visitors or dignitaries present for the meeting. Since there were none, she moved on to the next agenda item.

III. Approval of Minutes:

(a). Meeting Minutes from September 13, 2023

The Chairperson asked if there were any questions regarding the meeting minutes from September 13, 2023. Since there were none, she asked for a motion to approve those meeting minutes. Commissioner Clifton made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. The motion was 2nd by Commissioner Tillman.

**Aye 5 (Tillman, Clifton, Tompkins, Lucas and Brown)
Nay 0
Motion passed, Vote: 5 to 0**

(b). Executive Session Meeting Minutes from September 13, 2023

The Chairperson asked if there were any questions regarding the Executive Session meeting minutes from September 13, 2023. Since there were none, she asked for a motion to approve those meeting minutes. Commissioner Clifton made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. This motion was 2nd by Chairperson Lane.

**Aye 5 (Tillman, Clifton, Tompkins, Lucas and Brown)
Nay 0
Motion passed, Vote: 5 to 0**

IV. Report of the Executive Director:
(a). Staff Reports from September 2023

The Chairperson asked for the report of the Executive Director. Mrs. Jordan proceeded with the report for the month of September:

Relaunch of the Family Re-entry Program continued:

The team meet in-person on Monday, September 11, 2023, in Wilmington.

Action Items:

- Draft FRP guiding principles & process flow and share with group deadline 9/25.
- Review guiding principles & process flow, providing written feedback by 10/2.
- Schedule (before 9/20) virtual, 90-minute meeting during the week of 10/6.

Meeting Goals/Questions:

1. What are we trying to achieve with the FRP?
2. What are the key components of a successful FRP in Delaware?
3. What/Who are the key activities & stakeholders?

Intended outcome: Based on the ideas in general during the meeting, we will draft the FRP guiding principles and process flow for review.

FRP goal setting: Broadly, the FRP aims to help people leaving prison find and maintain housing. In the FRP 1.0, participants could live with family members in public housing for up to two years.

FRP Key Components Overview:

1. Program Referral: Process by which potential clients are directed to FRP.
2. Application & Eligibility screening: The process by which potential clients apply. Their application is processed, and a decision is made on their eligibility.
3. Enrollment & Program Requirements: The process by which accepted applications are initiated and the requirements they must meet to remain enrolled (e.g., monthly meetings).
4. Case Management & Wraparound Service Referral: The process by which FRP enrollees receive case management services.
5. Program Exit/Completion: (a). The process by which the FRP enrollees are released from the program. (b) This includes successful completion or voluntary exit from the program, as well as removal from the program due to a request by the head of household or because program requirements were violated.

All the FRP key components will need to be discussed further to determine who needs to be involved in the eligibility screening, the enrollment & program requirements, the Case management & wrap around service referrals and program completion/exit. The next meeting is pending.

Admin Position Advertised:

As previously mentioned, Greg Baldwin, NHA's Administrative Assistant, will be retiring in December. As of September 22, 2023, the position was posted onto our website and advertised in the Newark Post.

HUD Revisions to the Administrative Plan and Admission and Continued Occupancy Policies:

The Newark Housing Authority is in the process of updating its policies for both programs administered to comply with HUD issued PIH notices and CFR changes. On September 29, 2023, HUD issued a PIH notice announcing that HUD will not require PHAs to update their Public Housing Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP) or Housing Choice Voucher Administrative Plans by January 1, 2024. Instead, HUD expects PHAs to update those discretionary policies by the time they implement HOTMA. A draft of changes to date will be presented at the next meeting.

Energize Delaware Empowerment Grant:

The Newark Housing Authority received the final payment of \$25,000 from the grant we received from Energize Delaware Empowerment Grant.

Audited Financial Reports for FYE March 31, 2023:

The Newark Housing Authority met with the auditor on September 28th to discuss the audited financials for FYE March 31, 2023. A draft copy of reports was received and discussed. The auditor will present the audited financials at the November 8th meeting.

Survey for the Newark Public Library:

As you may know, New Castle County will be demolishing the current Newark Library and building a new 40,000 square foot library on the same footprint. Right now, the county is doing some public engagement with a few meetings and a survey. The link to the survey was forwarded to everyone hoping that all can participate. The survey link was uploaded onto our website. We also did a mass mailing to all our program participants encouraging them to participate. The City of Newark did confirm that the survey was circulated previously.

Relocation:

The Wilmington Housing Authority was able to provide Ms. Jordan with a list of units that can be considered for relocation. However, the list will have to be updated as we get closer to demolition. Ms. Jordan asked our attorney to provide comments on the list received regarding the location and amenities proposed for our seniors should they decide to relocate to Wilmington temporarily.

City of Newark Planning Department zoom meeting:

As previously mentioned by email, Renee Bensley, the Director of Planning from the City of Newark expressed concerns regarding our timeline for the building permits, planning commission approval and getting on the council's agenda as the holidays approach. To accomplish the approvals needed for GRV, Ms. Jordan mentioned holding a special board meeting to review the finalized site/floor plans for GRV prior to submission to the city. Board members were made aware that the team is working on getting the plans to them by the end of this week. There may be a delay as to when she will be able to circulate the plans.

2nd Informational Meeting with Public Housing Tenants:

NHA will be hosting a 2nd informational meeting with the residents on October 18, 2023, at 3 PM to update them on the status of GRV. All are welcome to attend. Notices were circulated to all Public Housing Program participants. That concluded the staff report from the Executive Director.

The Chairperson thanked those who attended the special meeting on October 4, 2023. She mentioned that we were able to hold the planners to their feet and to make sure our voices were heard. Some of the items of concern were solar panels and making sure the tenants get what they wanted in the floor plan for the 2-bedroom units. She asked if there were any questions or comments regarding the staff report. Since there were none, she proceeded with a motion to approve the Staff Report for September 2023.

Commissioner Brown made a motion to approve the staff report for September. The motion was 2nd by Commissioner Clifton.

Aye 5 (Tillman, Clifton, Tompkins, Lucas and Brown)
Nay 0
Motion passed, Vote: 5 to 0

V. Committee Reports:

The Chairperson called for the report from the Policies, Procedures, and Compliance & Personnel Committee.

A. Report of Policies, Procedure, Compliance & Personnel Committee – Chairperson (Mr. Brown):

The Chairperson of this sub-committee, Mr. Brown, was present for this committee update. However, the Chairperson of the Board, who is a committee member who filled in for Commissioner Brown during last month's Executive Session meeting, confirmed that Commissioner Brown received the minutes from the last Executive Session. Commissioner Brown confirmed they were received and provided a general overview. He reported we are about 95% complete with the evaluation. The evaluation went well and was approved in the Executive Session. Hopefully the evaluation will be executed by the end of the week.

The Chairperson of the Board acknowledged that the evaluation was held in two parts with the Executive Session opening at 4:45 pm and closed at 5:05 pm on September 13, 2023.

Commissioner Brown mentioned that we had a new staff member, and he didn't know if she was introduced to the board last month.

The Executive Director responded, "No, she was not. Her name is Diana Feliciano." The Executive Director will ask her to attend the next board meeting so she can be introduced to the commissioners.

The Chairperson called for the report from the Development Committee.

B. Report from the Development Committee – Chairperson (Vacant):

The Chairperson of the board acknowledged that an update from this committee was discussed earlier in this meeting.

C. Report of Finance Committee – Chairperson (Mr. Tillman):

(a) Committee Report - Monthly Financials:

The Chairperson of this sub-committee, Mr. Tillman, was present for this committee update. Commissioner Tillman confirmed that everyone received the financial reports. He began his report by stating, "We are 5 months into the year and at 41 and 2/3rds percent compared to that of 53 percent on our yearly budget for revenue in the public housing section. So, we are ahead of the budget. In the expenses for Public Housing, we are at 43.69 percent. Even though that is slightly above budget, the revenue is more above budget than the expenses. We have a profit showing at about \$52,000 at the end of the report. This is page one of the financial reports."

Then on page two of the financial report, which is Section 8, the report is similar in that we are at 43.5 percent of income vs. 41.47% into the year. So, we are slightly ahead of budget and well below the expenses. Again, we turned a little profit."

Commissioner Tillman wanted confirmation from Marc (fee accountant) as to what he reported during last month in that HUD typically makes a decision on subsidy in September. He asked if we had received confirmation of what our subsidy will be.

Mrs. Jordan responded that she has not received confirmation.

Commissioner Tillman asked, "What is the process of getting notified from HUD? Do they contact you or Marc?"

Mrs. Jordan responded, "Usually, I receive an email from HUD."

Commissioner Tillman stated that he would wait until Ms. Jordan is notified. That concluded his report, he opened the floor to questions on the financial reports presented.

Commissioner Brown inquired about the CDs.

Ms. Jordan replied, "The bank offered a better interest rate on one of the CDs, 5%." She asked him to stop by the office to sign the form.

Commissioner Brown made a motion to accept the financial report as presented. The motion was 2nd by Commissioner Clifton.

Aye 5 (Tillman, Clifton, Tompkins, Lucas and Brown)
Nay 0
Motion passed, Vote: 5 to 0

The Chairperson called for the report from the Strategic Planning Committee.

D. Strategic Planning Committee – Chairperson (Ms. Lane):

There was no further report from this committee needed. Previously (during this meeting), a report mentioned that a strategy for relocation is needed.

VII. Attorney Issues:

There were no attorney issues to report.

VIII. Old Business:

- A. From the other Commissioners: None
- B. From the Executive Director: None
- C. From Legal Counsel: None.

IX. New Business:

- A. From Commissioners: Commissioner Clifton stated that he had something he wanted to discuss. He began his new business by saying, "Here we are meeting by Zoom. One of the most mind- numbing ways to conduct a meeting. I'm not sure if any public body is operating solely by Zoom. I feel we are here to serve the clients of the housing authority and when we narrow the methodologies of how to attend meetings to that of being on zoom, which I would admit maybe the younger clients are probably tech savvy and have the ability. But some of the older clients that are in housing on Main Street (GRV) don't have that ability. I've seen where one or two will walk over to attend the meeting. I think (as I said before) we are here to serve them, and this is their business that we are conducting that they should be concerned about, and I think many are. I talked to Corin Ford today. I think that there are people who would at least like to view what we are doing in a live configuration. I see we were to meet every other month by Zoom. We were supposed to meet in-person for this meeting but here we are meeting by Zoom. The doors to the housing authority are still locked during business hours (I think). I got to tell you my opinion and quite frankly the opinions of others that if we want to

send a message that we don't care about engaging the clients that we serve, I don't know if we could be sending a better message. I think we should be meeting in person and the authority should truly be open. I know the argument (possibly could be) that having the doors open is a disruption to our day. Well, I get that. When you are a public body, that is part of being a public body, quite frankly, and you are going to have that. I think we need to rethink how we do business in a client-based lens and I would like to suggest that we go to live meetings (I think we did discuss that). We can also Zoom the meeting, like we have been. It's the best of both worlds. There is a full recording of the meeting should someone want to go to it, should they choose to do so. I think we need to get back to live meetings like we were prior to the pandemic. The pandemic is essentially over. I know the argument is COVID is still out there, but it's been out there. It's been out there for the last year and a half. The news today is no different than it's been for the last year. I think that it's an excuse for us to do work almost behind closed doors. I know that may offend some, but I think we need to rethink the way we do business."

Chairperson Lane thanked Commissioner Clifton for his comments. She then opened the discussion to the commissioners.

Commissioner Brown commented that he agreed with Jerry to a certain extent. "I was expecting this meeting to be onsite. I was kind of surprised to get notification of it being by Zoom. But, with the doors being locked, it can be an obstruction but there is also the safety factor. These days you do not know who is coming out of any facility. I know at our facility we maintain a locked gate coming in, but we are trying to sell product. I can understand the safety issue. Maybe one thing we can do is probably get a doorbell so we will know when someone is trying to get in because knocking on a window can be obnoxious."

Commissioner Lucas commented that she definitely feels as though she agrees. "There is no doorbell on the housing authority's door or anything and as a resident I have to knock on the door or call the office. It is a very unwelcoming feeling for me even as a resident. Also, as a resident, I never knew of these meetings until I was appointed to the board. So, as a resident I feel that I may not be the only one who did not know about these meetings when the meetings pertain to us as residents."

Chairperson Lane commented that she agreed with, "Being able to ring a doorbell is probably the best solution. Taping on a window is not the way we want to go for any business. I know Marene will be working on getting one installed. Maybe one with a speaker system (depending on expense), But getting a doorbell installed will help. I know at one point there was a resident newsletter. Maybe when we get staff, we can go back to a monthly newsletter letting the residents know of our meeting, events or anything going on in the city will help. With zoom, we did say every other month. I think we need to make sure we are doing every other. At least for now. I know having an in-person and Zoom can be complicated but certainly every other as we discuss. We should get back to that."

The Executive Director commented that she does not believe we are operating solely in a Zoom setting as commissioner Clifton mentioned. “However, we were supposed to rotate our meetings and I do apologize for scheduling two Zoom meetings in a row. But I find myself reaching out a couple of times before board meetings before I can confirm that we have a quorum. I think once the initial email is sent, we should all respond to ensure we have a quorum and that has been difficult. I would also like to say that when we have guests who are scheduled to present to the board, there are times where we have to wait until we have a quorum before the meeting is called to order. As far as our newsletters are concerned, our newsletters are circulated quarterly. We invite our residents to all our meetings. I remember when we were under review by the Joint Sunset Committee, a while ago, at that time we were holding our meeting at 3 pm. As a result, from the review, one of the recommendations was to change our meeting time from 3 pm to 5 pm to afford the public who work an opportunity to attend our meetings. Again, we do not have a lot of people from the public attend our meetings. I do not know why. Our meetings are open to the public, our residents are made aware of the meetings, and anyone can attend, including our residents. We invite residents to take part in activities and they do not attend. So, I am a little bothered by the fact that I am hearing that our residents are not aware that these meetings exist because they are aware. I don’t know if they read the newsletters or if they read any correspondence from the housing authority. I cannot say they do, or they do not. But I can honestly say within my 17 years as Executive Director, we have sought and continue to seek residents’ involvement in any action taken by this authority that may benefit them. But again, we may get a few maybe no one. It saddens me to hear that commissioner feels as though we are conducting business (that benefits residents and participants) in the dark. I disagree with that. In fact, I strongly disagree with those comments.”

Commissioner Clifton commented that sending the newsletter out once every three months only by email, the people may not actually have an email.

The Executive Director commented, “The newsletters are circulated by mail.”

Commissioner Lucas responded, “There are notifications that come in the mail that I receive regarding the Newark Housing Authority activities. I get the letters every so often because I do read my mail. But I don’t recall ever receiving a newsletter, a resident, maybe in the first year because there were no staff. But I have not received any notification for residents to attend community board meetings where the residents can attend to voice their concerns.”

The Executive Director commented that what commissioner Lucas is referring to is called the Resident Advisory Board (RAB). In the newsletters, NHA informs the residents of the existence of the board and its status being inactive due to there being no interest in filling the resident elected seats that make up that board.

Chairperson Lane asked if the newsletter stated the date of the upcoming board meetings.

The Executive Director replied, “Yes.”

Chairperson Lane added, "Is there a standard line in the newsletter where we tell the residents when the next meeting is?"

The Executive Director replied that she does not believe the newsletter states specifically when the next meeting will be held but it does say the board meetings are held the 2nd Wednesday of every month at 5 pm and the meetings are open to the public.

Commissioner Tillman commented that he has another vote for having as many meeting in person as we can. "I was one of the people who were COVID cautious. Just got my fourth or fifth vaccine today and I've got the sore shoulder to prove it. On the door, I was wondering if there was a low-tech solution. I have a hardwired ring camera on my front door. The nice thing about the ring cameras is it will send a message to your cellphone when someone is at the door whether they ring the doorbell or not and it will capture a video of who was at your front door. So, it's a little better than just a doorbell. I think. I offer that as a suggestion to put a ring camera doorbell on the door that is both a doorbell and a video camera and will give you an alert when some is coming to your front door. I paid about \$40 bucks for my hardwire ring camera. The hardwired ones are very inexpensive."

Commissioner Clifton asked if the sensitivity of the camera can be adjusted. "I don't think Marene wants to get an alert for everyone that may be approaching."

Commissioner Tillman replied, "Yes. You can adjust the sensitivity and the shape of the field it is looking at. It's not 100% perfect but I find it handy especially for packages from UPS and Amazon because they don't ring your doorbell, they drop it off and take a picture. So, it's nice to get a little chime when someone is at my door."

Chairperson Lane mentioned that the Executive Director will look into getting a doorbell for the office. "In terms of our meeting. We said for now our meetings will rotate every other month and we should stick to that. But for the 1st of the year, commissioners do you want to talk out loud about resuming in-person meetings."

Commissioner Clifton commented that he likes the consistency and openness of the in-person meetings. "I think it's been said before that I see one or two of you at other places in the city over the course of a month. I think in-person meetings take on a different atmosphere of interaction between the commissioners. These meetings are more personable than sitting here looking at a screen for hours."

Chairperson Lane opened the floor to all commissioners to decide on resuming in-person meetings at the 1st of the year.

Commissioner Brown replied, "Yes. I am fine with that. And just coming off the NAHRO conference one of the things I did learn about is having a board retreat."

Commissioner Clifton replied “Yes” to meeting in person and “Yes” for the idea of having a board retreat.

Commissioner Thompkins responded she is good with whichever way we decide to meet but she likes in-person meetings best but also understands why Zoom works to.

Chairperson Lane commented that if there is another surprise of another virus or if COVID picks up again, she can guarantee that she will be going back to the way we are meeting today.

Commissioner Tillman was in favor of in-person meetings.

Commissioner Lucas was also in agreement for in-person meetings.

The NHA council was also in agreement.

Chairperson Lane confirmed that as of January 1, 2024, the regularly scheduled meeting for the board of commissioners will resume in person. She directed the Executive Director to circulate all meeting agendas as such.

The Executive Director mentioned that as we continue with the redevelopment, it is unclear as to where the offices will be relocated. So, we may need to revisit how we meet at some point. However, she acknowledged the direction of the board meetings will be held in-person as of the 1st of the year.

In closing the Chairperson stated that for the newsletter, “We need to highlight our meetings or change the font, so the residents are reminded of when our meeting will take place.”

She stated for the record that she knows for a fact that Marene informs the residents that we have monthly board meetings and invites the public. “I know there was a time when we had someone from the public attend every meeting. (I miss her dearly) So, I know the word was out there informing the tenants and the public of our meetings.

It is upsetting to hear that there is a sense that our office is unwelcoming because it certainly is not. I know Marene spends day and night trying to get programs and get tenants involved in programs. She collaborates with nonprofits on the tenant’s behalf. That is why she is here. So, we will change the unwelcoming if it is a matter of knocking on the door versus ringing a doorbell. She is there a lot of times by herself. So having the doors locked, I agree with having them locked. There are offices up and down the city of Newark whose offices are locked, and you ring a doorbell or some sort of speaker. You cannot get into the municipal building (except for the front door) but you certainly cannot get past the receptionist without being buzzed in. So, we just need to figure that part out.”

- B. From the Executive Director: None
- C. From Legal Counsel: None

XI. Adjournment:

The Chairperson asked for a motion for the meeting to adjourn. Commissioner Clifton made the motion for the meeting to adjourn. The motion was 2nd by Commissioner Brown.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 5:45 PM

Minutes Submitted by: Marene M. Jordan, Executive Director

APPROVED