

**WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY
DECEMBER 17, 2020
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Call to Order, Roll Call, Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Getty called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. (In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and consistent with Governor Pritzker’s Executive Orders and Senate Bill 2135 (that was signed into law and which became effective on June 12, 2020), the meeting was held via video conference and/or telephone conference). Following the call to order, roll call was taken.

The following Board Members participated:

Present:	Chairman Dina M. Getty Commissioner Mustafa Abdall (arrived at 5:37 p.m.) Commissioner Alanna D. Conard Commissioner Danielle J.A. Potter Commissioner Tasha N. Reddic
Absent:	Commissioner Ronald E. Ballard Commissioner Fred S. Wescott

Also participating: Deputy Director Deb Alfredson, Director of Voucher Programs Kristin Andrews, Rental Housing Support Program Director and D’Agnolo Garden and Johnston Garden Manager Jilly Graciana and James R. Pirages of the law firm of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP.

Executive Director Alan Zais and Finance Director Vickie Huwe also participated via video conference and in person at the Winnebago County Housing Authority (WCHA) offices at 3617 Delaware Street, Rockford, Illinois, so as to allow for public attendance (if any).

Inasmuch as the meeting was held via video/telephone conference, the Pledge of Allegiance was not recited.

Introduction of Guests

Executive Director Alan Zais introduced Jilly Graciana of the WCHA staff and Emily Hartzog from the Chartwell Agency.

Public Hearing for the FY2021 Agency Plan and the FY2021-2025 Five Year Agency Plan

A motion to convene the public hearing on the FY2021 Agency Plan and FY2021-2025 Five Year Agency Plan was made by Commissioner Potter; that motion was seconded by Commissioner Conard. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present, with none against and three (3) Commissioners absent.

Executive Director Alan Zais noted that notice of the hearing had been publicized in the newspaper and at all sites and that the WCHA had received no comments and no one from the public was present. A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Conard and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Reddic. The motion to close the public hearing was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present (Commissioner Abdall had not yet arrived) with none against and three (3) Commissioners absent.

Public Hearing for Revisions to the FY2020 Housing Choice Voucher Administrative Plan

A motion to convene the public hearing on the proposed revisions to the FY2020 Housing Choice Voucher Administrative Plan was made by Commissioner Conard; that motion was seconded by Commissioner Potter. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present, with none against and three (3) Commissioners absent.

Executive Director Alan Zais noted that the notice of hearing had been publicized in the newspaper and at all sites and that the WCHA had received no comments and no one from the public was present. A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Potter and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Reddic. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present, with none against and three (3) Commissioners absent.

Public Hearing for Revisions to the FY2020 Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy

A motion to convene the public hearing on the proposed revisions to the FY2020 Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy was made by Commissioner Conard; that motion was seconded by Commissioner Reddic. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the five (5) Commissioners present, with none against and two (2) Commissioners absent. (Commissioner Abdall had recently arrived).

Executive Director Alan Zais noted that notice of the hearing had been publicized in the newspaper and at all sites and that the WCHA had received no comments and no one from the public was present. A motion to close the public hearing was made by Commissioner Potter and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Abdall. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the five (5) Commissioners present, with none against and two (2) Commissioners absent.

Changes to Agenda

Executive Director Alan Zais asked that Item XIII(A) under “New Business” be moved to this point of the Agenda in order to provide an explanation as to why the meeting was being held in this manner and to allow for the temporary suspension of a bylaw provision. The consensus of the Board was to allow for this change to the Agenda.

New Business

Attorney Jim Pirages explained the basis for the meeting being held in this manner and requested the temporary suspension of a bylaw provision for purposes of this meeting. Attorney Pirages advised the Commissioners that in keeping with Governor Pritzker’s Executive Order 2020-07 and subsequent Executive Orders as well as recently enacted Senate Bill 2135 (which became effective on June 12, 2020), various provisions of the Open Meetings Act (including those requiring the

members of the public body to be physically present at each meeting and those limiting remote participation by members of the public body) have been suspended provided certain requirements are met (including the audio recording of the meeting). Attorney Pirages went on to note that the provisions of the WCHA's bylaws (specifically, Article IV, Section 4 which provide that "[t]he physical presence of four (4) Commissioners shall constitute a quorum for purposes of conducting its business...") could also be suspended in keeping with the provisions of the Executive Order. Thereafter, a motion to suspend that bylaw provision for purposes of the December 17, 2020 meeting was made by Commissioner Conard and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Potter. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the five (5) Commissioners present with none against and two (2) Commissioners absent.

Public Comments

None.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Alan Zais introduced Emily Hartzog of the Chartwell Agency. Alan noted that the WCHA began looking to change its identity and website and move to a paperless design over a year ago but its efforts had been delayed by the pandemic. He said that the WCHA had retained Chartwell; he added that the WCHA staff had been amazed by the fantastic work that the Chartwell Agency has done.

Emily Hartzog from Chartwell had prepared a presentation that was to be shown on Zoom but, unfortunately, could not be shown due to technical difficulties. However, she directed the Commissioners to a link to the new website so that they could review the website while she discussed the remainder of the project.

She noted that Chartwell had learned a lot about public housing during the course of this project; she added that it is not an easy task to navigate all of the aspects of public housing and that, similarly, it is challenging to "rebrand" this organization. She said that they started with a "naming strategy" to make the WCHA less ominous and bureaucratic to residents. She said that they looked at a number of names given the fact that the WCHA now serves more than one county and came up with the name of "Northern Illinois REACH" (an acronym for "Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Housing") and that the website will be accessible through NIREACH.org. She said that they are also working on new letterhead, signage and business cards to reflect this new identity.

She commented that the websites of other housing agencies are generally difficult to use and that Chartwell has been attempting to address some of those difficulties in developing the new website for WCHA. She also discussed the "mobile first" strategy and the availability of an "App" to access the new website. She ran through the various attributes of the new website and noted their goal of showing our communities what affordable housing looks like and what it contributes to our communities.

Emily commented that the launch of the new website is tentatively set for January 12 and that in the course of launching the new website they will be discussing the success of the Hope VI Project; issuing a press release; and arranging for an "op ed" article in the Rockford Register Star. She also said that she would send to the Commissioners the PowerPoint that she had been unable to

share with them during the course of the December 17 meeting and welcomed them to let Chartwell know if they have concerns about the website inasmuch as this is a work in progress.

Chairman Getty noted that she was very impressed by the work that Chartwell had completed and complimented them for their extraordinary outcomes. Commissioner Potter also complimented Chartwell on the design and noted that she was jotting down notes for use at her employer in bettering its own website. Commissioner Conard noted that Chartwell had done an excellent job; she stated that she had helped with the website development for the 911 Memorial and for Winnebago County and believed that the new Northern Illinois REACH website was “very user friendly” and well done.

Executive Director Alan Zais thanked Chartwell for its work and noted that other housing authorities can hopefully learn from the example shown by the Northern Illinois REACH website. Alan said that the new identity will be reviewed with the Winnebago County Board but that ultimately he will ask the WCHA Board to ratify the launch of the new identity and website at the January 21, 2021 meeting.

Emily Hartzog departed the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

Alan then introduced Jilly Graciana and asked her to discuss the status of the Reentry Program that she directs. Jilly noted that there really had been three (3) different phases to the Reentry Program. The initial phase with the program involved NYU and “reintegration”. Through that Program the WCHA was able to assist four (4) participants back in 2019. The second aspect of the Reentry Program began this year through the initiatives of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and IHDA; Jilly said that the second Program has been “evolving as we go” and is based upon referrals that are received from IDOC. She noted that so far there have been three (3) individuals placed through the IDOC/IHDA Program with two (2) others now being processed. She said that some of the participants have been placed in housing through Trinity House and that she is currently working with a landlord by the name of Bosley who has expressed a willingness to work with the Reentry Program.

Chairman Getty asked for clarification about the number of types of programs involved. Jilly Graciana confirmed that the “reintegration” program was the initial program through NYU that has now been completed. The current program involves the Illinois Department of Corrections and IHDA and involves a “Reentry” Program. Over and above that, there is the Vera Institute of Justice initiative which is seeking to provide guidance to the WCHA regarding changes to its policies that will be applicable to the admission of all prospective tenants (whether they were formerly involved in the criminal justice system or not).

Vice Chairman Getty asked as to the nature of offenses of the three (3) individuals who have been placed through the IDOC/IHDA Program so far. Jilly noted that she believed that the first two (2) individuals had been convicted of crimes involving domestic violence that had been “targeted” at particular individuals (as contrasted with random acts of violence). The third individual she believed had a non-violent offense that was several years old. She noted that the individuals involved in the Program through IDOC/IHDA have been successful and cited to the fact that they have supportive families assisting them as contributing towards that success.

Executive Director Alan Zais asked Jilly about how the IDOC chooses individuals to participate in the Program. Jilly explained that counselors end up referring those with whom they work who they think will be successful in the Program. She added that the people who are most successful are those who have lots of support and a place that they can take pride in. She said that family members are involved and contact her often. She noted that while there is always a possibility of a “bad apple in the bunch” regardless of the group involved, she was hopeful of the success of those who are currently involved in the Program and those whose applications are pending.

Chairman Getty noted that she agrees that most of the failures of those who are released from the criminal justice system are attributable to the lack of intensive supervision and/or the lack of a support program. She stated that the presence of supervision and support tends to make those individuals more successful. She went on to note that she is comfortable not rushing through this process and highlighted the need to be sure that the WCHA is cautious about what we do – noting the importance of “safety first”.

Commissioner Conard again questioned the difference between the “Reentry” Program and the “Reintegration” Program. Jilly explained that the “Reintegration” Program was the pilot program through NYU which is now closed while the “Reentry” Program is the current program through IDOC/IHDA. Commissioner Conard noted her agreement that we need to exercise caution when looking at those who come into our housing and expressed her appreciation for the work that Jilly has done in overseeing these efforts.

Jilly departed the meeting at 6:23 p.m. Commissioner Abdall also departed the meeting at 6:23 p.m.

Alan closed his report by noting that everything else he wished to address was in his written report that had accompanied the Board packet.

Consent Agenda

A motion to approve the six (6) Resolutions on the Consent Agenda was made by Commissioner Conard. That motion was seconded by Commissioner Potter. The items on the Consent Agenda were approved by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present with none against and three (3) Commissioner absent.

Financial Report

Finance Director Vickie Huwe noted that her report was contained in the Board packet. Vickie said that she had failed to mention at the last meeting that Chairman Getty had been instrumental in getting the WCHA back into the “E-Lock System” and thanked Chairman Getty for her work in getting this task accomplished. Vickie also noted that the auditors will start with their work in for the current fiscal year in January and that the WCHA will later be issuing a request for proposals for the audit for the coming fiscal year.

Old Business

With regard to Item A under Old Business “name change”, it was agreed that that topic had previously been covered and that the change would be revisited by the Board at the January 21, 2021 Board meeting.

With regard to Item B under Old Business, Chairman Getty noted that the Vera Institute report had been discussed at last month’s meeting. She said that she had been getting confused between the work that Vera was doing and the IDOC/IHDA Program. She said that her initial review of the Vera Institute recommendations had caused “red flags” to go up but that she now realizes that the recommendations from Vera Institute are for the WCHA’s “regular residents” (and not limited to those involved in the Reentry Program).

Chairman Getty noted that she was nervous about the Vera Institute recommendation that the “look back” be changed from five (5) years to six (6) months and said that through subsequent discussions had arrived at a consensus for a three (3) year “look back” instead based upon the input that she obtained from both staff and other Commissioners. Commissioners Conard, Potter and Reddic all noted their agreement with a three (3) year look back and agreed that going to six (6) months was too drastic (given the fact that the former “look back” period had been five (5) years).

Chairman Getty asked if there were any other concerns about the Vera Institute report. Commissioner Potter raised her questions regarding the right to an administrative process before eviction or denial of application. Executive Director Alan Zais noted his belief that this type of process did not work and that it could create a fair housing issue. He said that he agreed with Commissioner Potter about this and said that he had discussed this issue with the Vera Institute representatives (and the fact that the Board does not want to mandate this type of administrative/grievance process).

Chairman Getty noted her agreement with Commissioner Potter’s concerns about this process and Commissioner Reddic also agreed with those concerns.

Executive Director Alan Zais said that none of this is urgent and that the Vera Institute’s recommendations are going to be revised and that information brought back to the WCHA Board for further action in the future. Commissioner Conard said that she likes the Fort Collins, Colorado matrix and encouraged the WCHA to look at something similar for use at WCHA. Executive Director Alan Zais invited the Board to participate if they wished in a monthly call that he has with the Vera Institute representatives (noting that we would have to be careful with regard to the number of Commissioners who could participate in a given call due to Open Meetings Act considerations).

New Business

Chairman Getty referenced Item B “Election of Vice Chairperson”. She said that the position had been vacated by her election to the Chairman position at the November 2020 meeting and she opened the floor for nominations. Commissioner Conard noted her interest in serving as Vice Chairman and, in turn, that led to the nomination of Commissioner Conard as Vice Chairperson that was made by Commissioner Potter; that nomination was seconded by Commissioner Reddic. No other nominations were made. A motion to elect Commissioner Conard as Vice Chairman was

made by Commissioner Potter and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Reddic. That motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present with none against and three (3) Commissioners absent.

Chairman Getty noted that this action now vacates the position of Secretary/Treasurer which will be subject to an election at the January 2021 meeting.

Executive Session

None.

Action taken from Executive Session

None

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Reddic and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Potter. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote of the four (4) Commissioners present with none against and three (3) Commissioners absent. Prior to closing, Chairman Getty thanked the Commissioners for their participation in what had been a lengthy meeting and for their diligence and preparation for the meeting at which she indicated a lot had been accomplished. The meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alanna D. Conard, Recording Secretary