

**WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY
JANUARY 21, 2021
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Call to Order, Roll Call, Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Getty called the meeting to order at 5:30 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 Vice-Chairman Alanna D. Conard Commissioner Ronald E. Ballard Commissioner Danielle J.A. Potter Commissioner Tasha N. Reddic
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Absent:	Commissioner Mustafa Abdall Commissioner Fred S. Wescott
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Also participating: Deputy Director Deb Alfredson, Director of Voucher Programs Kristin Andrews, and James R. Pirages of AGHL Law.

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

There were no guests in attendance for this meeting.

Changes to Agenda

Attorney Jim Pirages suggested that Item X(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 reminded the Commissioners that in keeping with Governor Pritzker’s Executive Order 2020-07

and subsequent Executive Orders as well as 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 January 21, 2021 meeting was made by Vice-Chairman Conard and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Ballard. 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 referred the Board to his written report that had accompanied the Board packet. However, he noted he also had a couple of matters to bring to the Board's attention. Alan said that he had been contacted by Winnebago County to complete the application for Emergency Rental Assistance Grant which is designed to assist families who are in danger of eviction and/or homelessness due to COVID-19 and/or similar reasons and to provide them with rental assistance to maintain their homes. Alan said that he had subsequently completed the application for the County and had learned that day (January 21, 2021) that the County has been awarded \$8.4 million for this purpose. Alan noted that the WCHA will administer this program through the Human Services Department of the City of Rockford; he added that the WCHA will craft the administrative program for those funds that the Human Services Department will use and is meeting with Department representatives on January 22, 2021 to begin this process. He contemplates an agreement being put together that will be signed by the participating families and landlords pursuant to which the money will be directed to the landlords on behalf of each participating family.

Alan also discussed the fact that HOPE VI Program has now ended. Following the termination of that program, Alan said he was contacted by HUD and that he had participated in a call with HUD representatives along with Finance Director Vickie Huwe. He said it was a very nice call and that HUD was congratulatory and provided nice accolades for the work that WCHA had completed with regard to the HOPE VI Program. He said that along with Peoria and Chicago, the WCHA's HOPE VI Program were the first in the State of Illinois.

With regard to the "Moving to Work" (MTW) program, reminded the Commissioners that they had previously approved WCHA applying for participation in for the MTW. He recalled that the first Cohort (that allowed full flexibility to the participating housing authorities) were for housing authorities under one thousand (1,000) units (for which WCHA did not qualify given its administration of the Hosmer-Brewster Developments in Freeport). He said that WCHA did not apply for Cohort #2 (which was for rent reform). Alan advised that Cohorts #3 and #4 are now

available (Cohort #5 has not yet been listed). Cohort #3 would involve a work requirement (with the participants being required to try different work programs) and Cohort #4 would involve landlord incentive programs. While reminding the Board that Cohort #5 had not yet been listed, he said that he understands from his sources that it may involve regionalization programs, that being a topic in which the WCHA has long been interested. He said that this presents an awkward situation because while it is now time to apply for Cohort #3 and #4, Cohort #5 may be the one that WCHA truly wishes to participate in if it materializes and focuses on regionalization programs. He said he had spoken with Mary Ann Navarro of HUD who had told him that WCHA could now apply for Cohort #3 or #4 and, assuming that WCHA has not been approved for either of those Cohorts, could then apply for Cohort #5 if it becomes available in the interim. (Alan said that he would provide additional explanation about all of this in his report for the February 2021 Board meeting). Alan noted that he would like to start working on an application for one of the Cohort #4. Alan discussed a variety of programs that could be involved in Cohort #4 including the use of Airbnb for single room occupancies vouchers to allow elderly property owners to supplement their income while increasing housing opportunities; he said that HUD had already been looking into this topic when he discussed it with them four (4) years ago. The consensus of the Commissioners was that Alan should proceed with the preparation of the application for Cohort #4.

Alan also noted that he received an e-mail from a participant who has been unhappy with the participant's property owner's handling of the housing assistance. The participant had expressed an interest in addressing the Board and that he would invite her to attend the February 2021 meeting.

Consent Agenda

A motion to approve the four (4) Resolutions on the Consent Agenda was made by Commissioner Ballard. That motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Conard. The items on the Consent Agenda were approved by unanimous roll call vote of the five (5) Commissioners present with none against and two (2) Commissioners absent.

(Prior to approval, Chairman Getty noted the omission of the word "Community" from the agency's new "name" that was discussed in the December Board Meeting Minutes; Commissioner Ballard and Vice-Chairman Conard both concurred with amending their motion to include a revision to the minutes to correct this omission).

Financial Report

Finance Director Vickie Huwe noted that the financial statements were included with the Board packet. She said that during the last three weeks she has been working on a number of audits, with all of her work having been completed and sent to the auditor. Chairman Getty asked how her new assistant was working in the Finance Department and Finance Director Huwe noted that things had been going well.

Old Business

With regard to Item A under Old Business “name change”, Alan reminded the Board that the name change has occurred and that he has received much positive feedback. He did note, however, that HUD seems to be confused by the name change and that apparently WCHA is the first housing authority in the State of Illinois to undertake such a name change.

With regard to Item B under Old Business, the Vera Institute report, Alan said that he had been in contact with Vera Institute representatives about the Board’s past discussions concerning the “look back” for criminal convictions. While the Board had wanted to consider a three year “look back” period (in lieu of the six (6) month period originally recommended by the Vera Institute), Vera Institute had put together and submitted additional information regarding a two (2) year “look back” period. However, Alan pointed out that there may be a new State Law, SB205, that makes its own changes on this topic and that the Bill is now awaiting the Governor’s signature. Alan said that the Bill requires housing authorities to record the number of people that apply for assistance who are turned down based on a criminal conviction and would also require that if an applicant was denied housing assistance that the applicant must be allowed to present information about mitigating circumstances (a right which Alan noted already exists). Alan went on to say, however, that the Bill would also require a six (6) month “look back” period under State Law. In light of this, Alan recommended that the Authority move forward with a two (2) year “look back” and revisit this topic later if the law changes. Alan said this would apply to approximately 130 housing authorities in the State of Illinois and that many of the smaller housing authorities have been looking to the WCHA and its policies on this topic.

Chairman Getty reminded the Board of her previously-stated concerns about reducing the “look back” period from five (5) years to six (6) months and would prefer the three (3) year “look back” period that the Board had discussed at prior meetings. However, in light of the developments noted by Alan, she stated that her thoughts were for WCHA to go ahead with the two (2) year “look back” period and then revisit that issue if required by State Law. She asked the other Commissioners for their perspectives on this and all of the other Commissioners in attendance concurred.

New Business

Chairman Getty referenced Item B “Election of Secretary/Treasurer”. She said that the position had been vacated by Vice-Chairman Conard’s election to the Vice-Chairman position at the December 2020 meeting and she opened the floor for nominations. Vice-Chairman Conard nominated Commissioner Potter for the position of Secretary/Treasurer. There were no other nominations for that position and nominations were closed. A motion to elect Danielle J.A. Potter as Secretary/Treasurer was made by Vice-Chairman 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.

Executive Session

None.

Action taken from Executive Session

None

Commissioner Reddic noted that she had an item that she wished to address. She said that she had recently graduated from the WCHA's Family Self-Sufficiency Program in which she had been participating since 2016. As a result, she indicated that she had purchased her own home in December 2020 and is no longer receiving assistance through the WCHA. Nonetheless, she noted that she will be continuing on the Board and thanked the Board for allowing her to do so. The other Commissioners and Attorney Pirages extended their heartfelt congratulations to Commissioner Reddic for her accomplishments.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Potter and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Ballard. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote of the five (5) Commissioners present with none against and two (2) Commissioners absent. The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Danielle J. A. Potter, Recording Secretary