

**MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF
THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK
TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024
MILLS PARK TOWER
7:45 AM**

OFFICIAL RECORD

PRESENT: Commissioners Walz, Teitelman, Kelm, Socall, Sood, and Chairman Muse
Staff, Pope, Swaggerty, Southward, Burgos, Carpenter

APPROVAL OF REGULAR OPHA FEBRUARY 20, 2024, MEETING MINUTES

Chairperson Muse asked if there were any corrections to the February 20, 2024, OPHA regular meeting minutes. There were none.

It was moved (Teitelman) and seconded (Kelm) to approve the February 20, 2024, meeting minutes of the Housing Authority of the Village of Oak Park. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Chairperson Muse then opened the floor for public comment. She asked that individuals who speak state their name and unit # for the record and limit their comments to three (3) minutes. She also asked that they use the microphone so they could be heard.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Merrit-White (14D) discussed the book "*Evicted*" by Matthew Desmond and recommended "*Poverty by America*" from the same author. She explained that poverty is sky rocketing, especially for Black mothers and children. She encouraged the Housing Authority to consider attending one of Dr. Katrina Fisher's "Evicted Laboratory." She added that we need to normalize the conversation around evictions, so people won't be ashamed to come forward when they need help.

Harris (4F) asked if there was a plan for handling the Cicadas that are coming in May through June. Executive Director Pope responded that there is no current plan, but stated he will look into it and circle back with Ms. Harris after the meeting.

Chairperson Muse asked if there were any further public comments. There were none.

HCVP WAITLIST OPENING UPDATE

Director Cobb stated that the 2024 OPHA Housing Choice Voucher Waiting List opened as scheduled on Monday, March 4, 2024, at 8:30 am. She noted that as expected, the first day of the waitlist opening was the busiest with 10,000+ pre-applications submitted. She added that over 80% of those pre-applications received were submitted by new applicants. She reported that a number of households who had applied in 2022 experienced technical difficulty accessing the pre-application this time due to outdated or forgotten login information already in the system. She said this required additional steps and technical assistance from both staff and Yardi. She added that so far staff have been able to address those issues and provide those households with access to the online pre-application.

Executive Director Pope added that it is helpful having community partners working with us. He explained we received calls from New Moms and Housing Forward to assist with their clients. He added that the collective outreach has been very helpful and highly successful.

Commissioner Walz shared that she was talking to an applicant in the community who said that they were happy with how transparent, open and easy the process was.

Executive Director Pope thanked Commissioner Walz for her comment and asked if there were any other comments or questions. He explained that there would be more data to report at the end of the week including who is applying and from what areas, numbers of new applicants vs. returning applicants, and preference numbers. He said it's good to see the amount of enthusiasm and active engagement that we have been receiving.

Commissioner Socall said the timing of the Village's FYI was helpful as well. Executive Director Pope agreed and explained that the FYI was sent out to people's homes on the opening day of the waitlist. He added that the FYI along with other published materials clearly explained that it did not matter what day or time during the waitlist opening you applied, and that all applicants would have the same opportunity to be randomly selected. Despite this he reported that over half of the 10,000+ pre-applications were received in the first hour.

Chairperson Muse stated that this was a huge undertaking and thanked staff for keeping the board informed throughout the process. She highlighted that these numbers indicate what she discussed last month regarding the importance of family self-sufficiency programs. She stated that while we currently lack the capacity to support a family self-sufficiency program, today's housing instability warrants that this year we take a serious look at developing a program that moves families out of vouchers and into more stable ownership positions for generational wealth and equities for family members.

Chairperson Muse asked if there were any further comments or questions. There were none.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

MILLS PARK TOWER

Property Manager, Carpenter briefly summarized the administrative, maintenance and resident activities summary for the month of February. She highlighted the Tai Chi classes that are held every Saturday with an average attendance of eighteen (18) residents and nineteen (19) residents who attended the February Birthdays Celebration.

Lloyd (11H) asked what the procedure for seniors who become disabled after they move in for requesting an ADA compliant unit. Executive Director Pope responded that he would investigate what the procedure would be. He said he believes there would be an opportunity to relocate residents that require disability accommodations before moving in new residents.

Commissioner Teitelman said he was impressed with the level of resident participation at the resident meeting. He asked how frequently resident meetings are held. Property Manager Carpenter explained she hopes to conduct them quarterly. Commissioner Teitelman added that a regular scheduled meeting would help with structure and would provide a place for miscellaneous questions to be discussed. Executive Director Pope agreed, and we should be able to host the resident meetings regularly now that the transmission of COVID-19 has materially diminished.

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER

Director Cobb briefly summarized the Housing Choice Voucher Program activities for February. She highlighted a lease-up rate of 98%. She also shared that she is attempting to coordinate a meeting with the State Representative and various referral agencies to try to increase NED voucher utilization. Executive Director Pope added that we had a good meeting with the Fostering Youths to Independence (FYI vouchers) Program people and are trying to include them in the conversation.

Director Cobb reported that we issued vouchers to the final 14 applicants from the 2022 Waiting List. Year-to-date two (2) new owners have been added to the program. She added she hopes to schedule quarterly owner meetings starting in April.

Chairperson Muse asked about the lack of available larger units. Director Cobb explained that we have seen growth in landlord participation since the recent increase in our payment standards, including landlords with larger units. Executive Director Pope added that he believes the increase is due to a combination of the new payment standards and our advertising and outreach related to the waiting list.

Chairperson Muse asked if we have a marketing plan specifically for landlords. Executive Director Pope stated no, but that landlords do receive information about HCV participation through the Regional Housing Center. He added we can look further at more directed marketing efforts.

Commissioner Socall asked if CIC financed apartments participate in our HCV Program as landlords. Executive Director Pope answered no but said we should consider and pursue actively encouraging them to participate in the voucher program as landlords.

OLD BUSINESS

Executive Director Pope explained that the large elevator was down, and Suburban Elevator was coming to fix it that morning. There were two potential issues; if the first issue fixes it, the larger elevator would be up the same day. If it is the second issue it would take the remainder of the week to fix. The full-scale restoration process of the elevators will begin on the small elevator at the end of the month. The controller, a part needed to begin the restoration process, is currently enroute from California.

Commissioner Socall asked if there is concern that with the large elevator issue taking the small elevator offline could cause a catastrophe. Executive Director Pope responded that Suburban elevator will not take the smaller elevator offline while the larger elevator was being fixed. He emphasized that the only way they'd take the small elevator out of service is if they were confident that the larger elevator will work as expected for the 12-16 weeks the smaller elevator is being restored. Once the small elevator is finished, they would start the restoration for the large elevator. The immediate focus is to ensure the larger elevator is working properly so restoration of the smaller elevator can begin. He added that we will provide notice directly to each resident's unit of the date the restoration process will begin.

NEW BUSINESS

Executive Director Pope announced this was M. Southward's last board meeting and to thank him for all his work, adding that we have been incredibly lucky to have him on board for the past 24 years. Chairperson Muse and the entire board congratulated Mr. Southward on his retirement and thanked him for his many contributions to OPHA and its residents and program participants.

ADJOURNMENT OF March 12, 2024, REGULAR MEETING

It was moved (Kelm) and seconded (Socall) to adjourn to the March 12, 2024, regular meeting. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Andrew Teitelman, Secretary