



**FRANKLIN COUNTY REGIONAL HOUSING &
REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

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**MINUTES
Annual Meeting – October 17, 2022**

The Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority Board of Commissioners conducted the annual meeting of the Authority on **October 17, 2022**, via Zoom. at 4:48 p.m.

1. Call to Order

Executive Director Gina Govoni called the meeting to order at 4:45 p.m.

Commissioners Present (via roll call): M. Slowinski M. Cucchiara S. Worgaftik L. Brown S. Cottrell F. Williams

Absent: A. Bresciano

Staff Present: G. Govoni A. Watson A. Larose B. McHugh K. Reardon K. Kelley L. Cornish N. Sauber P. Parmakian

2. Actions

2022 Annual Report: G. Govoni introduced the presentation and began the discussion.

Leased Housing

K. Reardon stated that the Leased Housing department manages the Section 8 Voucher Program, the Massachusetts Rental Vouchers, and the Alternate Housing Vouchers. The majority of the vouchers are Section 8, with 442 being mobile and 142 being project-based. The mobile section 8 vouchers can be brought anywhere, and the project-based are tied to specific units. Eight new project-based vouchers are coming online with Sanderson Place. Additionally, there are 15 emergency vouchers and 13 mainstream 811 vouchers. The emergency housing vouchers are for homeless individuals; the department has ten individuals leased and is working on the remaining 5. Each participant can spend up to \$2,500 in service fees such as utilities, security deposits, and buying essential items. This year the department spent \$20,513 in special service fees on the ten homeless participants.

In order to issue the vouchers, applicants must be pulled from the waiting list. Last year, 250 applicants were pulled, 26 of whom were veterans. In total, 70 vouchers were issued, with 33 new admissions to the Section 8 Voucher Program.

The Family Self-Sufficiency program assists those who wish to increase their household income. As the money increases, the department puts money into an escrow account on behalf of the participants. Upon graduation, they receive the money in their

account. Two participants graduated from the program this year and were paid out \$23,066.

HCEC

A. Watson stated that the Housing Consumer Education Center provides housing education, information, and referrals regardless of income. Overall, HCEC served 850 people in a variety of different ways.

One of the largest programs is RAFT, which is Residential Assistance for Families in Transition. The application for this program is now available online to assure full accessibility among participants state-wide. Though, paper assistance is available when needed.

M. Cucchiara joined at 4:55 p.m.

A. Watson continued, stating that in FY22, 701 households were assisted with RAFT and ERAP Funding. ERAP was Emergency Rental Assistance for those possibly being evicted, though this program is no longer active. In total, just over \$4,000,000 was spent assisting participants with a variety of housing-related costs.

G. Govoni stated that the HCEC team has processed ten times the volume of participants that are typically seen without ten times more staffing. The volume in RAFT eclipsed the amount of HAP administered in Section 8 over many months in the pandemic.

S. Worgaftik questioned why the numbers have slightly fallen since FY22. A. Watson responded, stating that in the last two fiscal years, there was federal ERAP funding through RAFT. This funding had no cap on up to 18 months of rental arrearage. Currently, the only available funding is the standard RAFT funding which has a cap of \$10,000. While there is less funding, many people still need and utilize what is available.

G. Govoni stated that as of August 2022, DHCD also reimplemented a notice to quit as a qualifier for RAFT eligibility. Many entities are working to repeal this action to ensure ease of access to the program. M. Cucchiara questioned if some applicants have been turned away due to this. A. Watson responded affirmatively, stating that while some applicants have been denied, more time has been spent educating landlords and tenants on the use of the notice to quit form. Additionally, being denied does not bar participants from reapplying.

RDI

A. Larose stated that Rural Development, Inc. is the non-profit developmental arm of HRA. The main project this year has been Sanderson Place in Sunderland. This year has shown immense progress, large in part through help from the project manager Laura Baker and many HRA staff members. Pam Parmakian, Nikki Sauber, Katie Kelley, and Katelyn Reardon have put together a great team effort to assist with this project.

Currently, the team is waiting on a certificate of occupancy, which is dependent upon the impending completion of the electrical components. Due to global supply chain issues, the delivery of such components has been delayed. The team is working on putting a temporary solution in place.

The marketing for this project began in April. In total, there were 62 applicants in the lottery, with 33 households ready to move in.

Another development project that has been ongoing since February is creating permanent supportive housing at the 60 Wells Street in Greenfield. This project is sponsored by the local non-profit Clinical and Support Options. Next year, CSO is slated to take over the shelter operations, which are currently managed by ServiceNet. The one-stop application is due next Friday and is currently being put together. CEDAC has provided predevelopment funding, and the team is making great progress.

Additionally, to highlight the new projects and ensure RDI's mission is well understood in the community, a new website has been put together by Nikki Sauber.

M. Cucchiara asked what the total cost for the 60 Wells Street project was. A. Larose responded, stating that it is around \$19,000,000 though it is still ongoing.

Property Management

P. Parmakian stated that currently, there are 264 scattered sites across Franklin County in the portfolio. The new Sanderson Place development has added 33 new units of senior housing; much of this year was spent putting together the lottery. Including non-qualified applicants, there were over 100 individuals that applied.

This year, 39 units were filled throughout the public and private portfolios; this was a banner year for occupancy. There has never been a year on record in the system that had a higher rate of occupancy than FY22.

G. Govoni interjected, noting that this progress is outstanding. The data is key to understanding HRA's true impact in the community.

P. Parmakian continued, stating that the Property Management department is delighted to report that the department has seen growth. A permanent part-time applications person and additional maintenance personnel have been brought on board. Unit turnovers are faster and more efficient than ever before.

This year, DHCD has worked with to improve the functionality of CHAMP. Currently, HRA is the only true regional housing authority in Massachusetts. Due to this, HRA has been eager to assist DHCD with developing helpful solutions to existing agency-specific problems. This year alone, 26 CHAMP list pulls have been completed.

The annual report references the details regarding the current public rehabilitation projects. The best day in housing is awarding a new home, and the Property Management department has had a very successful year.

CDBG

B. McHugh stated that typically the Community Development department focuses on one or two major projects per year. The main construction project this year focused on restoring the sidewalks outside of the Shea Theatre in Turners Falls. Five bids were submitted, ranging from approximately \$185,000 to \$400,000. The total cost for the project was \$206,790. The grant included \$276,000; thus, some funds will be reallocated

to other projects in Montague. Everything aside from the kiosk was removed and replaced with concrete and bricks.

Regarding housing rehabilitation, Community Development had about \$1,000,000 in funding. A great portion of this funding was put toward the communities in Heath and Hawley. Through using current grants and Revolving Loan funds, HRA managed 30 Rehab Projects in nine Franklin County towns in FY22.

G. Govoni emphasized that managing and running a regional rehabilitation program is no small undertaking and commended the CD team for their work.

Finance

L. Cornish stated that one of the main items that stands out in the financials from the past five years is the total asset change of \$2,661,000 from 2017 to 2021. The liabilities also saw an increase, but the net changed by nearly \$1,000,000. This puts HRA in the right direction. The total net position is becoming more positive; the non-current liabilities are inclusive of the OPEB and pension liabilities. The pension liabilities are going to fluctuate year-to-year.

The statement of revenue expenses and net position were also compared over the past five years. Revenue includes all of the programs and has grown from \$8,000,000 to roughly \$12,000,000. A great deal of this growth came from ERAP through HCEC. Section 8 and CDBG both continue to move up as well. The change in the net position shows that there have been large losses in FY17 and 18, though it is now heading in a positive direction.

Operations

N. Sauber stated that the operational focus this year has been on the growth and modernization of the HRA systems. There have been many changes at HRA, and it has been vital to balance this focus on growth with stability and sustainability.

This year, HRA partnered with TechCollective and no longer has internal IT staff members. Understanding HRA's technological needs has led to the modernization of the IT systems in place. The Orange Teen House has had an increased need for IT assistance due to the growing number of on-site staff members. This need has been met through a variety of projects, and the space is now more supportive for said staff members and their clients.

The Human Resources department has transitioned from Finance to Admin. The focus this year has been on streamlining existing processes, reviewing the employee handbook, and evaluating policies. Telecommuting, Family Friendly, and many other new policies have been developed with the eye for recruiting and maintaining quality staff members.

G. Govoni stated that the strength and sustainability of any company is the connection between the staff members and how they work together. The Operations Department has come a long way in a very short amount of time with Nikki's leadership.

Summary

G. Govoni stated that HRA has seen many accomplishments over the past year, starting with the dedication of Spinner Park. In Orange, the HCEC department is live and on-site. With RDI, Sanderson Place has seen immense growth since this time last year. Highland Village's rehabilitation was completed after being in the project pipeline for five years. Stoughton Place's new look has also been completed. The HRA team has been working together to achieve great goals and working interdepartmentally to achieve the same goal of providing housing and improving the quality of life for those living in Franklin County.

Commissioner Slowinski moved, and Commissioner Cucchiara seconded a motion to accept and approve for submission to the towns of Franklin County and other interested parties the 2022 Annual Report of the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

17-4336 Vote 6 in favor; 0 opposed; 0 abstaining

Nomination and Election of Officers: Commissioner Slowinski moved, and Commissioner Worgaftik seconded a motion to appoint the slate of Commissioners to serve as officers for a one-year term beginning 10/31/2022 and ending on the date of the annual meeting to be held in October 2022:

Chair: Faith Williams

Vice-Chair: Michael Cucchiara

Treasurer: Leslie Brown

17-4337 Vote 6 in favor; 0 opposed; 0 abstaining

Rural Development, Inc. Board of Directors Commissioner Appointments: Commissioner Slowinski moved, and Commissioner Worgaftik seconded a motion to appoint the following two Commissioners to serve as HRA Representatives on the Rural Development, Inc. Board of Directors until the annual meeting of the HRA Board of Commissioners in October 2023.

Commissioner 1: Faith Williams

Commissioner 2: Leslie Brown

17-4338 Vote 6 in favor; 0 opposed; 0 abstaining

3. Adjourn

The regular meeting of the HRA Board of Directors convened at 5:33 p.m. as there was no further business to discuss.