



HOUSING CONNECT

MINUTES OF THE ELECTRONIC MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

October 21, 2020

PRESENT (video):

Jennifer Johnston – Chair
Mark Johnston – Vice Chair
Phil Bernal – Commissioner
Erin Litvack – Commissioner
Spencer Moffat – Commissioner
Christine Nguyen – Commissioner

EXCUSED:

Gwen White – Commissioner

STAFF PRESENT (video):

Janice Kimball – Chief Executive Officer
Andre Bartlome – Chief Finance Officer
Zach Bale – Chief Programs Officer
Mike Kienast – Chief Operations Officer
Jeremy Runia – Real Estate Development Director
Jarin Blackham – IT Director
Ilez Brady – Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Director
Krysta Niemczyk – Grant Programs Director
Dan Pincock – Executive Administrator

COMMENCE

At 11:33 a.m., Board Chair Jennifer Johnston welcomed the Board members and the Housing Connect management team in attendance to the Board meeting.

1. PUBLIC COMMENT

No members of the public were in attendance other than the invited guest, Mr. Nick Fritz, Chair of the Housing Connect Fund (HCF) Board.

2. CONSENT AGENDA

The following items were included in the Consent Agenda:

- the Housing Connect Board Meeting minutes from September's meeting
- Covewood remodel update
- 426 South 500 East project update
- Hunter Hollow activity report
- staff changes

Vice Chair Spencer Moffat motioned to approve the Housing Connect Board Meeting minutes for September 16, 2020, with Commissioner Nguyen seconding. All Board members present (Chair Jennifer Johnston, Vice Chair Spencer Moffat, Commissioners Bernal, Mark Johnston, Litvack, and Nguyen) voted affirmatively, and the minutes were approved.

3. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board opted not to enter into Executive Session.

4. HOUSING CONNECT FUND (HCF) REPORT AND PRESENTATION

Housing Connect CPO Zach Bale (who also serves in the capacity of HCF Executive Director) introduced Mr. Nick Fritz (HCF Board Chair) who gave a presentation to the Board about the Housing Connect Fund and the Social Determinants of Health. He briefly touched on HCF's mission, 5-year goals, goal setting, the Social Determinants of Health framework, and HCF's next steps.

He said that the HCF Board formally adopted the Social Determinants of Health framework as a way of organizing the language and the strategy on what programming it feels is critical. CPO Bale gave some history of the Needs Assessment and the Outcome Analysis (outcomes which were specific to impacts on population) which was conducted by Housing Connect staff and which were used to help HCF arrive at the adoption of the Social Determinants of Health. They categorized the outcomes from the Outcome Analysis into six groups, which they realized closely aligned with the main components of the Social Determinants of Health framework.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Board voted to approve Resolution #1020 - adoption of the Social Determinants of Health to anchor current and future Housing Connect programming. Commissioner Nguyen motioned to approve the adoption, and Commissioner Mark Johnston seconded the motion. All Board members present (Chair Jennifer Johnston, Vice Chair Spencer Moffat, Commissioners Bernal, Mark Johnston, Litvack, and Nguyen) voted affirmatively, and Resolution #1020 was approved.

5. MOVING TO WORK (MTW) DISCUSSION

CEO Janice Kimball presented information to the Board about Housing Connect's plans to apply for Moving To Work (MTW) status from HUD. She started off by explaining that Housing Connect has an opportunity to apply for HUD's Moving To Work program, which is a demonstration program that allows housing authorities some flexibility with regulations, specifically looking at how to design policies, programs, and procedures to meet local needs. The objectives include using federal dollars more efficiently, increasing housing choices for low-income families, and promoting self-sufficiency.

MTW has requirements which serve as checks and balances to make sure the housing authority is taking care of the same population. These requirements are to ensure that 75% of households are very low-income; to establish rent policies that encourage employment and self-sufficiency; to continue serving the same number of households and family configuration and sizes; and to meet health and safety standards.

She reiterated that the benefit to the program is its flexibility and said that a lot of the policies and program designs are geared toward the larger agencies throughout the country and don't work as well with the smaller housing authorities (asset management, for instance, where it works well with a large property of 100 or more units in a single property, but Housing Connect's scattered sites properties have never performed well under HUD's inspection system, because Housing Connect's sites and systems points weighed more and received more deductions because of it). She pointed out that the other benefit is the fungibility between HUD funding which the program allows and to re-purpose that funding to better meet the needs of the community.

She reviewed MTW's expansion, where Congress approved 100 new Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) for the program in 2016 (from 39 housing authorities which have already been awarded MTW designation) to look at 4 specific policies: flexibility with funding for small-sized PHA's; rent reform (which Housing Connect is interested in); work requirements; and landlord incentives.

She added that in order to qualify, a PHA needs to be recognized as a "High Performer" agency and have geographic diversity. Housing Connect is one of 36 housing authorities nationwide to be considered for MTW.

Under the Rent Reform policy, CEO Janice Kimball pointed out that HUD is interested in knowing whether there is a better way to determine affordable rent. The policy would apply to non-elderly, non-disabled households, and, if Housing Connect is approved, half of the client households would go into a control group where there would be no change to rent calculation (i.e., business as usual), and the other half would be randomly selected into the rent study test group, where rent would be determined based on a new calculation. She added that there would be a safety net/hardship provisions for those whose income decreased. She said this would also move re-exams to every 3 years (thus reducing the paperwork for the agency) and that rent would be calculated based on gross income, with no deductions.

She briefly reviewed the way rent is currently calculated for residents and the negative implications associated with the method used, and then she discussed the two Rent Reform structures: tiered rent and stepped rent (which the agency prefers). The tiered rent puts people in income tiers, and she pointed out that there is a potential that rent could increase significantly at the re-exam for this option. Housing Connect, she said, is leaning towards the stepped rent option, where rent increases over time according to a fixed schedule regardless of time, and household rent would increase every year by a set amount, based on a formula from the Fair Market Rent (FMR).

She showed how two sample households (Household A – Income Increase; and Household B – Income Decrease) would be impacted under the model.

She then displayed the timeline and answered questions and comments.

Commissioner Mark Johnston wanted to know to which funding sources would the MTW apply? CEO Janice Kimball answered that it would apply to the two main sources: Public Housing Operating and Capital Fund and Section 8 Rent and Admin funds. She noted that specialty programs and vouchers are not part of this program. Commissioner Mark Johnston then asked about Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) (which is based on Section 8). CEO Janice Kimball responded that Housing Connect would like to continue the FSS program in MTW but is unsure right now what that is going to look like. Housing Connect would vet this with HUD.

Commissioner Nguyen expressed concerns that clients would not be meeting often enough with case managers. CEO Janice Kimball agreed that there needs to be ongoing conversations with the families so that they are remembering all of their other obligations and that Housing Connect is offering the appropriate support. She said that the Families BOND program which Housing Connect developed could be adjusted for this purpose.

CEO Janice Kimball added that it has been pointed out that there may not really be an incentive to get off of the program and that Housing Connect would need to work with HUD on this issue.

Chair Jennifer Johnston asked about forecasts to the budget. CFO Andre Bartlome displayed various scenarios showing the savings to the agency. Commissioner Mark Johnston felt that this would be much simpler for the staff (not having to recalculate income as often) and that there would be a substantial savings where those staff could be re-deployed elsewhere within the agency. CEO Janice Kimball said that the agency would like to bring back a housing retention specialist and also helping people who have vouchers to get housed quickly. She said management should think through FSS, too.

Commissioner Nguyen inquired about whether Section 8 would benefit from a yearly household exam or whether it would be every 3 years. CEO Janice Kimball said that it would be every 3 years. Commissioner Nguyen wanted to know whether clients could still contact their case managers, in case of problems with landlords, etc. , and CEO Janice Kimball confirmed that they would be able to reach out to their case managers as needed.

Housing Connect would be limited for the first 6 years as to what they could do under the model, but she said after the first 6 years, She felt that there are some models that could be looked at across the nation that could help Housing Connect determine how to calculate rent and benefit the households which Housing Connect serves.

Management will ask the Board to adopt this plan in December, after tenant meetings, the RAB, and a public hearing have taken place, based on the timeline.

6. ACTION ITEMS

The Board approved the following action:

Resolution #1021 - Emergency Preference voucher deadline extension and approval of additional vouchers: COO Mike Kienast explained to the Board that Housing Connect would like to extend the deadline for the Emergency Preference vouchers which were first established when COVID broke out (Resolution #1002). Through Resolution #1021, the agency has requested that the deadline be pushed until March 2021. Housing Connect also asked for the Board to approve 100 additional vouchers for homeless with chronic health conditions who are older than 55 years of age and are impacted by COVID-19 and who also risk losing their housing and whose income was at 80% AMI or lower prior to the emergency. Commissioner Litvack motioned to approve, and Commissioner Bernal seconded the motion. All Board members present (Chair Jennifer Johnston, Vice Chair Spencer Moffat, Commissioners Bernal, Mark Johnston, Litvack, and Nguyen) voted affirmatively, and Resolution #1021 was approved.

7. CEO'S REPORT

Housing Connect CEO Janice Kimball updated the Board on the following:

- COVID: To date, 5 staff have tested positive, but none have been work-related. We are doing inspections in units (smoke detectors, filters, etc.) before winter and are also doing wellness checks of the residents.
- Client feedback: We have contracted with Pulse For Good for clients to provide feedback on how we're doing (this will include some kiosks for clients to provide their input as well as web-based feedback).
- Meetings with cities: I have been meeting with officials from cities around the County to re-introduce Housing Connect and to remind officials that we are a resource in affordable housing. My most recent meeting was with the Riverton City Council on Friday, October 16.
- Diversity goals: We have contracted with Choice Point for the diversity, equity, and inclusion training. In early October, seven members of the management team participated in some WOKE training.
- CDCU sales: So far, 10 homes have been sold through disposition, and we are getting ready to transition the next 16 homes. The goal is

to sell all disposition properties by October 2021.

- Choice Property Solutions (our 3rd party property management entity): We now have three properties which we are handling the property management: i) Denver Street (VOA); ii) Central City (First Step House); and iii) Kathleen Robison Huntsman Apartments (YWCA)

8. COMMISSIONERS INPUT

Board commissioners provided the following input:

Commissioner Litvack remarked that the emergency response at the County level continues. The number of homeless has doubled. She appreciated Housing Connect's assistance and the efforts of the Board.

Vice Chair Moffat mentioned that housing prices continue to rise.

Commissioner Nguyen expressed her appreciation for Housing Connect's efforts in moving individuals out of facilities and making sure NED vouchers are filled.

Commissioner Bernal informed the Board about the upcoming national NAHRO fall conference.

9. OTHER

Regarding Fraud Risk Assessment, CFO Andre Bartlome informed the Board that the online training does not apply to commissioners of housing authorities.

Commissioner Litvack asked about wifi access for residents, noting that this is becoming a huge issue which is causing a divide. CEO Janice Kimball explained that we have wifi in our newer properties in the common areas but that we don't have it in our older properties. There are some contractual limitations, too.

Chair Jennifer Johnston reminded the Board members about making donations to the agency.

ADJOURN

No other items were discussed, and at 1:05 p.m., the meeting was adjourned.

The November Housing Connect Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 18.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Pincock
Executive Administrator