

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

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SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Laura Taylor
Department of Housing and Community Development
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300
Boston, Massachusetts 02114

Re: Great Barrington Housing Authority

March 16, 2022

Dear Ms. Taylor,

This letter is intended to raise questions and observations about the structure, responsibility and history of the Great Barrington Housing Authority (GBHA), a suggestion for solving issues that consistently prevent it from fulfilling its mission and a request for guidance to improve this situation.

- 1) The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) that oversees state housing authorities including Great Barrington Housing Authority (GBHA) has guidelines that demand harassment of any kind be reported immediately to the local executive director (ED) and board. However, under the current scenario, GBHA staff has no recourse when consistent abuse (and evidence) comes from a GBHA board member. There is no DHCD Human Resource policy that we are aware of that provides GBHA's employees any reporting option when the abuse comes from an actual board member.
- 2) Approximately one third of GBHA's physical units are located in the town of Sheffield, a separate emergency response, police and health jurisdiction. Yet Great Barrington's tax dollars go to supervise facilities that legally fall under the town of Sheffield's charter and jurisdiction. e.g. GB administrators, health director, fire & safety, IT and legal employees' time and salaries go toward examples such as: COVID response, town funded senior transportation, fire hazards and health issues with ever present hoarding behavior, open meeting law disputes, fire safety drills, guns in units, marijuana use & policy with children in public communal areas.

Furthermore, Sheffield residents do not have elected representation on the board.

- 3) Surely, the history and mission of the state's affordable housing solution is laudable and successful in many areas. However, the recent reality in rural areas presents a statewide framework that produces grave fiscal, service and time inefficiencies. Just as Berkshire County schools were slated in the 60's as the Commonwealth's first school district consolidations, the county's multiple housing authorities are also ripe for a vision that saves tax dollars by co-opting and streamlining responsibilities and attracts professional and competent staff and board members.
- 4) Lastly, we have additional communications disseminated routinely by an elected board member to paid subscribers. Aside from the inherent conflict of interest (using an elected position for personal gain) this board member's "reporting" spawns misleading information for larger countywide publications such as the Berkshire Eagle and Berkshire Edge and solidifies a poor image of state-run affordable housing in the area. Needless to say, this behavior costs multiple parties much time and money including DHCD, vendors and employees.

As members who have sat on countless boards (county, town, church, search and initiatives) and have been diligent about online DHCD training, we consider ourselves very "trained" volunteers. Our participation and support would come when a strategic approach and timeline is offered for addressing the issues listed above. In our years of volunteer service, we have never witnessed board behavior and attitude that surely your own files and experience reflect.

Our suggestion or solution would be to disband the current board of elected members effective immediately, re-establish a working "interim" board that includes Sheffield select board representation as well as a new local tenant organization representative.

We understand the merits of having part-time HA's offices, but if Sheffield has no on-site staffed ED then surely Great Barrington, and perhaps Stockbridge, Lee and Lenox do not warrant one either. We propose a serious consolidation effort and have talked with members of our Berkshire state delegation who agree that there are certainly opportunities for tax savings here through re-thinking the oversight and delivery of affordable housing to the rural people of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Mary Pat Akers, Board Member



James Mercer, Chairman



Marie Ryan, Treasurer

Cc: carolina.gonzalez@state.ma.us ; sarah.oleary@state.ma.us