

WINOOSKI HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING

4:15 P.M.
April 17, 2024

Zoom
For link please call (802) 655 2360 by
noon of the scheduled meeting.

MINUTES

Present: Chair Owen; Vice Chair Raymond; Commissioner Mace; Commissioner Al Zubaidy

Officers: ED Decarreau

Meeting called to order by Chair Owen at 4:24

1. Public Comment

No Comment

2. Approve Agenda – No Changes Proposed by Staff

No Change – continued from 3/27/24

3. Approve Minutes of February 20, 2024

Commissioner Mace motion to approve Minutes

Motion carries 3 – 0 1 abstention

4. FY 25 Budget Approval

Completed on 3/27/24

5. Discussion of Policy on Felony Standard for Wait List Application

ED Decarreau explained the issue about how HUD required a five year wait after a felony conviction. (See notes)

ED Decarreau noted that this is about the waitlist and does not impact the tenant screening process.

Commissioner Mace asked about the number of people who are turned down under the current policy. ED Decarreau noted that the rate of rejection for felony charges. Of the appeals we hear, we see drug offenses that include violent crime. Many times we see women who may have Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) protections.

Commissioner Owen clarified that there would be some mechanism to determine whether a potential issue that would allow us to reject a person for tenancy even if they were allowed on the waitlist.

Commissioner Al Zubaidy clarified that it is up to the Executive Director as to whether a person is allowed on the waitlist or accepted for tenancy. ED Decarreau noted that there is a lot of work to do on the policy to make sure we are protected regarding the two decisions the waitlist and tenancy.

Commissioner Mace noted that allowing folks with convictions for felonies on the waitlist will place folks without felonies further down on the list. Commissioner Mace also noted that folks rehabilitate themselves and the criminal justice system functions with built-in bias.

Commissioner Owen noted that the ability to appeal is an effective way to make sure the policy allows for reconsideration, also noting that people who are not familiar with the culture or is otherwise disenfranchised will struggle to take advantage of the appeal process.

Commissioner Mace asked ED Decarreau what would be helpful in terms of a policy with enough guardrails to be effective.

Commissioner Mace asked about other housing authorities are handling. ED Decarreau noted that the Vermont PHAs range from 3 – 7 years, with most at 3 or 5 years.

Commissioner Al Zubaidy noted the rise in felonies that result from drug abuse that leads to more significant crimes. Commissioner Al Zubaidy asked about the ED's position, noting that dropping the restriction to zero seems dangerous.

ED Decarreau noted that the gut instinct is a 3 restriction with the appeal process in place.

Commissioner Raymond noted that a long time ago no one with a felony could move in.

The Board agreed to head toward a three-year prohibition from the waitlist.

6. Discussion on Statewide Waitlist

Vermont State Housing Authority (VSHA) is working with an outside group. (See Notes)

Commissioner Mace asked whether this was a real initiative. ED Decarreau stated that VSHA is now working with the company.

Commissioner Raymond asked how people would enter the waitlist. The company would manage the entire enrollment process with online and paper system.

Commissioner Mace noted some skepticism about using standard protocols – noting that some solutions may be too good to be true and wants to let the state work at the wrinkles. ED Decarreau agreed with that assessment.

Commissioner Owen agreed that this was a good idea and makes sense if we can make it work.

7. Other Business

ED Decarreau noted the following:

- St. Stephen's has not closed. WHA is keeping an eye on the situation in case a opportunity presents. Commissioner Owen asked about the issue with the deal on the Church. A group that includes the Vermont Historic Preservation Office, a private developer, and us. We requested permission for an engineer to evaluate the structure.
- Having coffee with Sarah Phillips from the Vermont Community Loan Fund looking for alternatives to waiting on EverNorth or another similar partner.
- Two legal issues:
 - Washing machines were not working and the company stopped responding to requests to repair. We cancelled the contract and are trying to work out a solution to end the contract.
 - AT&T lease is being renegotiating as the current lease which expires in October of 25.
- Planning Commission is trying to write zoning that would incentivize a private developer to build three plus bedroom units. This is difficult from a market perspective. The Housing Commission is working on the issue with the Planning Commissioners.

8. Adjourn

Commissioner Mace motioned to adjourn at 5:15. Seconded by Commissioner Raymond.

Motion carries 4 - 0