

**WINNEBAGO COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY
OCTOBER 17, 2019
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Call to Order, Roll Call, Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Chairman Getty called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Following the call to order, roll call was taken.

The following Board Members were present:

Present: Vice Chairman Dina M. Getty
Commissioner Mustafa Abdall (arrived at 5:42 p.m.)
Commissioner Ronald E. Ballard (arrived at 5:42 p.m.)
Commissioner Alanna D. Conard
Commissioner Danielle J.A. Potter
Commissioner Tasha N. Reddic

Absent: Chairman Fred S. Wescott

Also present: Executive Director Alan Zais, Assistant Executive Director Felicia Davis, Finance Director Vickie Huwe and James R. Pirages of the law firm of Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP.

Following roll call, Vice Chairman Getty led those in attendance in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Introduction of Guests

Three (3) guests from the Marron Institute of Urban Management at New York University were introduced. Those individuals are Sandy Mullins, Janelle Prueter and Jonathan Kulick.

Changes to Agenda

Executive Director Alan Zais asked the Board for permission to move to this point of the meeting agenda the Item listed under "Old Business" so to allow the representatives from the Marron Institute to make their presentation. The Board concurred with this request.

Old Business

Sandy Mullins, Janelle Prueter and Jonathan Kulick of the Marron Institute of Urban Management at New York University made their presentation. Janelle indicated that there is a great partnership between them and Alan Zais and the rest of the WCHA staff. She wanted to advise the Board of how the program was evolving and of developments associated with the Graduated Reintegration Program.

By way of background, she noted that in 2016 two (2) of her colleagues at NYU introduced the concept of graduated reintegration for people getting out of prison. The thought behind this was

that there needed to be a more thoughtful and rational process for individuals coming out of prison to successfully reintroduce them into their communities.

She said that there were several concepts governing the graduated reintegration process including that it be voluntary; that they be released early to tightly controlled supervision; that a key element of it was to provide housing as well as referral to supportive services; and that it be tightly controlled at first but that participants be rewarded for accomplishments (or sanctioned for violations) during the process (with those being rewarded getting more freedom as they are reentering their communities).

She noted that NYU awarded funding in 2016 to see if this concept could be implemented. Two sites were selected -- Winnebago County and Peoria County -- involving 63 people. Of the 63, however, three (3) individuals were removed from the Program before being released. She said that the eligibility criteria for involvement in the Program were established by the Illinois Department of Corrections (DOC) with services being provided by TASC. Among the criteria set by DOC was that there could be no sex offenders, no individuals convicted of domestic violence or of violent crimes or of notorious offenses.

She reported that as the Program proceeded, finding landlords had been quite a task within private housing. She said that 21 participants have now completed the Program (with 11 of those in the Rockford area). She noted that not every one of the original 60 has done well (citing to the fact that 11 individuals have been arrested (but among those only two (2) convictions with three (3) dismissals of the charges)). Others of those arrested are still pending.

She added that at this point they do not know the actual recidivism rate. Vice Chairman Getty asked about their definition of the term "recidivism" and it was acknowledged that there may be a different definition of that term between the Graduated Reintegration Program and that at the DOC.

There was discussion regarding the services offered by TASC to the Program participants. She noted that in the Rockford area there had been services provided by Rosecrance and that other services included employment and training as well as placing them with actual employers.

Janelle noted that two (2) of the participants had sadly died of Opioid overdoses (one (1) in Rockford and one (1) in Peoria) but that while sometimes things happen within this population, some of the participants are doing well. She said that the "biggest gap" in services involve psychiatric services. She added that among the factors that are of the highest importance are housing and employment. She said the statistics through mid-September show that 85% of the individuals had obtained a job at one point, with 55% of them remaining employed as of mid-September.

Janelle said that after one (1) year in the Program, individuals are no longer involved in the Program but remain on parole and may still call on a TASC case manager for assistance. She noted that it was invaluable that public housing options have been made available by the WCHA. While the pilot program concludes at the end of this year, she said that the new Illinois Reentry Pilot Program will then be available and cited to the fact that there have been 30 vouchers awarded to the WCHA (20 in Winnebago County, 5 in both Stephenson and Boone Counties) as

part of the Illinois Reentry Pilot Program. She noted that this type of housing is important – citing to the fact that Winnebago County has the third highest number of individuals being released by the DOC within the State of Illinois (528 individuals).

Sandy Mullins then provided additional comments. She noted that this was a unique Program and that the Illinois Reentry Pilot Program is being supported by the DOC and by IHDA at the State level. She said that they (the Marron Institute) are making recommendations to the State for the State Program (based upon their experience over the past year). Among the recommendations are the following:

- Appropriate support before and after prison;
- Assuring that other basic needs are met (e.g., utilities, furniture, household goods, etc.) as part of the housing process;
- Revisiting eligibility criteria and the selection process (she noted that before there were limited criteria applied and that they recommend that the individual selected be in the “right head space” and that further thought needs to be given as to who is best for this Program (citing to better success with older inmates or inmates who have had an opportunity to go through more of a transformative process while in prison)); and
- That the interview process be more rigorous.

Executive Director Alan Zais said that the WCHA has always taken “bite size” pieces with new programs and that is the way that the WCHA went into this pilot program. He said that the WCHA, by policy, had agreed to start with non-violent offenders and that its involvement has been unfolding well -- as recognized by the State giving the WCHA one-third (1/3) of the state vouchers awarded as part of the upcoming pilot program. He noted that the WCHA staff members have been doing a great job with identifying landlords, providing furniture and supportive services, etc. Alan requested the Board to consider expanding the Program as to eligibility so as to include individuals who may have been violent offenders but excluding individuals who were sex offenders or who had been convicted of crimes involving methamphetamines. He said that this would require the Board to approve revising the policy to remove the limitation of allowing only the involvement of non-violent offenders and that such a revision would have to be included in the ACOP for public housing as well as in the policies applicable to the Rental Housing Support Program.

Commissioner Conard asked the Marron Institute representatives as to whether there was much data available to support the request to revise the policy made by Alan . Alan commented that the WCHA is unlikely to know the outcome of this until we try. Janelle noted that Illinois was the first State which had been involved in such a program and, therefore, that there is not much data available to support the policy change request.

Vice Chairman Getty noted that she had been in support of the Program from the beginning but that she did not know if she was ready “to go all in yet” with the allowance of violent offenders into the Program. She thought that the WCHA needed to take a gradual approach on violent offenders and questioned whether the DOC had established “levels” of violent offenders – noting

that there is a spectrum of violent offenders ranging from those convicted of domestic violence to those who have engaged in public violent offenses. Sandy Mullins noted that people apply for the Program and the State was looking at a process involving the more personalized vetting of every applicant for the Program. Sandy noted that the DOC maintains both a “risk assessment” with regard to recidivism as well as a violent screening score for individuals coming out of DOC. Vice Chairman Getty noted her belief that if we are going to change the policy, it should only initially involve low-level violent offenders; Janelle responded by saying that this request could be given to the DOC as something for them to focus on.

Vice Chairman Getty said that she favored taking a gradual approach with this given the fact that the WCHA’s residents are generally facing challenges in their lives and she would not want to see them faced with other potential challenges coming from the violent offender population being released by DOC. Commissioner Reddic questioned how the WCHA residents would know about these individuals’ convictions and noted that individuals coming out of the DOC need a chance. She shared information about a family member who is involved in the DOC and, as a resident of public housing, her perspective about Vice Chairman Getty’s comments. Vice Chairman Getty noted that while she was still promoting continued involvement in this Program, she wanted to see a slower pace going forward with respect to the involvement of violent offenders. There was significant discussion back and forth between Vice Chairman Getty and Commissioner Reddic on this topic. Janelle indicated that the emphasis in expanding the Program could certainly focus on only the “low level” violent offender being released from the DOC.

Executive Director Alan Zais noted that Vice Chairman Getty had been involved early on in support of the Program, had met with the State to bring the Program forward and was an advocate for the WCHA’s involvement in this Program. The consensus of the Commissioners was that if the Program is to be expanded, it should only involve “low risk” violent offenders and that Executive Director Alan Zais should bring policies forward for review regarding the expansion of WCHA’s involvement in the Illinois Reentry Pilot Program. Janelle indicated that she had a powerpoint slide that she could send to Alan about the Marron Institute’s recommendations; Alan will circulate that slide amongst the Commissioners once it is received. It was confirmed that the steps taken at this meeting were to develop a consensus and the Board was not yet approving the revised policies. The revised policies will not be put together until further work is done by DOC on identifying the low level violators and that Alan will come back to the Board with additional information and policy revisions at a later point; Alan indicated that this would not be done within the next couple of months but would be a more gradual process.

The Marron Institute representatives departed the meeting at 6:32 p.m.

Executive Director’s Report

Executive Director Alan Zais noted that his written report had accompanied the Board packet that the Commissioners had previously received. With regard to one item, Alan noted that he needed to update the Board. He said that one of the Resolutions in the Consent Agenda and in his report had involved the donation of the Collier Gardens refrigerators to Habitat for Humanity. He noted, however, that after further consultation with Commonwealth Edison, it has been confirmed that the old refrigerators must be destroyed and cannot be donated to Habitat for

Humanity Restore. Because of the confusion that had existed about this issue, Commonwealth Edison has agreed that it will destroy the old refrigerators at no cost to the WCHA. Therefore, Item VII(D) on the October 17, 2019 Consent Agenda was to be removed; that removal was approved by the consensus of the Commissioners present. There was further discussion about whether Board action was needed to approve the destruction of the Collier Gardens refrigerators; since such destruction is in keeping with the WCHA's policy, it was agreed that no such formal action needed to be taken at this meeting but that the minutes would reflect that the Board had been advised of the destruction of the Collier Gardens refrigerators by Commonwealth Edison and the Board's concurrence with that action.

Consent Agenda

A motion to approve Items A, B and C (but not Item D) on the Consent Agenda was made by Commissioner Ballard. That motion was seconded by Commissioner Conard. Items A, B and C on the Consent Agenda were approved by unanimous roll call vote of the six (6) Commissioners present with none against and one (1) Commissioner absent.

Financial Report

Finance Director Vickie Huwe reported that Winnebago Homes Association (WHA) had received approximately \$1,000.00 from its California properties. She also advised the Board that the Boone County Housing Authority (BCHA) has received approximately \$3,000.00 and will soon pay off its remaining legal bills which, in turn, will allow the BCHA to resume making payments to the WCHA. With regard to the Freeport RAD Program, she noted that the payments are now four (4) months behind and the financial picture appears to be getting worse. Executive Director Alan Zais noted that cost estimates for repairs needed there (including the cost of a fence and the construction of entrances) are approximately \$25,000.00 and that the WCHA will require that these improvements be made as part of the Program in the interests of resident safety.

Old Business

It was confirmed that this item was previously covered at the beginning of the meeting; see above.

It was also noted by Attorney Pirages that, for the record, the public is placed on notice of the action taken at the August 15, 2019 meeting making available for public inspection the minutes of Executive Sessions from the January 17, 2019 and March 21, 2019 Board meetings.

New Business

None.

Commissioner Comments

Alan Zais congratulated Commissioners Conard, Reddic and Ballard on their re-appointment for another term as approved by the Winnebago County Board.

Executive Session

None.

Action Taken from Executive Session

None.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Reddic and that motion was seconded by Commissioner Conard. That motion was passed by unanimous voice vote of all six (6) Commissioners present with none against and one (1) Commissioner absent. The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alanna D. Conard, Recording Secretary