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LOWELL HOUSING AUTHORITY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 22, 2022

Mercier House
21 Salem Street
Lowell, Massachusetts

--- Transcribed by Jacqueline P. Travis ---

1 Board of Commissioners:

2 Philip L. Shea, Chairman

3 Mony Var, Vice Chairman

4 Joanie L. Bernes, Commissioner

5 Matt Marr, Commissioner

6 Rodney Elliott, Commissioner

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8 Lowell Housing Committee:

9 Gary K. Wallace, Executive Director

10 Sherry Giblin, Chief Financial Officer

11 Kevin J. Murphy, General Counsel (virtually)

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

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2 Mr. Shea: Thank you very much for coming
3 here this evening. I'd like to read into the record
4 that this is a special meeting of the Lowell Housing
5 Authority Board of Commissioners, and the purpose of
6 the meeting is to take up business that's before us.
7 So with that being the case, I'll have the clerk call
8 the roll.

9 Mr. Wallace: Chairman Shea.

10 Mr. Shea: Present.

11 Mr. Wallace: Vice Chairman Var.

12 Mr. Var: Here.

13 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Bernes.

14 Ms. Bernes: Here.

15 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Elliott.

16 Mr. Elliott: Here.

17 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Marr.

18 Mr. Marr: Here.

19 Mr. Wallace: Five present.

20 Mr. Shea: Thank you.

21 The next item -- the first item on the
22 agenda is resident correspondence. Do we have any --

23 Mr. Wallace: We don't have any resident
24 correspondence present here tonight.

1 Mr. Wallace: Okay. Thank you.

2 The report of the chair.

3 Mr. Wallace: Mr. Chairman, let me give you
4 an updated --

5 Mr. Shea: You may want to give me what you
6 have.

7 First of all, I'd like to welcome everyone
8 in attendance here tonight. I know the holidays are
9 around the corner and it's kind of a bad night, but
10 it's nice to see so many of our employees and other
11 interested residents of the community be present here
12 tonight for this meeting.

13 As you all know, the purpose of the meeting
14 was to get a report from the executive committee
15 pertaining to the recommendation of that committee to
16 the full Board to appoint an interim executive
17 director effective January 1st, 2023. And with that
18 being the case, that's what's before us.

19 Mr. Wallace: Correct.

20 Ms. Shea: And so with that being the case,
21 and as chairman of the executive committee, with
22 Commissioner -- Vice Chairman Commissioner Mony Var,
23 I want to report that we had a meeting at the
24 executive office today. Attending the meeting was

1 executive director Dr. Gary Wallace; our chief
2 financial officer Mrs. Sherry Giblin; the vice
3 chairman of the committee, Mr. Mony Var; and myself
4 as the chairman of the executive committee.

5 Also present virtually was the Lowell
6 Housing Authority general counsel, Attorney Kevin
7 Murphy.

8 And the purpose of that meeting was to
9 recommend to this Board tonight a person that should
10 succeed our director who leaves on December 31st,
11 2022. And the new director -- interim director will
12 take over the control of the Lowell Housing Authority
13 on an interim basis on January 1st, 2023.

14 So we had this meeting, I'll let
15 Commissioner Mony Var speak for himself, but just to
16 let the other Commissioners in on the dialogue, and I
17 thank our chief financial officer for taking the
18 minutes of the meeting, which is public to anyone
19 that wants to read what took place behind those
20 doors. And unlike the Catholic religion when we
21 elect a new pope, if you like the pope, the white
22 smoke goes up. We got a pope that you don't like the
23 pope, then the black smoke goes up. Well I want to
24 say that we come here this evening to tell you that

1 the white smoke has gone up because we have selected
2 a person -- we selected a person to recommend to the
3 Board of Commissioners that that person take over the
4 duties as of January 1st. And with that being the
5 case -- Kevin Murphy incidentally is here virtually,
6 thanks to Sherry, and he can listen to the
7 participation of the various Board members in this
8 historic motion. There hasn't been another motion
9 like this before the Board of Commissioners in nearly
10 25 years. But time goes by that quickly. And my
11 eyes look at you, Gary, I knew you when you were 18.
12 So that's like 40 years ago. I don't want to tell
13 you how old I am because I don't want to admit it.
14 But the bottom line is that I'm up there.

15 So with that being the case, we had a
16 meeting and we had a discussion that I thought was
17 pretty interesting. And I can only give you my point
18 of view what took place, and I'll let Mony Var
19 explain to you his point of view, which may not be a
20 heck of a lot different.

21 But basically what was suggested to us by
22 our general counsel was that we have the right to
23 appoint -- and Gary, please feel free to interject
24 some of the things that Mony and I may have missed.

1 We have the right to appoint an executive
2 director and we have like 60 days, within 60 days to
3 advertise to bring back candidates to be named
4 permanent director.

5 And so there is a lot of technical legal
6 work that we have to perform, but more importantly
7 that's been dictated to us in part by the Department
8 of Housing and Community Development, they kind of
9 dictate the procedures that you follow, the
10 advertisements that you make, the interviews you
11 have, the vote that must be taken for the permanent
12 director for their review in Boston. Maybe
13 Representative Elliott can help us move that
14 application along when it gets down there
15 January 6th.

16 And then they have to approve whatever we
17 do. And there's a lot of -- a lot of paperwork to
18 it. Much more now than seven years ago when we
19 reinstated the way you appoint the director in the
20 Commonwealth. The Massachusetts General Laws was
21 amended seven years ago to make it a little bit more
22 broader in scope.

23 So those are all things that, luckily, we
24 have Kevin advising us on. Because we can get lost

1 in some of these technicalities.

2 But on the other hand, when we do name a
3 director we have to name a committee to review the
4 applications that we get that are sent out by our
5 human resource person, and we have to interview --
6 and then we interview. So the process is -- this is
7 the beginning of the process of replacing Dr. Wallace
8 who retired, as you all know, effective December
9 31st. But the process is a heck of a lot more than I
10 thought, and Mony. And there's just a lot to it.

11 So tonight after the executive committee met
12 to talk about an interim director, we had a
13 discussion and it's amazing, you know, the things you
14 learn. Because it's -- life is a learning process
15 but, boy, I never thought that I found out so much.
16 But the committee, there was a recommendation by the
17 vice chairman of the committee, seconded by the
18 chairman to name Mr. Tha Chhan as the interim
19 director of the Lowell Housing Authority, and to name
20 that person -- to recommend that to the Board of
21 Commissioners.

22 So we, as a committee, are recommending
23 tonight the name of Tha Chhan to be the interim
24 director effective January 1st of the Lowell Housing

1 Authority. And I know that Mony may want to say few
2 things on this, but I can tell you that I will urge
3 my fellow Commissioners to vote for Tha Chhan. I've
4 known Tha Chhan for 11 years, 12 years maybe. I met
5 him when he worked up in Salem Street and, however, I
6 never knew Tha Chhan. Tha Chhan that I read in his
7 résumé. Because if there was one word that Tha Chhan
8 put into the dictionary that Webster did not put into
9 the dictionary it's the word humility.

10 This guy has a record that's just
11 unbelievable if you read it. And as a matter of
12 fact, I brought a couple of extra copies for my
13 committee members. And this gentleman started off,
14 once upon a time, into the country. And when he got
15 into the country coming out of Cambodia, he had to go
16 through all kinds of difficulties. And when he got
17 to this country, he didn't have shoes on his feet, he
18 didn't have \$2 in his pocket, he couldn't speak
19 English, and he didn't know what the 48 states were.
20 And he came here and he came to Lowell and got an
21 education. And then went on, and I never knew this,
22 I've known Tha for 11 years, and then he goes on to
23 get a high school diploma, he goes on to learn
24 English, he goes on to get a degree in business, he

1 then goes on to get a master's degree from Boston
2 University.

3 He's been with the Housing Authority for
4 33 years, working with the Housing Authority. He
5 started off at the level of probably of a custodian.
6 He started off as a person on Salem Street as a
7 housing inspector. From there he went to being an
8 administrative aid. From there he went to be the
9 assistant director of the Lowell Housing Authority.
10 From there he went to become the chief administration
11 officer of the Lowell Housing Authority. I never
12 knew that he worked so hard to get an education as he
13 did. He is highly respected among all members of the
14 Housing Authority community. He, I think, is the
15 right man for the time, for the position, to head up
16 the Housing Authority. And when I read his résumé, I
17 can tell you, and I told this to Tha on the phone the
18 other night, I didn't even know that. That's how
19 humble he is.

20 You know, some people get announced with
21 their education, they become big shots, forget where
22 they come from. This guy got a pound of education,
23 never told anybody about it, and he is more humble
24 today than he was when I met him 11 years ago. And I

1 see Tracy here, she's smiling. That's when I met
2 Tracy, 11 years ago up there in Salem Street.

3 So that was my conclusion as to why I voted
4 to support a person who's deeply, deeply respected in
5 the Housing Authority community. And I think he will
6 be a tremendous leader for the Housing Authority
7 effective January 1st. However, that's my two cents'
8 worth. It's up to other members of this Board of
9 Commissioners, Commissioner Elliott, Commissioner
10 Mony Var, Sherry, Matt, it's up to them to vote. So
11 with that being the case, that was how my conclusion,
12 my vote on behalf of Tha Chhan as the chairman of the
13 executive committee of the Lowell Housing Authority.
14 And with that I'll turn it over to Mony Var to say a
15 few words.

16 Mr. Var: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I know
17 Tha for two, three years now. But, you know, the
18 résumé is quite impressive. You know, impressive.
19 You know, from the way he started from the bottom up
20 for 33 years plus, it's amazing. And I strongly
21 recommend the Board vote for Tha Chhan for the
22 interim director.

23 Mr. Shea: Thank you.

24 Mr. Elliott: I make a motion that we adopt

1 the recommendation that we appoint Tha Chhan as the
2 interim director for the Lowell Housing Authority.

3 Mr. Marr: Second that.

4 Mr. Shea: There's a motion made by
5 Commissioner Rodney Elliott, seconded by Commissioner
6 Matt Marr to appoint effective January 1st the
7 interim director of the Lowell Housing Authority
8 Mr. Tha Chhan. Any other comment? Hearing none, the
9 clerk will call the role.

10 Mr. Wallace: Chairman Shea.

11 Mr. Shea: Yes.

12 Mr. Wallace: Vice Chairman Var.

13 Mr. Var: Yes.

14 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Bernes.

15 Ms. Bernes: Yes.

16 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Elliott.

17 Mr. Elliott: Yes.

18 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Marr.

19 Mr. Marr: Yes.

20 Mr. Wallace: Five yeas.

21 Mr. Shea: Thank you.

22 (Applause)

23 Mr. Shea: Please step forward. State your
24 name.

1 Mr. Chhan: May name is Tha Chhan.
2 Currently the chief officer of the HUD housing
3 program. I am so honored by the recommendation by
4 the chairman, and so I want to thank you for giving
5 me this opportunity. I am deeply humbled by the
6 confidence and the faith that you have in me to lead
7 this agency. During my 33 years with the Lowell
8 Housing Authority I had the opportunity to work with,
9 I had the honor and the privilege to work with.
10 Thank you.

11 The team does a lot of hard work, is
12 dedicated, committed individuals. And I feel lucky
13 and very proud to be part of the team. Thank you.

14 And I also have the opportunity to interact
15 with everyone in the Housing Authority, including the
16 property manager sitting over there, and the leasing
17 tenant, assistant property manager. I had the
18 opportunity to interact with the facility manager and
19 housing maintenance staff. Asset manager Laura,
20 Jonathan. Also Sherry and everyone else. And at the
21 time I am also fortunate enough to have the
22 opportunity to collaborate with other board members,
23 other agency, and privately work throughout the
24 greater Lowell area. And such interaction, such

1 collaboration and therefore we began a great deal.
2 Learn about our agency, about the nature of our
3 services as an agency to provide affordable housing
4 to people, and with the understanding of the
5 importance, the continuity of this agency during this
6 transition period, and in the best interest of the
7 resident, of the participant. And the response that
8 we're confident that we have the entrustment and the
9 responsibility to lead this agency during this
10 transition, I promise you to do everything within my
11 ability and to work very hard with every housing
12 staff, with the residents, with the participants, and
13 organization and state holdings to bring about
14 seamless transition and continue to carry on the
15 Board mandate and our contingent plan. And once
16 again, thank you very much for the opportunity.

17 Mr. Shea: You're welcome.

18 (Applause)

19 Mr. Shea: I would like to just also make a
20 couple other announcements that as you know, Tha
21 being the chief admission officer, effective
22 January 1st will be the interim director, also on
23 January 1st I'd like to let the record indicate that
24 Allison Patel will then move up to be the chief

1 operating -- chief admission officer on an interim
2 basis until we go from there. But I want to
3 congratulate Allison Patel tonight.

4 (Applause)

5 Furthermore, I'd like to just indicate for the record
6 that there's a process that we have to follow in
7 naming the director and the executive director, and
8 that is under the Massachusetts law we have to file
9 -- we have to form a committee. It'll be a five
10 member committee. It will be an interview committee,
11 because we'll be advertising in the month of December
12 for anyone interested in applying for the job, and
13 then we have to interview. But there will be a five
14 member committee. The chief financial officer will
15 be on the committee; the head of human resources for
16 the agency will be on the committee; the vice
17 chairman of the executive committee, Mony Var will be
18 on the committee; the chairman, myself, will be on
19 the committee; and a fifth person on the committee
20 will be a tenant that will be selected to serve on
21 the interview committee for the permanent job. And
22 we hope to be able to get through that sometime in
23 the month of January.

24 And then whenever you select a person under

1 Massachusetts law, which was instituted about seven
2 years ago, we have to notify the Department of
3 Housing who that person is, been selected by the
4 Board of Commissioners, and they have to approve the
5 appointment.

6 And so there is a lot of little paperwork
7 that we have to do in the future that wasn't the case
8 necessarily when Gary became the director 20 years
9 ago. But times have changed. So there is a little
10 bit of a process that we have to follow, and so we're
11 going to follow that process. But the interview
12 committee will be -- as a matter of fact, Attorney
13 Murphy has worked with our human resource person,
14 Donna?

15 Mr. Wallace: Toohey.

16 Mr. Shea: Toohey, and they've already
17 worked on some of the details of the advertisement.
18 So there is a little bit -- it's like -- it's like
19 bidding for a building or something, all the fine
20 print. There is a little bit of fine print that
21 we're working through and hopefully we can move
22 forward with the progress, with this attempt to name
23 a permanent director.

24 So I can tell you that this is the first

1 step that we'll take, and I think that I just wanted
2 that to be part of the record. Attorney Murphy
3 brought that to our attention. He was dealing with
4 our chief financial officer Sherry Giblin, and they
5 were working out the details of the language of the
6 legislative intent that's been put out by the
7 Department of Housing in Massachusetts.

8 So that's basically it. So I wanted to
9 indicate that for the record. With that being the
10 case I -- Matt, do you have anything? Rodney? With
11 that being the case, my fellow Commissioners, there
12 will be a motion now to adjourn. And with that being
13 the case I'll ask the motion by Commissioner Rodney
14 Elliott, seconded by Commissioner Joanie Bernes to
15 adjourn. And the clerk will call the roll.

16 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Shea. Chairman
17 Shea.

18 Mr. Shea: Yes.

19 Mr. Wallace: Vice Chairman Var.

20 Mr. Var: Yes.

21 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Bernes.

22 Ms. Bernes: Yes.

23 Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Elliott.

24 Mr. Elliott: Yes.

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Mr. Wallace: Commissioner Marr.

Mr. Marr: Yes.

Mr. Wallace: Five yeas.

Mr. Shea: Thank you for coming tonight and happy Thanksgiving to everybody.

(Whereupon the Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners concluded.)