

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**APRIL 4, 2023, AT 6:00PM**  
**TOWN HALL GYM, TOWN HALL, LEICESTER, MA 01524**

Chair Allen Phillips called the meeting to order at 6:05PM. Chair Allen Phillips, Vice Chair Rick Antanavica, Second Vice Chair Dianna Provencher, Selectman Herb Duggan Jr, Selectman John Bujak, Town Administrator David Genereux, and Executive Assistant Maria Cataloni were in attendance.

**CALL TO ORDER/OPENING**

**1. SCHEDULED ITEMS**

Assistant Town Administrator Vitale informed attendees in the Gymnasium that the Information Session would begin at 6:20PM.

**Select Board Meeting Room**

**a. 6:00 PM Reconsideration of Ballot Question – Override vote**

Chairman Phillips stated that the number for the Town's portion of the override is not firm. Due to this, he asks that Town pull its portion of \$850,000.00 and remove it from the override vote and go back to the drawing board. Mr. Phillips does not want to hamper the schools' chances of having the override pass. The override will strictly be for the schools.

**Motion 040423-1a:** A motion was made by Mr. Duggan and seconded by Mr. Bujak to remove the Town's portion from the override. **Motion carries 4-1-0. Mr. Antanavica was opposed.**

Mr. Genereux asked if the Board would allow to delay the vote of the gift acceptance for the scoreboard and field (discussed at April 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting). Mr. Phillips agreed to delay the vote and he also stated that the next meeting, April 18<sup>th</sup>, will be to discuss the budget with Advisory and the schools. Mr. Genereux said that it can be at the Senior Center for a larger capacity. Mr. Antanavica states that the meeting needs to be advertised. Mr. Duggan stated to make sure that all Department Heads know about it and know what the meeting is for.

**Motion 040423-1a.1:** A motion was made by Ms. Provencher and seconded by Mr. Duggan to join the public information session and resume the meeting later. **Motion carries 5:0:0.**

**Town Hall Gym**

**b. 6:20 PM Former College Dormitory Lease Information Session**

Mr. Genereux began the discussions by providing an overview of the proposal from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA). DHCD and CMHA propose leasing three former dormitories on the former Becker campus for the purpose of providing temporary housing for families facing homelessness. Mr. Genereux stated the proposal is still being negotiated, and financials will not be discussed during the information session. The town will provide an update on the negotiations later in the agenda. Mr. Genereux stated this is not an item for Town Meeting, as the Select Board was previously provided disposition authorization at the 2021 Special Town Meeting for all Becker properties. However, Mr. Genereux stated the Select Board wanted to get a feel from the community on their thoughts and for DHCD to answer questions. Mr. Genereux stated the town will not tolerate misbehavior and asked for attendees to maintain decorum.

Mr. Genereux stated he will moderate if audience members have any questions, and he hopes the presentation is informative.

Ms. Leah Bradley introduced herself as the CEO of the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA). They will be the service provider.

Ms. Alvina Brevard introduced herself as the Director of DHCD. Ms. Brevard stated their program assists families in the Commonwealth with rehousing or emergency shelters in certain situations. Ms. Brevard stated this current program is designed to address the current capacity crisis.

Ms. Bradley stated the CMHA has 177 units of housing in the area. In Oxford, they have a temporary site due to the ongoing housing crisis. The families at that site need to be transitioned to a new location. Ms. Bradley stated families go through the DHCD screening process, at which time it will be determined who they can accommodate based on housing availability. Once in the program, CMHA services include 24/7 on-site staffing and a team of care providers including housing search coordinators, case managers, child advocates and leadership team. As part of the program, there are certain requirements that need to be followed including attending a certain number of meetings with care providers, no drugs or alcohol, strict visitor policy, quiet hours, curfew, and individualized action plans for family members. Folks that come to the program are often still working, so CMHA tries to keep them close to their community of origin so there aren't any disruptions. Program participants sometimes face depression and anxiety based on the situation they are in. Ms. Bradley stated this program is only for families that have children.

Ms. Brevard added by stated it must be Massachusetts families who have children under the age of 21. To be program eligible, the maximum household income must be 115% of the federal poverty limit. In addition, families must have a reason for being homeless, such as eviction, loss of income, change in household composition, or domestic violence. Because families are facing trauma, Ms. Brevard stated it's important they are creating a safe environment and with good service providers.

Mr. Genereux opened it up to questions from attendees.

Resident Andrew Kularski of the Leicester Housing Authority stated he has concerns about this facility opening in town. Their facility currently has a two-year waitlist for affordable housing. Mr. Kularski asked if families have to go through the Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Programs (CHAMP) process. Ms. Brevard stated they do; however, they are only eligible for emergency temporary housing. Ms. Brevard stated this program is not a pathway to subsidy housing. Ms. Alvina Brevard stated many families that leave the program enter the private housing market and apartment share. Families that leave the program are eligible to receive up to \$30K in rental assistance. Mr. Kularski stated if he knew of people living in their vehicles, can they be placed in emergency housing. Ms. Brevard stated they can apply through DHCD at the toll-free number and get a same day eligibility determination. Mr. Kularski asked if Leicester residents would get first priority. Ms. Brevard stated they try to keep residents in their community of origin based on availability. Ms. Bradley stated there is also an option of moving families after they have entered the program. Mr. Kularski stated he is personally against the proposal because it is on the school property. Mr. Kularski stated he reached out to the Select Board about using the Memorial School for housing but never heard back. Select Board members asked when he submitted the inquiry. Mr. Genereux encouraged Mr. Kularski to reach out to him to discuss further.

Resident John McNaboe asked if this program would be servicing illegal aliens. Ms. Brevard stated Massachusetts is a right to shelter state for Massachusetts residents and have documentation stating they are in the country legally. Mr. McNaboe asked if veterans' families have preference. Ms. Brevard stated they don't have preferences with the exception of individuals with disabilities. Mr. McNaboe stated he does not think the housing should be right next to the high school.

Ms. Brevard stated all family members undergo a Sex Offender Registry Information (SORI) Check and Warrant Check.

Resident Mary Kay Hannant provided an overview of the actions taken leading up to the town purchasing the Becker campus as well as the status of the progress to date. Ms. Hannant stated she does not believe the Select Board has the authorization to lease the property. Mr. Genereux read the 2021 Special Town Meeting Warrant language pertaining to the authorization. Mr. Genereux stated the proceeds from the sale of any of the properties would go against debt exclusion. However, lease revenue is handled differently per Mass General Laws. Mr. Genereux stated this proposal is a one-year lease with a 90-day opt-out clause. Mr. Genereux stated there would be a fence to separate the properties. Ms. Hannant stated she wants to hear from the elected officials. Mr. Phillips stated this meeting is to ask questions and get answers from DHCD and CMHA. Mr. Phillips stated the Select Board has hopes and dreams and they are doing everything they can to clear up the issues and get the kids on the campus. Mr. Phillips stated last year, 26 people moved into town and asked if anyone knew anything about those people. Mr. Phillips asked what's the difference with this proposal.

Resident Betty Buto asked how many units are in the three dormitories and what the square footage is of each of the rooms. Mr. Genereux stated there are 65 rooms with some space for offices. Mr. Genereux stated the dorm rooms are about 12x12 feet. Mr. Genereux stated the goal is not for families to live and be comfortable there. The goal is to process them and get them out. Ms. Buto asked if beds and dressers were provided, to which Mr. Genereux stated yes.

A resident asked what the average stay is and if there has been criminal activity.

Chief Antanavica stated he did research on CMHA's Oxford location. Based on his search, there were six medical calls, one follow-up visit, and two 911 calls that were children playing with the phone. There were no arrests. At CMHA's Worcester location, there were 11 medical calls, 1 call of lost property, 1 vehicle disturbance call unrelated to the facility, and no arrest. Chief Antanavica stated nothing stood out in his search. Chief Antanavica stated residents' concerns are his concerns and he is glad he did the research.

Ms. Bradley stated their goal is to be good neighbors. Ms. Bradley stated they have had conversations with the Select Board, Superintendent, and Town Administrator. Ms. Bradley stated anyone can have her number. Ms. Bradley stated she is stumbling with her words because these are families. CMHA's goal is to provide care and hope. Ms. Bradley stated there is no maximum duration. Ms. Bradley stated some families move out immediately, while the longest stay has been 15 months. Ms. Bradley stated COVID-19 and increase in bills has made it harder for families to regain ground.

Resident Jeffrey Fisher asked how long it would be until the buildings are fully occupied. Ms. Bradley 12 families would be transferred immediately, and the ramp up period would probably be 3-4 months. Mr. Fisher asked how checking in and out would work. Ms. Bradley stated they will have 24/7 on-site staff and security. Ms. Bradley stated it would be very much like a college in terms in checking in. Ms. Bradley stated the green space is good for the kids. Sunday-Thursday, Quiet Hours begin at 8:00PM and Curfew at 9:00PM. Mr. Fisher asked how they can enforce their policies.

Ms. Brevard stated each family is under contract with DHCD in a Universal Shelter Rule Package. If individuals are not in compliance, the family would be at-risk of being terminated from the program. Ms. Brevard emphasized the need for there to be structure.

Ms. Brevard stated they have been doing this for 30 years, it's important for families to blend into communities and be productive citizens. important to blend in.

Mr. Fisher stated the town is in a difficult situation. The Town has empty buildings and needs money. On the other side of this is families. Mr. Fisher stated CMHA's point of view brings great sympathy from him. If he had a choice, the three dormitories would be low of his list of locations. However, to those who have concerns about the beauty of the campus, the dormitories are as far away as they can be. Mr. Fisher stated the Select Board members look like they are at a wake. Mr. Fisher asked if the town gets lease payments even if some of the rooms are unoccupied. Ms. Bradley said yes. Mr. Fisher stated the

town should cover itself and have an exit clause in the contract. Mr. Fisher stated he is going to put his faith in the Select Board.

Resident Francis Joyce stated his main concern is the proximity to the high school, and who would be paying for the fence. Mr. Phillips stated they will be discussing the financials later. Mr. Joyce asked if a feasibility study was done. Ms. Bradley stated they have conducted walkthroughs of the buildings and renovations will be asked for as part of the lease. Mr. Joyce asked about the need for ADA accessibility. Ms. Bradley stated as long as they had one floor that was ADA accessible, they can navigate it with the families. Mr. Joyce asked about liability coverage. Ms. Bradley stated it's complicated, but they would have all the proper insurances.

Resident Kelly Bergeron stated CMHA does great work. Ms. Bergeron asked about capital funding to upgrade and maintain the buildings. Mr. Genereux stated they cannot get into those details. Mr. Genereux stated the town would be responsible for wear and tear, however, DHCD would be responsible for damages.

Ms. Bradley stated DHCD has an inspection unit that signs off before moving families in. Ms. Bradley stated DHCD also conducts weekly in-unit inspections.

Resident Pat Dykas stated she pulled up articles on the internet about the housing crisis and referenced a story about homeless housing at a hotel in Methuen, Massachusetts. In the story, the mayor stated the town was stuck with the additional costs of educating and transporting students. Ms. Dykas requested information on their other facilities. Ms. Bradley stated she can try to get information together. Ms. Bradley stated there was funding approved as part of the supplemental state budget and federal transportation funding to reimbursement 100% of school costs. Ms. Dykas provided an estimate of what she thinks the lease amount could be. Ms. Brevard stated costs depend on the setting, contract terms, and services being offered. The proposed program in Leicester is expensive, and it is why it is essential they work with the town to help reduce costs.

A resident asked what their termination rate is for families. Ms. Brevard stated they do not track termination rates. Ms. Brevard stated they do not have many issues with that. Ms. Brevard stated people want to live and find housing.

Resident Lucky Margadonna stated the town can't paint a broad brush on the families. Mr. Margadonna asked about capital expenses. Mr. Phillips stated that is part of the negotiations.

Mr. Fisher stated again that this is a one-year lease with 3-month termination clause. Mr. Fisher stated the town does not have that much exposure and needs the money. Mr. Fisher stated he would read the contract if needed. Mr. Fisher stated where the comma goes makes a difference in the contract.

Resident Janice Parke stated her concern is about the children in the housing, and stated they need outdoor space. Ms. Parke requested that be included in the negotiations.

A resident raised concerns about school overcrowding, the need for extra teachers, and other school disruptions. Ms. Brevard stated the majority of families reflect the local population and the supplemental budget and federal assistance would be provided per additional pupil in the schools.

A resident named Scott stated the town has no say in who, what, or where these residents come from. Scott stated these families would be vetted by two agencies and monitored by one agency. Scott stated DHCD and CMHA are putting in so much effort into making this program right.

Mr. Joyce asked when they would know about the facts and figured. Mr. Phillips stated right after this as well as once negotiations are done.

Resident Cheryl Cooney thanked DHCD and CMHA for everything they do. Ms. Cooney stated she has been in their shoes and worked with marginalized groups. Ms. Cooney stated she is floored and had flashback to 25 years ago when she was involved in a similar situation opening a group home in Leicester. 25 years later, there are 8 group homes in Leicester, and nobody knows the difference. Ms. Cooney stated DeJa New would love to see them in town.

Mr. Genereux thanked everyone who came out and ask the questions. Mr. Genereux stated the Select Board will take the comments from this discussion under advisement.

Ms. Brevard thanked attendees and stated she hope they have the opportunity to partner with the town.

*The presentation ended at 8:35pm.*

*No action was taken by the Select Board on this agenda item.*

## **2. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Former College Dormitory Lease Discussion**

*Mr. Phillips resumed the meeting at 8:45pm.*

Mr. Phillips stated they want to make sure the residents know what the town knows. Mr. Genereux stated the town has been in discussions for a number of months. There is no contract, draft contract, or anything in writing at this time. To date, it has been a series of conversations with DHCD and CMHA. The proposal is a one-year lease with three-month no-fault termination clause. The proposal is \$2M per year, with \$150K for capital renovations for all three dormitories. Mr. Genereux stated DHCD wants an all-inclusive lease, so the lease would include the cost of utilities, water, sewer, cleaning, and maintenance. Payments would be made monthly. Mr. Genereux stated the town is writing the lease and can put its own terms in for DHCD to review and accept. Mr. Genereux stated as an example, the town can stipulate the function of the guards. At a future Executive Session, the draft lease will be reviewed and up to the Select Board to decide. If the town moves forward, there will be a public notification process.

Mr. Fisher asked if the town calculated their costs. Mr. Genereux stated those costs will be discussed further but stated it has been challenging for the town to get information from National Grid. Mr. Genereux stated the town has information from when kids were in the schools and based the assumptions on current utility rates. Mr. Fisher stated it is worth a one-year lease.

Mr. Genereux stated the town was nowhere near that rental figure at the beginning. Mr. Genereux stated the town will find out how close they are with the assumption. After the first year, if the benefit isn't what the town wants, they will negotiate or terminate the agreement.

Ms. Hannant asked if the town will be keeping track of the net benefit. Mr. Genereux stated the town will be keeping track each month.

Resident Ashlyn Coyle asked who will keeping track. Mr. Genereux stated it is a public process, and the Accounting Department will set up a separate fund in VADAR, the town's financial management system. Ms. Coyle asked who will be in charge of the money, and if the Select Board would be involved. Mr. Genereux stated it will go in as maintenance funding and will go before the Select Board and Advisory Committee.

Mr. Fisher suggested the town look at the leases from the other CMHA locations and write the lease with key bullet points.

A resident asked who the point person would be with DHCD based on the workload. Mr. Genereux stated the school would handle the kids coming into the district. Mr. Genereux stated the only aspect on the town side would be collecting lease payments and doing inspections.

*No action was taken by the Select Board on this agenda item.*

**Motion 040423-3:** A motion was made by Mr. Duggan to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Provencher. **Motion carries 5-0-0 at 9:15pm.**

**ADJOURN**