

**Syracuse Housing Strategies Corporation**

One Park Place  
300 South State St., Suite 700  
Syracuse, New York 13202

**MINUTES**

Board of Directors Meeting  
March 24, 2025  
2:00 p.m.

A regular meeting of the Syracuse Housing Strategies Corporation (the “**Corporation**”) was convened in public session on March 24, 2025 at 2:00 p.m., in the Common Council Chambers, City Hall, 233 East Washington Street, Syracuse, New York.

**Board Members Present:** Hon. Benjamin Walsh, Robert Simpson, Katelyn Wright, Patrick Hogan, Donald Radke, Rasheada Caldwell.

**Excused Members:** Helen Hudson, Latoya Allen, Patrona Jones-Rowser.

**Staff Present:** Michelle Sczpanski, Mike Cannizzaro, Conor Rourke, Esq.

**Others Present:** Hannah Garty, Katherine Keane, Karen Schroeder, Kyle Price.

**I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

Mayor Walsh called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Mayor Walsh acknowledged the board members present and noted the excused absence of members Helen Hudson, Latoya Allen, and Patrona Jones-Rowser.

**III. PROOF OF NOTICE**

Mayor Walsh acknowledged that notice of the meeting had been duly and properly provided.

**IV. MINUTES**

Ms. Sczpanski noted a correction to the January 27, 2025 Board meeting minutes in the Board’s agenda packet. Ms. Sczpanski explained that there were two versions of the January 27, 2025, minutes in the packet. She asked the Board to review and approve the minutes titled, Draft Version Two. Ms. Sczpanski further explained that there were some minor changes made by Corporation Counsel to Draft Version Two.

Member Radke asked Ms. Sczpanski which version of the minutes they should approve. Ms. Sczpanski responded that Draft Version Two is the correct version of the minutes. Member

Wright asked where the documents are labeled Draft Version Two. Ms. Sczpanski and Mayor Walsh responded that there is a watermark denoting the version. Mayor Walsh asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the January 27, 2025 board meeting.

Member Simpson made the motion. Member Radke seconded the motion. **ALL OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 27, 2025 BOARD MEETING.**

## **V. NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Resolution to Adopt General Program Policies & Procedures for Homeowner Planning**

Ms. Sczpanski outlined the draft Policies and Procedures, included in the Board's agenda packet, to be considered by the Board for adoption.

Ms. Sczpanski explained that the Board must comply with the requirements of the New York State, Empire State Development ("ESD") to gain access to the \$5 million that they have committed to SHSC. She noted that ESD has stringent requirements that SHSC must comply with regarding applications, required materials for applicants, and eligibility.

Ms. Sczpanski explained that SHSC must lay the foundation of their policies to move forward with the ESD process. She noted that there are non-negotiable items that SHSC must have in their program policies and procedures. The purpose of this Resolution is to affirm those non-negotiables. Ms. Sczpanski stated that SHSC's Governance Committee should be convened soon to discuss specific policies to be considered in more detail, such as construction and design standards, mortgage policies, and more. Ms. Sczpanski stated that these baseline guidelines in this draft will be enough to ensure that SHSC is on track with ESD. Then, the Board can adjust and expand upon this draft later.

Mayor Walsh asked if anyone had any questions.

Member Simpson explained that there are other issues that SHSC is trying to address and engage stakeholders with. He asked if there is an opportunity in this draft for residents who are receiving funding from the Housing Strategies Corporation to check a box that they will also resolve other issues that the City of Syracuse ("City") wants resolved.

Ms. Sczpanski responded that a mailer was sent out to 7,000 properties, which included an option for residents to join focus groups. The goal of this mailer was to identify those who are interested. The plan is to leverage those groups to receive the feedback Member Simpson requested. Ms. Sczpanski emphasized that this is why SHSC should not be too specific with the draft policies and procedures. Based on ESD's policies, it is easier to add items onto the baseline guidelines, instead of removing items off after they have already been added.

Member Caldwell asked for clarification in the document where it states: "an applicant must be able to adequately finance a portion of the project and provide proof of funds to Invest DSM. Invest DSM, in its sole discretion, will determine whether the applicant has submitted satisfactory proof of funds." Ms. Sczpanski explained that the two Invest DSM-related sections

in the Packet are examples of more robust policies to be considered by the Board. Ms. Sczpanski clarified that SHSC does not need to mirror the policies in these two sections, but SHSC should consider everything in those sections. Member Caldwell responded that she understood that they are using these two sections as a platform to understand the next steps.

If SHSC adopts a similar plan to the Invest DSM sections, then Member Caldwell asked who holds the loan in that instance. Ms. Sczpanski responded that there are various ways that SHSC can create a loan that is forgivable as a grant if certain terms are met, but SHSC should discuss this with outside counsel.

Member Radke stated that the mortgage aspect of the Invest DSM examples could be problematic and that SHSC should examine ESD's guidelines for mortgages. He explained that if there are already multiple mortgages on a property, then the mortgage placed on the property by SHSC will be worthless. Ms. Sczpanski responded that in the future, SHSC will add mortgage policies into their completed policies and procedures.

Member Wright asked if the "Neighborhood Finance Corporation" referenced on the last page of the Board's packet is Des Moines's version of Home Headquarters. She further asked what the Neighborhood Finance Corporation is. Ms. Sczpanski stated that she needs to check on the answer to that question. Member Wright stated that she is curious if the Neighborhood Finance Corporation is a model where they have outsourced the lending. Ms. Sczpanski stated that she will look into that.

Member Caldwell asked Member Radke to clarify what he meant when he said, "worthless" earlier. Member Radke explained that if the means to protect the loan is to put a mortgage on the property, most properties already have one or two mortgages. If SHSC wants to put another mortgage on these properties, then they would be subordinate to the other mortgages.

Member Hogan stated that under the "Closeout & Reimbursement," section in the Board's packet, people will need capital to be involved in the program and that capital will need to be reimbursed. He asked if that is possible. Ms. Sczpanski responded that this is an area where the Board needs to discuss further. She clarified that there will be situations where SHSC will want people to demonstrate their capital up front and there will be other situations where upfront capital will not be required.

Member Simpson asked Ms. Sczpanski if homeowners will be able to use sweat equity as a contribution toward the match amount. Ms. Sczpanski answered in the affirmative, but stated that there are issues with reimbursement for expenses related to sweat equity. She explained that the Board must further discuss how to structure this policy in a thoughtful way that protects the interests of SHSC, but is not onerous to participants.

Member Wright stated that she noticed in the Invest DSM examples, the check was made directly to the contractor, which she thinks SHSC must have the flexibility to do.

Member Simpson stated that SHSC could engage a local financial institution here. He explained that there could be value in engaging a partner using the deposit as back stop and collateral and

asking this local institution to put money out in advance. Member Simpson stated that there are private sector solutions if there is an issue with participation.

Member Caldwell stated that she is concerned about the loan aspect. She explained that with the current state of the country, people will be reluctant to sign anything to pay funding back.

Member Caldwell noted that members of the community are resourceful. She mentioned that there are phenomenal painters and people that do great work in the City, but they do not have the financial resources to do this work. She asked how to find a solution to this problem. Ms. Sczpanski responded that the Board must find a balance between accommodating Member Caldwell's observations and ensuring that this work is completed.

Mayor Walsh asked if there were other questions for Ms. Sczpanski.

Member Hogan noted that in Des Moines, there were five people who joined together on one block. Ms. Sczpanski stated that in a subsequent Board meeting, the Board will discuss this. Ms. Sczpanski noted that when she visited Des Moines, their homeowner block program created lots of opportunities for quick wins. She thinks that this will create opportunities for SHSC to test proof of concept and determine the administration of the program. She explained that over the next few months, they will wrap up the resident focus groups, finalize the small area plans, and create a work plan for the next six to 12 months.

Member Caldwell explained that legal problems could arise because some homes are not in the homeowners' names, yet. Member Caldwell mentioned carving out financial resources for these people. Ms. Sczpanski responded in agreement.

Mayor Walsh stated that the draft Policies and Procedures allows the Board to keep this process moving with ESD. Mayor Walsh explained that the Board should not try to reinvent the wheel. He stated that the Board should find what works here, replicate it, and modify it as needed. He emphasized that this allows SHSC and ESD to move on parallel paths to ensure that funding is secured, and everyone is ready to hit the ground running.

Member Caldwell stated that she would like to figure out a way to add a representative from Home Headquarters to the Board. Ms. Sczpanski noted that she is waiting on paperwork from a prospective new board member, but that she is in the process of adding a representative from Home Headquarters.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Walsh asked for a motion to approve the draft Policies and Procedures as presented in the packet.

Member Allen made the motion. Member Simpson seconded the motion. **ALL BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE GENERAL PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES.**

## **VI. OTHER BUSINESS**

Status of Pending Funding Agreements - Ms. Sczpanski provided updates on the status of pending funding agreements with ESD and the City.

Ms. Sczpanski explained that at the last Board meeting, they discussed the processes of carrying out an agreement with the City for funds authorized in the City's FY24-25 general operating budget. Corporation Counsel for both the City and SHSC recommended that City funds flow to SHSC through the Syracuse Urban Renewal Agency (SURA).

SURA will adopt a second urban renewal plan that mirrors the Syracuse Housing Strategy as adopted by the Syracuse Common Council. Ms. Sczpanski stated that the second urban renewal plan has been drafted, and it was approved at the last SURA Board meeting. She explained that the plan will be presented to the City Planning Commission for their review. Then, the plan will be reviewed by the Council. Ms. Sczpanski explained that when the second urban renewal plan comes to the Council for review, the Council will be affirming that SURA is allowed to match what the Council has already authorized under the Syracuse Housing Strategy.

Member Hogan asked Ms. Sczpanski what she meant by "match." Ms. Sczpanski responded that she means match in terms of the policies. She explained that SURA's policy will now match the policy in the Syracuse Housing Strategy.

Mayor Walsh stated that the end of the fiscal year is at the end of June and these funds are in the current budget. Mayor Walsh asked if there will be a contract in place, and if they can move these funds prior to the end of June. Ms. Sczpanski responded that she is confident that this will happen.

Mayor Walsh also flagged that as they are putting together the budget for the next fiscal year, they should consider this line item. Ms. Sczpanski highlighted that allocating funds for subsequent budgets will be a straightforward process.

Member Wright asked whether the money will go from the City to SURA, instead of from the City to SHSC. Ms. Sczpanski responded in the affirmative. Member Wright asked if the City's budget must be modified since that budget line item is for SHSC. Ms. Sczpanski stated that the Board can confirm the specifics with Corporation Counsel. Mayor Walsh stated that he does not think it needs to be modified because it is for the benefit of SHSC.

Member Caldwell requested that all this funding information is available to the other Council members if they have questions. Ms. Sczpanski agreed.

Member Hogan asked if SURA would allow SHSC to explore other vehicles for funding. Member Hogan asked if SHSC could use bonds. Ms. Sczpanski stated that they are continuing to explore what bonding for housing would look like.

Mayor Walsh stated that no further action is needed here, and that the Board will ensure the other members of the Council are provided with this information.

Update on Small Area Plan Progress - Ms. Sczpanski provided updates regarding the small area plans within the four targeted neighborhoods. She explained that the four neighborhood steering committees will convene meetings throughout this week and next week. The steering committees will present draft plans based on czb's work. Ms. Sczpanski stated that these plans build off material presented to the Board during the last meeting. She noted that these plans will come before the Board for approval in the next few months.

Member Caldwell asked if Ms. Sczpanski is hiring more people at SURA to help with this project. Ms. Sczpanski stated that she wants to. Ms. Sczpanski stated that SURA will enter into an agreement with SHSC to carry out the new urban renewal plan on their behalf. Dollars going to homeowners will be managed by SHSC.

Regarding additional staff, Mayor Walsh asked if those people would be staff of SURA, the City, or SHSC. Ms. Sczpanski responded that she thinks they will be staff of SURA. She explained that the bulk of the Neighborhood and Business Development Department ("NBD") who have been working on this project are SURA employees.

Member Caldwell noted that for budget purposes, if people see that SURA's budget is different, then they should know that the differences are due to additional staff. Ms. Sczpanski stated that there are positions that are already accounted for in the SURA budget.

Mayor Walsh asked if this is already reflected in the City's budget. Ms. Sczpanski stated that she believes so. Mayor Walsh invited Commissioner Cannizzaro to answer this question. Commissioner Cannizzaro stated that the SURA salaries are reflected in the City's budget. Commissioner Cannizzaro explained that SURA employees flow through NBD's purchases line instead of the salaries and wages line. In NBD's department purchases line, it contains the fully loaded SURA salary in the 2026 City budget. Member Caldwell asked if they should be looking for more positions allocated under NBD this year. Commissioner Cannizzaro answered in the affirmative.

To clarify, Mayor Walsh stated that the groups that they are convening to advance this work include the Board and the neighborhood steering committees. Mayor Walsh asked whether there is a SHSC-wide steering committee. Ms. Sczpanski explained that when the Council passed the legislation authorizing the incorporation of SHSC, they also authorized a resident advisory committee. She stated that this would be similar to the Syracuse Land Bank Citizens Advisory Board. Ms. Sczpanski explained that she has been working with Corporation Counsel to decipher the specifics of those appointments for SHSC.

Last Friday, Ms. Sczpanski was advised by Corporation Counsel for both the City and SHSC that because of the configuration of the committee, the members shall be subject to conflict-of-interest requirements. Residents who are considered for appointments who live in neighborhoods where implementation is occurring will not be allowed to apply for those funds while they are on the committee.

Member Wright stated that Corporation Counsel advised her that the Syracuse Land Bank Citizens Advisory Board was not subject to conflict-of-interest requirements. Mayor Walsh

stated that he will have a conversation with Corporation Counsel on behalf of the Board because the value of the advisory committee becomes questionable if people with vested interests are not involved.

Member Hogan asked if the people on the four neighborhood steering committees will be eligible for SHSC's resident advisory committee. Ms. Sczpanski answered in the affirmative and explained that there are people on the steering committees that could be great fits.

Mayor Walsh asked Ms. Sczpanski if she has any other updates on anything. Ms. Sczpanski asked if anyone had any questions.

## **VII. Adjournment**

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Walsh asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Simpson made a motion. Member Radke seconded the motion. **ALL BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 2:45 PM.**