

**Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of the Management Committee**  
**January 10, 2022**

A meeting of the Management Committee of the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (“RIHousing”) Board of Commissioners was held on Monday, January 10, 2022 at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held via telephone conference call pursuant to Executive Order 22-01.

Carol Ventura, Executive Director, stated that this was a telephonic meeting of the RIHousing board of Commissioners Management Committee. Ms. Ventura then introduced Carl Rotella, Director of Information Technology, who summarized the parameters of the meeting.

Mr. Rotella stated that (i) this meeting would be recorded and available for review on the RIHousing website within 3-5 business days after the meeting and (ii) except for specific RIHousing staff participating telephonically in the meeting, all callers would be muted during the meeting. Mr. Rotella also asked that to prevent any feedback or background noise, telephone participants to please mute the telephone if not speaking. Additionally, Mr. Rotella announced that if during the meeting anyone had technical difficulties with audio or accessing the call, they should call (401) 457-1240.

Next, Corinne Myers, General Counsel, provided additional guidance for the meeting. Ms. Myers stated that pursuant to Executive Order 22-01, dated January 6, 2022, the meeting was being held via teleconference. Members of the public could visit the RIHousing website to view the agenda and information on the actions being taken and in the event the teleconference was interrupted, staff would stop the meeting until audio was restored.

Ms. Myers also stated that Committee Chairman Thorsen would preside over the meeting and requested that any Commissioner or staff member state their name prior to speaking for the benefit of listeners and to mute the phone when not speaking. She then invited Committee Chairman Thorsen to call the meeting to order.

A quorum being present, Committee Chairman Thorsen introduced himself and officially called the meeting to order at approximately 3:07 p.m. Committee Chairman Thorsen then invited Ms. Ventura to proceed with the roll call of Commissioners.

Ms. Ventura conducted a roll call of Commissioners and staff participating in the meeting. Commissioners participating were: Committee Chairman Thorsen, LeeAnn Byrne, Designee for General Treasurer Seth Magaziner, and Stephen McAllister.

RIHousing staff participating were: Carol Ventura, Executive Director; James Comer, Deputy Executive Director; Christine Hunsinger, Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer; Kara Lachapelle, Chief Financial Officer; Lisa Primiano, Chief Operating Officer; Corinne Myers, General Counsel; and Carl Rotella, Director of Information Technology.

Members of the public were also present.

The following matters were discussed by the Committee.

1. Approval of Minutes of the Management Committee Meeting Held on August 10, 2021

Committee Chairman Thorsen asked for a motion and a second for the approval of the minutes of the Management Committee held on August 10, 2021. A motion was duly made by Commissioner Designee Byrne and seconded by Commissioner McAllister.

There being no discussion, Corinne Myers, General Counsel, conducted a roll call vote of the Commissioners. The Commissioners voted as follows:

Commissioner Thorsen	Aye
Commissioner McAllister	Aye
Commissioner Designee Byrne	Aye

Ms. Myers then stated that the following was unanimously adopted.

VOTED: That the minutes of the Management Committee Meeting held on August 10, 2021 hereby are approved.

2. Recommendation for Approval of Renewal and Amendment of Engagement of Witt O'Brien's LLC

Committee Chairman Thorsen introduced Christine Hunsinger, Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer who made this presentation.

Ms. Hunsinger said that this request seeks authorization for RIHousing to renew and amend its engagement of Witt O'Brien's LLC ("Witt O'Brien's") for the provision of call center services in connection with the RentReliefRI Program, an emergency rental assistance ("ERA") program funded by the U.S. Department of the Treasury ("Treasury").

In February 2021, the State of Rhode Island (the "State") designated RIHousing as the subrecipient of approximately \$352 million in ERA funds that were appropriated to the State by Treasury. To administer the subaward, RIHousing developed the RentReliefRI Program (the "Program") and, through it, utilizes ERA funds to assist Rhode Islanders with their rent, utility, and other housing-related expenses.

As it developed the Program, RIHousing recognized that it needed to engage a vendor to provide applicants with call center services so that Program objectives would be accomplished in a timely, efficient, and effective manner. In turn, a Request for Proposals ("RFP") for call center services was issued in February 2021. Sixteen (16) firms, including Witt O'Brien's, submitted responses to the RFP. In March 2021, RIHousing's Board of Commissioners authorized RIHousing to award Witt O'Brien's with a contract in an amount not to exceed \$2,500,000 for a nine-month period.

Pursuant to the Board's authorization, RIHousing initially agreed to compensate Witt O'Brien's at an hourly rate based on employee title/role and number of hours worked. Both the call center services that Witt O'Brien's provides under the Program and the pricing structure have been adjusted to reflect the evolution of the Program since its initial rollout, importantly the higher-than-expected volume of applications approved. Currently, a hybrid pricing structure is in effect: call center agent services continue to be billed on a per role/title and number of hours worked basis but set fees have been established for application processing services. The total cost of the engagement will be approximately \$5,000,000, which includes \$750,000 for call center services rendered in calendar year 2021 and a budget of \$4,250,000 for services for twelve months in 2022.

Since the Program’s inception, Witt O’Brien’s has proven to be an integral component to its success. Their customized scripting, agent training program, quality assurance, reporting capabilities, and Program application assistance and processing services have been critical in enabling RIHousing to both administer the Program and comply with the ERA program requirements of the State and Treasury. As RIHousing continues to administer the Program, their continued engagement will allow RIHousing to continue to accomplish these objectives.

Following the presentation, Committee Chairman Thorsen asked for a motion and a second to recommend to the Board of Commissioners Approval of Renewal and Amendment of Engagement of Witt O’Brien’s LLC.

A motion was made by Commissioner McAllister and seconded by Commissioner Designee Byrne.

Committee Chairman Thorsen asked Ms. Hunsinger for a brief status update on the program. Ms. Hunsinger said that following a few challenges in the beginning, the program is working extremely well. RIHousing has hit an important milestone on federal dollars disbursed, reaching \$100 million this week. Staff has assisted over 1,300 families and is on track to meet the ERA 1 and ERA 2 target goals. The program is also on pace to meet Treasury’s established target goals and staff believes that there is minimal risk that the funds will be recaptured.

Commissioner Thorsen then asked for confirmation that the risk of recapture is lower than a month ago. Ms. Hunsinger confirmed that fact.

There being no further comments, Corinne Myers, General Counsel, conducted a roll call vote of the Commissioners. The commissioners voted as follows:

Commissioner Thorsen	Aye
Commissioner McAllister	Aye
Commissioner Designee Byrne	Aye

Ms. Myers then officially stated that the recommendation for Approval of Renewal and Amendment of Engagement of Witt O’Brien’s LLC was unanimously approved.

3. Recommendation for Approval of Pre-Qualification of Additional Rental Assistance Support Service Vendors for RentReliefRI

Committee Chairman Thorsen asked Ms. Hunsinger to also present this request.

Ms. Hunsinger stated that this request is for approval to expand the roster of pre-qualified partners to support the RentReliefRI Program (the “Program”), an emergency rental assistance program funded by the U.S. Department of the Treasury (“Treasury”) and administered by RIHousing.

On March 18, 2021, RIHousing’s Board of Commissioners approved its creation of roster of pre-qualified vendors that could provide the Program and its applicants with outreach, application assistance and processing, and legal support services on an as-needed basis. As demand for these services continues to grow, RIHousing seeks to expand the breadth of pre-qualified vendors on the roster to reach additional demographics and areas where current presence is under-represented.

In November 2021, RIHousing issued a request for proposals for Program application and processing assistance, outreach, and legal services for tenants and landlords (the “RFP”). The RFP was posted on RIHousing’s website and the website maintained by the State of Rhode Island Department of Administration. In addition, RIHousing circulated the RFP to more than 200 entities, including for and non-profit organizations, social service providers, neighborhood organizations, cultural entities representing a variety of populations, places of worship, and community groups. In response, RIHousing received sixteen (16) proposals from a diverse group of entities, with some entities proposing to provide multiple categories of support.

A selection committee comprised of RIHousing staff (the “Committee”) reviewed the proposals in accordance with the criteria set forth in the RFP and determined whether respondents were qualified to perform the requested services. Based on the review, the Committee proposes to add ten (10) new vendors to its roster for Rental Assistance Support Service Vendors<sup>1</sup>. The proposed expanded roster is as follows<sup>2</sup>:

**Application Assistance**

- Blackstone Valley Community Action Program
- Comprehensive Community Action Program
- Center for Southeast Asians
- Central Falls Housing Authority
- Crossroads
- Cultural & Linguistic Advocacy Support Services (C.L.A.S.S.)\*
- DARE\*
- Dorcas International\*
- East Bay Community Action Program
- Family Service of RI
- George Wiley Center\*
- Higher Ground International\*
- Oasis International\*
- ONE Neighborhood Builders
- Progreso Latino\*
- RI Community Action Association\*
- Sojourner House
- Tri-County Community Action Agency
- Witt O’Brien’s

**Outreach**

- Advocacy Solutions, LLC
- Comprehensive Community Action Program
- Center for Southeast Asians
- Central Falls Housing Authority
- City of Providence\*
- Cultural & Linguistic Advocacy Support Services (C.L.A.S.S.)\*
- DARE\*
- East Bay Community Action Program

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<sup>1</sup> Note that some vendors appear under more than one category.

<sup>2</sup> The proposed new vendors are noted with a (\*).

Family Service of RI  
Genesis Center\*  
George Wiley Center\*  
Higher Ground International\*  
Housing Network of RI  
ONE Neighborhood Builders  
Progreso Latino\*  
Sojourner House  
Tri-County Community Action Agency  
Witt O'Brien's

**Legal Support Services**

Center for Justice  
Law Offices of Michael D. Crane, LLC  
Rhode Island Legal Services

**Application Processing**

Blackstone Valley Community Action Program  
Comprehensive Community Action Program  
Center for Southeast Asians  
Central Falls Housing Authority  
Crossroads  
East Bay Community Action Program  
Family Service of RI  
Housing Network of RI  
Tri-County Community Action Agency  
Witt O'Brien's

RIHousing anticipates that the selected firms will appear on the roster for a period of three years, which period may be extended if staff determines that doing so is in the best interests of the corporation. Staff may either engage vendors on the roster on an as-needed basis or solicit bids for particular projects consistent with RIHousing's Purchasing Policies. There is no guarantee of any level of spending activity to a vendor selected for this roster.

Following the presentation Committee Chairman Thorsen asked for a motion and a second to recommend to the Board of Commissioners Approval of Pre-Qualification of Additional Rental Assistance Support Service Vendors for RentReliefRI.

A motion was made by Commissioner McAllister and seconded by Commissioner Designee Byrne.

Committee Chairman Thorsen asked Ms. Hunsinger to clarify how to differentiate the new vendors from the current partners. Ms. Hunsinger explained that new vendors are identified by the asterisk.

Committee Chairman Thorsen also asked if there were any vendors that applied that were denied. Ms. Hunsinger said that two (2) applications were received after the deadline and were disqualified and three (3) applicants that offered turnkey solutions like Witt O'Brien's LLC. Staff felt that RIHousing did not require the level of involvement proposed by those three (3) applicants, therefore, they were not recommended.

Committee Chairman Thorsen then requested a report on the volume generated by the partners as there appears to be high concentration of services provided by certain affiliates. Committee Chairman Thorsen felt that having that information would be beneficial in identifying partners that needed assistance or additional guidance.

Ms. Hunsinger said that she is happy to provide a report with those details. Furthermore, staff is proposing providing additional support to the less experienced partners with coaching, training and technical assistance.

Commissioner Designee Byrne requested an amendment to the resolution that clearly identifies the new vendors from the original roster to avoid potential conflicts of interests for the Commissioners. The change Commissioner Designee Byrne suggested is to the resolution to clearly identify the list of new pre-qualified vendors to support all RIHousing's emergency housing programs.

A motion was then made by Commissioner Designee Byrne and seconded by Commissioner McAllister to amend the motion for Approval of Pre-Qualification of Additional Rental Assistance Support Service Vendors for RentReliefRI.

Ms. Myers then explained that the amended motion is for approval of the addition of the new providers of application assistance and outreach services to RIHousing's roster of pre-qualified vendors to support emergency housing programs.

There being no further questions or comments, Corinne Myers, General Counsel, conducted a roll call vote of the Commissioners. The commissioners voted as follows:

Commissioner Thorsen	Aye
Commissioner McAllister	Aye
Commissioner Designee Byrne	Aye

Ms. Myers announced that the recommendation for Approval of Pre-Qualification of Additional Rental Assistance Support Service Vendors for RentReliefRI as amended by oral motion was approved.

#### 4. Recommendation for Approval of Pre-Qualification of Communication Services and Data Research Firms

Committee Chairman Thorsen again recognized Ms. Hunsinger who proceeded with the presentation.

Ms. Hunsinger said that request is for the authorization of RIHousing to establish a roster of pre-qualified communication services and data research firms. RIHousing may accept bids from and engage such firms on an as-needed basis to provide (i) communication services and (ii) housing related research, analysis and reporting services.

Periodically, RIHousing engages firms to provide it with communication services in the following categories: public and stakeholder engagement; focus groups, surveys, in-depth interviews and facilitated meetings; industry and market analyses and business planning; marketing; advertising; graphic design; video and audio recording and production; and strategic communication advice and counsel. In addition, RIHousing recently identified a need for broader research, analysis and reporting services to provide housing related research and policy recommendations, and the production of plans

and reports as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and other federal regulatory agencies. Consequently, RIHousing issued the following Requests for Proposals (“RFPs”) to create a roster of qualified firms to fulfill these needs:

a. **Communication Services**

In October 2021, RIHousing issued an RFP seeking qualified firms to provide it with communication services in the following categories (collectively “Communication Services”):

- A. Marketing/Advertising/Media Buying
- B. Creative Services
- C. Media Relations
- D. Report Writing
- E. Video/Audio Recording and Production
- F. Photography
- G. Website Hosting, Maintenance and Support
- H. Public and Stakeholder Engagement
- I. Focus Groups, Surveys, In-depth Interviews, & Facilitated Meetings
- J. Strategic Communications Advice and Counsel

The RFP notice was posted on the RIHousing website and the website maintained by the State of Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Purchases. In addition, the RFP was sent by email to more than 180+ public information/communications agencies and trade associations as well as 80 contacts who have signed up to receive RFP notifications from RIHousing.

Overall, RIHousing received proposals from sixteen (16) unique firms, with some firms applying for multiple service categories.

A selection committee comprised of RIHousing staff (the “Review Committee”) reviewed the responses in accordance with the criteria set forth the RFP and determined whether respondents were qualified to perform the required services. Based on this review, RIHousing seeks approval to include the following sixteen (16) firms on its roster for Communication Services (please note, some firms appear under more than one category):

**Marketing/Advertising/Media Buying**

- Advocacy Solutions
- Allen Roche Group
- DDL Advertising
- ESM (Electric Symphony Media)
- Glad Works
- Luminous
- SCS (Systems Change Strategies)
- Trailblaze Marketing
- True North Inc.

**Creative Services**

- Advocacy Solutions
- Allen Roche Group
- DDL Advertising
- Glad Works
- Luminous

SCS (Systems Change Strategies)  
Shields Design Studio  
Trailblaze Marketing  
True North Inc.

**Media Relations**

Advocacy Solutions  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)

**Report Writing**

Advocacy Solutions  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)

**Video/Audio Recording and Production**

Advocacy Solutions  
Allen Roche Group  
Glad Works  
Luminous  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)  
Shields Design Studio  
Sociable  
St. Thomas Sound & Picture  
Third Spoon

**Photography**

Allen Roche Group  
Connie Grosch Photography  
DDL Advertising  
Glad Works  
Gretchen Ertl Photography  
Luminous  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)  
Third Spoon

**Website Hosting, Maintenance and Support**

Glad Works  
Luminous  
NineDot  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)  
Shields Design Studio

**Public and Stakeholder Engagement**

Advocacy Solutions  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)

**Focus Groups, Surveys, In-depth Interviews, & Facilitated Meetings**

SCS (Systems Change Strategies)

**Strategic Communications Advice and Counsel**



Advocacy Solutions  
SCS (Systems Change Strategies)

**b. Data Research Services**

Continuing, Ms. Hunsinger said that in October 2021, RIHousing issued an RFP seeking qualified firms to provide housing related research, analysis and reporting services (“Data Research Services”). The RFP notice was posted on the RIHousing’s website and the website maintained by the State of Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Purchases, as well as the local and national websites for the American Planning Association. In response to the RFP, RIHousing received proposals from five (5) firms.

The Review Committee reviewed the responses in accordance with the criteria set forth in the RFP and determined that each of the five (5) respondents whose submissions met the threshold requirements was qualified to perform the services. Based on this review, RIHousing seeks approval to include the following firms on its roster of Data Research firms (please note, some firms appear under more than one category):

**Production of Plans and Reports**

HousingWorks RI  
Mullin & Lonergan Associates  
Western Economic Services, LLC

**Industry/Market Analyses/Business Planning**

Ninigret Partners  
Western Economic Services, LLC

**Housing Related Research, Analysis and Policy Recommendations**

January Advisors  
HousingWorks RI  
Mullin & Lonergan Associates  
Ninigret Partners  
Western Economic Services, LLC

The selected firms will appear on RIHousing’s roster of pre-qualified Communication Services and Data Research Services for a period of three years, which period may be extended if determined by staff to be in the best interests of the corporation. Staff will engage firms from this list on an as-needed basis or solicit bids for particular projects consistent with RIHousing’s Purchasing Policies.

After the presentation, Committee Chairman Thorsen asked for a motion and a second to recommend to the Board of Commissioners Approval of Pre-Qualification of Communication Services and Data Research Firms.

A motion was duly made by Commissioner Designee Byrne and seconded by Commissioner McAllister.

Committee Chairman Thorsen then asked if anyone had any questions.

Commissioner Designee Byrne inquired what the average yearly expense budget is for the Communications and services contracts.

Ms. Hunsinger explained that depending on the size of the contracts, most range between \$10,000 to \$40,000. Periodically, RIHousing incurs larger expenses for more complex contracts such as the Consolidated Plan and Strategic Communication and Data Policy support contracts. Those engagements require several focus groups and media services that can fluctuate from \$2,500 to \$5,000 dollars per month. Ms. Hunsinger did not have the breakdown readily available but offered to gather the information and provide those numbers to the Committee.

There being no further comments, Corinne Myers, General Counsel, conducted a roll call vote of the Commissioners. The commissioners voted as follows:

Commissioner Thorsen	Aye
Commissioner McAllister	Aye
Commissioner Designee Byrne	Aye

Ms. Myers then officially stated that the recommendation for Approval of Pre-Qualification of Communication Services and Data Research Firms was unanimously approved.

Prior to adjournment, Ms. Ventura mentioned that immediately following this meeting, staff is convening the Intergovernmental Relations Committee meeting.

Ms. Ventura then announced that in case the Committee missed the media coverage, RIHousing launched the new Homeowner Assistance Fund Rhode Island (HAF-RI). Funds are now available to provide mortgage and housing-related assistance to help eligible RI homeowners maintain housing stability. As of noon, 262 application have been opened and 94 are complete.

There being no further business to discuss, Committee Chairman Thorsen asked for a motion to adjourn the Management Committee meeting. A motion was duly made by Commissioner McAllister and seconded by Commissioner Designee Byrne to adjourn the meeting.

Corinne Myers, General Counsel then conducted a roll call vote of the Commissioners in response to a vote for adjournment. The Commissioners voted as follows:

Commissioner Thorsen	Aye
Commissioner Designee Byrne	Aye
Commissioner McAllister	Aye

Ms. Myers announced that the motion to adjourn was unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 3:28 p.m.

Committee Chairman Thorsen thanked the Commissioners and staff for their time and wished everyone a good day.

Respectfully submitted,

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Carol Ventura, Secretary and Executive Director