

HRA board divided on executive director process

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The Austin Housing and Redevelopment Authority continued evaluating the future of its executive director position at its monthly meeting Thursday, and board members were divided over recent actions in the process.

The HRA board's current executive director is Jim Hurm in a part-time position. The board must look at which option is right for HRA: either full time or part time, and with Hurm or with someone else.

Board members disagreed over whether the HRA board should have been able to discuss Hurm's recommendation to explore City Engineer Jon Erichson's interest in a part-time position as HRA executive director prior to Hurm bringing it to the Austin City Council at its April 2 work session.

"It was not about who Jim was recommending," said board member Marilyn Prenosil. "It was about how he went about it."

At the April 16 city council work session, HRA board member and city council member Roger Boughton said Hurm was just the conveyor of the message regarding a recommendation about the position. Boughton also offered an apology to Hurm that night, on behalf of himself and the HRA, regarding comments made at the April 14 Coffee with the Council meeting. That was where HRA Board Chair Marv Repinski and Prenosil questioned Hurm's seemingly premature recommendation that Erichson be considered for the job.

Prenosil asked Boughton Thursday how he could speak for the entire HRA board during that apology. Boughton said Hurm deserved that apology "on behalf of me," and he apologized for speaking for the HRA board in his apology.

"You were a step ahead of the board," Prenosil said.

Prenosil said she had looked at past minutes from former Austin HRA boards and offered a comparison.

"I think we ask more questions," Prenosil said. "We ask more questions and that's what we need to do."

Ultimately, the decision about the executive director position is up to the HRA board, Prenosil said. Board member Joyce Poshusta and Boughton agreed.

"We all need to come together," Boughton said. "And I think we've got a great board with lots of skills. We're learning. We're making mistakes. And so we're here to bring things together."

Poshusta and board member Shirley Schlieve both said they appreciated the phone call from Hurm regarding Erichson's interest in the position. Hurm said bringing it to the work session was "just a courtesy to the council," and that he would do it again. Poshusta agreed with the order of things, because who better to make a recommendation than Hurm, she said.

But the concern of Repinski and Prenosil was that the HRA board had not discussed it.

"It should have gone through this board first," Repinski said. "At this point, we'll make the best of it."

Repinski said that by having a name out there for the position, "already the process has been wounded and broken."

"Some of you do not want to admit that we went into this backwards."

But the discussion had run its course for Poshusta. She suggested the board start looking at the executive director position at the next meeting.

"I think we just need to move on to the next item on the agenda," Poshusta said.