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OHA: Foundation will pick consultant

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The board that oversees **housing** for the city's poorest people could not agree Friday on a consulting firm to help pull the **Omaha Housing Authority** out of its financial straits. Instead, the OHA board decided to submit three candidates to the private foundation that has indicated it might pay for the consultant's services. OHA has not made the local foundation's name public, but chairman Phil Wayne said the group would decide which consultant is used.

The three nominations were picked from a group of four bidders. They are: the Nelrod Company of Fort Worth, Texas; Borrell Technology Inc. of Chicago; and Jackson Management Consulting of Woodbridge, Va.

Board members have said they were concerned about the way **Omaha's** public **housing** agency is run and preferred to have an external group review operations and recommend changes.

The consultant will serve as interim director - filling in for Stan Timm, who resigned as executive director in late January - and could help the next leader implement changes, Wayne said. OHA is conducting a national search for Timm's replacement.

"We're not looking for snakes in the grass," Wayne said in an interview. He said a thorough analysis of past practices is necessary to get to a "lean and intelligent machine."

OHA officials have been meeting with federal **housing** officials about concerns involving the agency. In addition to the sudden departure of Timm, the board is reeling from a retroactive 8 percent federal cut that affects **housing** agencies across the country.

Tim Bohling, OHA finance director, said congressional cuts could

worsen the situation.

OHA also has used \$1.1 million of its Section 8 reserve fund and \$1.5 million of its public **housing** funds to pay day-to-day costs and must pay back those accounts.

The board on Friday scheduled a closed executive session for Tuesday to discuss possible solutions to cover the agency's financial shortfalls.

On Wednesday, the board will meet with officials of the U.S. **Housing** and Urban Development agency who want answers about how OHA will handle the money it needs to put back into those funds.

Friday, OHA board members will hold a meeting for its employees to announce any staff changes or developments. That meeting will be not be open.

On Feb. 24, the board will hold its regularly scheduled monthly meeting to publicly announce staff or program changes.

Core **housing** programs for some 16,000 low-income residents will not be touched throughout the process, Wayne said. He could not be certain that the financial problems wouldn't have an impact on or shrink certain social or support services.

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