

FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE

November 4, 2009 Meeting Minutes Approved 12/2/09

Fair Housing Committee members in attendance: Sheila Mondshein (chair), Phil Herr, Henry Korman, Josephine McNeil, Esther Schlorholtz

Guests: Roberta Rosenberg

Staff: Bev Droz, Trisha Kenyon Guditz, and Robert Muollo, Jr.

1. Review and approval of October minutes

Phil asked why the housing provider was not identified in the October minutes under “other matters,” citing that it is a public agency which was discussed specifically by name in the meeting. Esther believed that it was not appropriate to put charges associated with names before said charges were confirmed as being true. Josephine expressed concern that not providing specific information is a case of filtering.

Henry agreed with Phil, and noted that as housing providers, having complainants is a cost of doing business. Henry asked the Committee what the issue had to do with the Committee’s jurisdiction as it was a privacy issue. Sheila explained the issue’s applicability to fair housing, and stated that she had advised the individual write to HUD.

The minutes were approved, as revised, to include the specific name of the housing provider. Esther voted against naming the housing provider in the minutes, unless the charges are reviewed more formally.

Sheila noted that the issue of including specific names in the minutes can be revisited in a policy context in the future.

2. Committee membership and creation of webpage

Regarding Fair Housing Committee membership:

Sheila introduced the Committee to Roberta Rosenberg as a new member of the Fair Housing Committee, subject to a formal approval by the Mayor. Ms. Rosenberg will take the place of Ms. Ferguson, who had resigned. Sheila also informed the Committee that Gerard Plante, a member of the Mayor’s Committee for People with Disabilities (MCPD), will also be appointed as a member to the Fair Housing Committee and serve as a liaison to the MCPD.

Josephine asked how Gerard, who has a motorized wheelchair, will be able to access the current meeting room as the room is quite small. Rob and Bev will work together to secure an accessible meeting space at City Hall for future meetings.

Regarding the creation of Fair Housing Committee Webpage:

Where it states “Newton Housing Authority” on the final page of the draft, the language and link will be changed to direct the browser to the City’s “housing opportunities” page, rather than the NHA’s webpage. “Housing Discrimination Hotline” will be changed to “Housing Discrimination Number.”

3. Work Plan for FY2010

Trisha asked if the second program listed in February 2010 that states “securing a consultant to evaluate the City’s review, approval, and monitoring procedures to satisfy disability access requirements for housing development and public accommodations,” should be prioritized as the first task in January 2010. Trisha explained that Housing staff continues to investigate further into the root of the deficiencies in the City’s Accessibility compliance procedures and believed that training for housing providers could be initiated quicker than a securing a consultant.

Josephine believed that until housing providers are educated first, the problem will not be resolved. Phil believed that the architectural access consultancy piece should happen first. Henry pointed out that doing 3 training events in 3 months is a big job and liked moving the consultancy piece higher to have it reflect the overall priorities of the Fair Housing Committee. Sheila suggested that a consultant regarding architectural access become the second program for January 2010 and hold off on the proposed fair housing publicity campaign, (possibly moving it to second program starting in February 2010). Fair housing training for housing counselors and social service providers will remain as the first priority for January 2010.

Phil asked why the proposed Draft Work Plan does not have any actions in November and December, 2009. Sheila explained that the change in administration causes this delay. Henry wondered if the Committee should seek an audience with Setti Warren in the two months before the work plan begins.

Discussion began regarding how the Newton Housing Authority (NHA) and other housing providers be engaged for training, with Josephine stating that a strategy needs to involve the Newton Housing Authority. Josephine wondered how the Office of the Mayor could be involved in providing help.

Roberta asked what the role is of the Fair Housing Committee in relation to the Newton Housing Authority. Trisha explained that the NHA is a separate entity from the City; that it is quasi-public. Henry explained that the Committee is an independent group that advocates for fair housing in Newton.

Sheila added that she would like to include landlords and managers of subsidized housing, including nonprofits in any training of the Newton Housing Authority on reasonable accommodation. Josephine asked how the City’s Housing Authority compared to others in the State. Henry explained that if the Housing Authority has state funded developments then DHCD is the major player, otherwise it is HUD.

Phil believed that forcing training is not the most effective strategy; the NHA should believe that fair housing training is a good idea. Training will only work if the organizations want it. Phil wondered if the NHA would like to co-sponsor the training and have other landlords participate in the training as well.

Sheila will contact the Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston about training opportunities.

On a separate subject: Henry wanted to know the status of a consistent local preference policy for housing across programs in the City. For example: is there a written document for the CPA Program regarding a local preference policy? Trisha explained that there is nothing in the CPA Program that speaks to this, and thus follows the City's current uniform local selection preference policy.

4. Discussion of Analysis of Impediments of Fair Housing for FY2011 – 2015

Phil noted that "a lack of available developable land zoned to permit compact residential development," as stated in the FY06-10 AI is not true and should not be included in the FY11-15 AI.

Josephine noted that the "Age of housing stock and the existence of lead-based paint hazards" impediment identified in the FY06-10 AI is true, and may also generate an entirely new impediment. Josephine believed that the City's housing stock creates a challenge with respect to providing accessible units, which relates to the fact that the City promotes utilizing existing stock rather than new construction. Trisha agreed that making existing multi-family stock fully accessible is difficult.

For the next meeting, Robert will provide a list of impediments from the FY06-10 AI that are currently relevant, along with what actions have been accomplished regarding these impediments.

5. Status of Consolidated Plan Accessibility Needs Assessment and Strategies sections

Trisha explained that several things are happening simultaneously around accessibility. Trisha explained that she is in the process of setting up an internal scoping process for housing development projects to assure compliance with applicable fair housing laws on accessibility. Housing staff are also looking at other City Departments to find their scope of review regarding accessibility. Trisha explained that these efforts will ultimately lead to providing a factual Accessibility Needs piece in the FY11-15 Consolidated Plan, which will be provided to the Committee at a future date.

Henry asked what Trisha's confidence level of ISD is regarding Federal accessibility requirements. Trisha was unsure about how effective ISD is in complying with federal accessibility laws. Josephine believed that this needs to be brought to the attention of the New Mayor.

Phil provided an update on the status of 192 Lexington Street and indicated that the Committee might want to testify at the public hearing on November 24th. Trisha explained that the federal and state fair housing laws applicable to the project will be addressed in the analysis of the project that comes from Housing staff.

6. Report on neighborhood input requirements for housing funding applications

Tabled due to time constraints

7. Other matters (Westchester Settlement addition on City's Fair Housing Website)

Sheila explained the purpose of adding information about the Westchester settlement on the fair housing website.

Josephine and Phil believed that the information provided should be succinct and the content should find a way to connect to Newton and Massachusetts. Sheila will explore further revisions of the draft.

The meeting was adjourned.