

June Fair Housing Committee Minutes

June 3, 2009 meeting

Attendance: Sheila Mondshein, chairman, Nadine Cohen, Phil Herr, Doug Sweet, Esther Schlorholtz, Marianne Ferguson and Susan Paley

Staff: Trisha Kenyon Guditz and Bev Droz

1. Introductions: Sheila introduced Sandi Fromm, whom the Fair Housing Committee (FHC) has asked the Mayor to appoint to the committee. Her appointment is pending a meeting with the Mayor expected sometime in June.

2. Fair Housing Month event: Phil noted that the May meeting minutes should be revised to reflect that both Len Raymond as well as Jim Campen participated in the event as speakers.

3. Reverse mortgages: Sheila updated the members on her conversation with Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services for the City. Jayne stated that she wants an informal session on reverse mortgages but not from an organization that provides this product. She envisions one to two sessions that provides the audience with the pros and cons to the use of reverse mortgages. Joanne Fisher is the lead contact for the session(s) and Alice Boyd is the staff person to contact to book the room. According to Jayne, the best months to make the session(s) available correspond to the senior newsletter that is published in August and November. Therefore, the session(s) should be scheduled for September or December.

Sheila asked if the FHC should establish a sub-committee to develop the program. The members thought there should be one session that is scheduled for a morning in September. Sheila also asked for volunteers to think about potential speakers.

Trisha said that the new FHC staff person, Robert Muollo will take the lead on the event but that he will need suggestions for prospective speakers.

Nadine cautioned the members about providing a list of housing counselors as part of the program. Nadine and Esther volunteered to research names of potential speakers for Rob when he begins work on June 8. Sandi Fromm said that she would help with Alice Bailey to identify a date for the program.

4. Minutes from the May meeting: The minutes were approved with the one change requested by Phil earlier.

5. Meeting accommodations: Sheila updated the committee on her conversation with Barbara Lischinsky who may be joining the FHC in the fall. However, she needs transportation assistance to attend the meetings. She is visually impaired and has a guide dog. The committee discussed the following options:

Use of The Ride although dependability can be irregular;

A committee member or members could commit to picking up Barbara with her dog and provide transportation to and from the meetings;

Barbara can take the T to Highlands Station or Newton Centre weather permitting and a member or members could commit to picking her up; and/or

The City could use CDBG funds to pay for the cost of a cab for Barbara. Funds would come out of the administration budget not the fair housing “line item.”

The members discussed the following questions: Could the City have a contract with Yellow Cab? Could this establish a precedent that members of other advisory committees could request transportation assistance? What is the round trip fare? (Approximately \$30.) Could Barbara try The Ride a couple of times to see if she can attend meetings at the 8:00 a.m. start?

The members decided that the use of CDBG funds to pay cab fare for Barbara ---which is an eligible expenditure— is justifiable as a matter of reasonable accommodation to make the meeting accessible for Barbara as liaison with the Mayor’s Committee for Persons with Disabilities. The committee will advise Barbara accordingly.

6. Needs assessment discussion for the FY11-10 Consolidated Plan: Kathleen Cahill, Senior Planner joined the conversation and with Trisha facilitated a discussion about fair housing-related needs and strategies for the City’s FY11-10 Consolidated Plan.

The committee referred to the *Fair Housing Action Plan’s* 12 “action steps” to begin their conversation. Sheila asked a clarifying question regarding the \$25,000 in FY10 CDBG funds that have been “reserved” for fair housing in the FY10 Annual Action Plan. Trisha explained that the funds were not earmarked for specific projects or activities in the Annual Action Plan and that the committee had a lot of flexibility regarding their use. Funds can be used for additional testing, more educational outreach (training workshops, multi-lingual brochures, educational workshops, etc.).

Sandi raised a concern about action step #9—hiring a Civil Rights Coordinator—which has little chance of being funded in this fiscal environment. Phil noted that the City already has a designated 504/ADA Coordinator, which addresses part of these responsibilities Trisha suggested that perhaps there could be a subcommittee of existing City staff to work together on all pertinent Civil Rights issues with the assistance of FHC. The members all agreed that the City’s overall compliance with architectural access requirements needs improvement.

Sheila and Nadine volunteered to follow up to see if any complaints have been filed with MCAD (Nadine) and HUD (Sheila). If so, City housing staff needs to make sure to add these issues to their monitoring and compliance responsibilities.

Sandi said that ongoing training for landlords is a need. She said that many landlords don't understand their responsibilities under fair housing and they know there is no enforcement if they break the law. She still sees landlords discriminating against prospective tenants based on their income (they have rental assistance) or having young children under six which requires a lead safe unit. Also, individuals and families that require reasonable accommodations don't know their rights.

It was noted that there is a recurring need for training of real estate agents, for whom fair housing compliance may not be a priority in the current economic climate. Nadine stated that there should be a contract that landlords and real estate agents would have to sign committing them to adhering to fair housing laws.

The members agreed that more public information is required.

David Norton is the new zoning official in ISD who is responsible in part for ADA compliance. He is attending the June 15 meeting of the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities. The members wondered if he could also attend a FHC meeting.

Kathleen discussed a problem that arose with regard to making the entrance of the Housing Authority's office on Lincoln Street more accommodating. There was a problem with installing a sign in Braille. Sheila said that she would try to gather information about the Housing Authority's compliance generally with access requirements, including whether there have been any compliant investigations or compliance reviews by HUD. She is also continuing to work to get their past transition plan.

(Also, see Kathleen Cahill's notes on this portion of the meeting.)

7. Mayoral forum: U-CHAN is sponsoring a Mayoral forum for all the candidates in August. (Date TBA.) The members all agreed that the FHC should submit questions to the candidates via Josephine. The members will develop questions at their July meeting.

8. ADA/Section 504 transition plan: Sheila circulated the City's plan and evaluation in advance of the meeting. Phil stated that the plan was fine if the City adhered to it. "We would be in good shape if we do what we said we would do," he stated.

Phil was authorized to tell the City Clerk on behalf of the FHC that accommodating language should be included in the notice of public hearings. Phil stated that some of the public hearing notices don't include accommodating language. The City clerk's office is responsible for making this language change.

The FHC needs to work with the MCPD to address non-housing issues related to accessible public accommodations (schools, voting, sidewalks, etc.)

The meeting was adjourned.