

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

Staff

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade

Patrice Faulkner

Dennis Fischman

Rona Fischman

Natasha Sierra

Meeting Minutes

June 27, 2019

Conference room-City Hall Annex
50 Evergreen Avenue, Somerville, MA

4:00 pm

The meeting began at: 4:16 pm.

Attending: FHC members, Claudia DeAndrade, Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman and Rona Fischman; City staff, Hannah Carrillo, Michael Feloney and Bryant Gaspard.

Minutes distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members and others attending; also posted to City website

I. Standing Agenda Items

Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes from the May 23rd meeting that had been prepared by Bryant Gaspard and reviewed by Mike Feloney. Dennis Fischman made a *motion* to accept the minutes which was seconded by Patrice Faulkner and unanimously *approved*.

Facebook page update: Dennis shared that two particular Facebook posts in the month of June were the most popular and had the most engagement (shares). One of the Facebook posts was in regards to the difference between two protected classes under federal and state fair housing law, National Origin and Ancestry. National Origin is where an individual comes from (whether born or raised); whereas, Ancestry is where your parents come from. The second post informed readers that if you're subletting a room, fair housing laws would still apply to sub-letters.

Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant informed the commissioners of a recent fair housing complaint regarding a tenant whose lease was not renewed. The tenant believes the lease was not renewed because she has a service dog and was initially charged pet fees by the condo board where she lives (rents a condo). The tenant hired an attorney who wrote a letter to the condo board explaining that their actions were illegal. The fees were dropped, but the tenant was recently informed the lease was not being renewed and was not given a reason. Bryant followed up with the Massachusetts Office on Disability regarding the issue.

II. Update on Specific Activities

AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing)-Condo Conversion Ordinance:

Hannah Carrillo, staff member to the Somerville Condominium Review Board (CRB) spoke with the commissioners about the new Condo Conversion Ordinance that scheduled to take effect on July 31,

2019. She discussed some of the major changes designed to increase protections in the revised ordinance such as a five year notice period for elderly, low income, and disabled tenants as compared to the current ordinance which provides two years of notice. Another increased protection is the increase of relocation expenses of \$10,000 for a unit if there is an elderly, disabled or low income tenant residing there compared to the current ordinance which allows for relocation expenses of \$300 or one month's rent, whichever is greater.

Hannah added that she has had a good deal of communication from homeowners who have received phone calls and letters in the mail that are spreading misinformation about the revised ordinance. Dennis noted that these phone calls and letters to homeowners seem to be intentional to create fear and apprehension about the ordinance. Additionally, Mike suggested that Hannah write a letter to one of the individuals known to be among those spreading misinformation about the revised condo conversion ordinance and provide him with correct information. Rona asked Hannah to research if the elderly (65 and older) might be discriminated against because of the protections in the revised ordinance.

Rona noted that it may be useful to find data on the number of condominiums sold from 1980-1990 when the first condo conversion was passed in 1985. This would provide some information and evidence on whether the revised condo conversion ordinance would have an adverse effect on the housing market in Somerville. Hannah added that she would reach out to the Council of Aging (COA) once the revised condo conversion takes effect because of the significant number of seniors who have contacted COA with question about the revised ordinance.

Patrice remarked that many of her friends who are tenants in Somerville do not know about the condo conversion ordinance and that more outreach and/or advertising about it is important. Dennis offered to post some of the condo conversion changes on the Fair Housing Commission Facebook page. He also suggested that the major changes to the condo conversion be translated into different languages. Claudia added that grocery stores like Market Basket are a good place to advertise to immigrant populations. Hannah shared that she would work with the Office of Housing Stability to connect tenants who are in a multi-family house that may be sold and converted to condos.

2019 Greater Boston Housing Report Card:

Bryant briefly mentioned the 2019 Greater Boston Housing Report Card. He specifically discussed the chapter: "The Relationship between Housing Production and Segregation," which reported that the Boston Metropolitan region is consistently among the set of hyper-segregated cities for black residents—meaning that blacks were highly segregated on at least four of the five dimensions of population distribution. He also shared a table that showed different municipalities in the Greater Boston area that have a majority of people of color living there such as Lawrence, Chelsea and Brockton. Prior to seeing the table, Claudia mentioned her (accurate) understanding that Randolph has a majority minority population and seen a significant increase in its minority population since 1990.

The Greater Boston Housing Report card also highlighted that the Boston Metro area is one of the most expensive in the country (4th) to buy a house and to rent a two bedroom apartment (3rd). Rona shared that based on what she has read, the Boston area is now the third most expensive real estate market in the nation.

III. Announcements/Updates

Bryant shared that he would be out of the office the week of the next scheduled meeting in July. There was related discussion that the FHC sometimes hasn't met during one of the summer months. It was agreed that the Commission would not meet in July, and instead would meet next on August 22, 2019.

A motion to adjourn was introduced by Rona seconded by Patrice and approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 pm.