

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor

Liaison

Bryant Gaspard
Program Specialist

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade
Jose Filho
Dennis Fischman
Rona Fischman

Meeting Minutes

March 27, 2018

Somerville Library-Central Branch
1st Floor Auditorium
79 Highland Avenue
1:00 pm

The meeting began at: 1:08 pm.

Attending: FHC members Jose Filho, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman; City staff, Mona Al-Abadi, Michael Feloney, and Bryant Gaspard

Not attending: FHC member Claudia DeAndrade

Minutes distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members; staff attending, City website

I. Standing Agenda Items

- Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes from the March 1st meeting that had been prepared by Bryant Gaspard and reviewed by Mike Feloney. Rona Fischman made a *motion* to accept the minutes, which was seconded by Dennis Fischman and unanimously *approved*.
- Facebook page update: Dennis shared that in the month of March one of the most popular and shared Facebook items was a news article about a resort town in Michigan that allows only practicing Christians to purchase homes or inherit them.
Another popular item on the page was the question, Can my apartment complex ban kids from playing outside? The answer is no.
- Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant reported on several communications he had:
 - Cassandra Thorburn called Bryant on 3/6/2018 to discuss an issue about her landlord. She shared that her landlord was keeping her full security deposit because he alleged she stole a couch from the apartment. Cassandra denied this allegation and stated that there was no “couch” to being with. She discussed how the landlord never gave her a statement of condition and asked if she should copy the Housing Division on any emails sent to the Landlord/Attorney. Bryant told her she did not have to copy the office in any emails, but did give her the contact information for Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS). She shared that both of her parents were Attorneys and would be helping her with this issue.
 - Mati Dupont called Bryant on 3/15/2018 and shared that his property manager sent him a letter that his rent would be increased from \$2400 to \$3500 once his current lease expired. His lease expires on 8/31/2018. He wanted to know what steps he should take to try to reduce the rent

increase. Bryant suggested to Mati to ensure all correspondence is in writing and to find out why there was such an immense increase.

- Bryant shared a phone conversation he had with Susan Hegel, an Attorney at Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services. Attorney Hegel is representing another tenant at 383 Broadway who also has a Section 8 Voucher and is a single mother. An eviction case was brought against this tenant, but Susan shared with Bryant that the case was dismissed without prejudice, which means the plaintiff is allowed to bring a new suit on the same claim within the period of limitation. She believes this occurred because the Attorney for the property owner committed procedural mistakes. Susan also shared that she did not think there was sufficient evidence against the property owner to file a Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination Complaint.
- Revision of the Fair Housing Ordinance - Mike shared that he spoke with Mayor's office staff, specifically on revisions regarding residency requirements. Staff hope to be able to work with relevant committee chairs regarding change, without having it being an extended process.

II. Update on Specific activities.

- AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing) – Mike shared that most of the public comments on the AFH have been answered and no major revisions are needed. He also shared that the data on the Infographic may be updated to reflect current figures..
- AFFH-related items:
 - Bryant shared that he went to the First Time Home Buyer's class at SCC and spoke about Fair Housing law and the City's Housing Programs. Dennis and Bryant shared their thoughts on the First Time Homebuyer's class at Naveo credit union and how they did a streamlined presentation.
 - Rona is still in the process of revising parts of the Tenant Handbook, but also saved some time when she met with Hannah and Bryant to go over the City's Housing and Fair Housing website. Rona wanted the website to be more redundant and fix the non-English links.
 - Mona shared that we should consider putting the Fair Housing complaint form in a different language and the website is not mobile friendly. Dennis shared that people with low sensory vision should be accommodated to use the website as well.

III. Event at Mystic Activity Center,

- Confirmation of Attendees, resources, date and time-Bryant shared that he reached out to Barbara Chandler at Metro Housing Boston and she is available the last two weeks of April, except on April 24th. She can do evenings and a Fair Housing Training would take a minimum of 90 minutes. Rona felt that this would be too long. Commissioners decided it may not be useful to ask Barbara to come and speak.
 - Bryant, also reached out to the Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Testing Program regarding outreach and education. He emailed Professor Berman and Jamie

Langowski about outreach and spoke with Catherine Laria about how the program performs and conducts its investigations and testing.

- Dennis mentioned it was important for residents to meet face to face with Bryant and see who works for the City. Mike proposed the possibility of talking about the goals and main priorities of the Assessment of Fair Housing.
- All Brainstorming for marketing and outreach-Mona mentioned about Postering in different parts of Somerville and contacting Dan Moore the Webmaster for the City, to add to the event to the City website calendar.

IV. Commissioner Reappointment

- Mike shared that the Reappointment is in MinuteTraq. He also mentioned that new members are on the Appointment committee and that a meeting should be coming up.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Rona and seconded by Joe and *approved* unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 2:00pm.