

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

Liaison

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade

Dennis Fischman

Rona Fischman

Meeting Minutes

October 26, 2018

Somerville Library-Central Branch

1st Floor Conference Room

79 Highland Avenue

12:30 pm

The meeting began at: 1:09 pm.

Attending: FHC members, Claudia DeAndrade, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman;
City staff, Bryant Gaspard

Minutes distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members; Michael Feloney, OSPCD Housing

I. Standing Agenda Items

- Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes for the October 12th 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 Claudia DeAndrade and unanimously *approved*.
- Facebook page update: Dennis shared that the Facebook item that received the most interest was an article inquiring if a grandchild can live with a grandparent in Senior Housing. The article receiving the second most attention was about real estate agents steering certain households to certain neighborhoods based on race.
- Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant shared a fair housing complaint that was sent to him via email on October 3rd, 2018. The tenant filed a complaint based on concern that she had been discriminated against due to a disability, **discrimination due to her disability**. The tenant reported that the property manager at her apartment building did not honor her reasonable accommodation to add a door to her stand up shower. The tenant shared that a curtain was installed and that it poses a danger to her, because the floor gets wet and she could possibly slip and fall.

Bryant shared that he communicated with the property manager and the attorney representing the owner of the apartment building regarding why a curtain was installed rather than a door. Bryant was informed that the configurations of the standup shower the tenant had was bigger than normal and a door would not be able to fit; therefore a curtain was installed. The attorney also shared with Bryant that the property managers did convert the tenant's bath tub to a stand up shower based on the tenant's reasonable accommodation request, and responded that the manager and/or owner have not engaged in any discrimination based on disability towards the tenant.

Rona expressed that in her opinion it is not uncommon for management to direct maintenance to perform modifications in a unit, prior to speaking with a tenant. She believed it was wrong that they did not explain to the tenant what the pros and cons were for a curtain compared to a door and believes it likely had to do with expense.

II. Update on Specific Activities

- AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing): Bryant shared that the comments the City of Somerville submitted to the federal Housing and Urban Development agency (HUD) regarding amending the 2015 Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule were posted online. The comments outline the City's position that there should not be substantial amendments to the 2015 AFFH rule. The comments were posted to the City's Housing division website under the tab "Additional Resources, Plans, and Reports."
- Bryant also shared that the revised tenant handbook has been emailed to the City's webmaster and it will be posted on the City of Somerville website in the Housing and Fair Housing sections. Rona expressed the possibility of having the tenant handbook translated into different languages or at least the most common foreign languages spoken in Somerville. She also shared that she spent a considerable amount of time revising the handbook and her intent for doing so was because the last iteration of the handbook had too many pages for tenants to read through if they were going through an eviction.
- Bryant informed the commissioners that he has been communicating with the staff at the Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Testing Program regarding upcoming training opportunities for people who want to be testers. He added that he would share any information about the date and location of the training once he received it

III. Vacancies on Fair Housing Commission

- Bryant shared that the Somerville Housing Authority has recommended Natasha Sierra to be its designee on the Fair Housing Commission. Natasha works in the resident services department and speaks Spanish fluently. Bryant added that he must follow certain appointment procedures before Natasha can be confirmed as a commissioner and sworn in, but he was pleased to report that she is willing to serve on the Fair Housing Commission. Rona and Dennis expressed their pleasure about Natasha's selection, especially in regards to soon having a fourth member and the increased language capacity (Spanish) on the commission.

IV. Announcements

- The commissioners all agreed that starting on November's meeting and moving forward for December and 2019, meetings will occur on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 12pm.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Rona and seconded by Claudia and *approved* unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 1:38pm.