

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

Liaison

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade

Patrice Faulkner

Dennis Fischman

Rona Fischman

Natasha Sierra

Meeting Minutes

February 28, 2019

Cross Street Senior Center
165 Broadway, Somerville, MA
4:00 pm

The meeting began at: 4:16 pm.

Attending: FHC members, Claudia DeAndrade, Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman; City staff, 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 January 23th 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 Rona Fischman and unanimously *approved*.

Facebook page update: Dennis shared that the Facebook item that was the most popular in terms of views was an article about St. Bernard Parish, a community in Louisiana that passed an ordinance prohibiting property owners from renting their single-family homes to tenants unrelated to them by blood. The Parish, which has a population that is about 90% white, settled a lawsuit based on the “blood-kin” ordinance for close to \$2 million dollars because it would effectively shut out non-white groups of people from renting in the Parish. Another issue that arose in the Parish is when it amended its zoning regulations to not allow group homes in the community because they found out two homeowners had applied for licenses to house children with disabilities. The Department of Justice brought suit against the Parish in 2018 for violating the Fair Housing Act in relation to the group home ordinance. The post that had the most interaction in terms of shares and likes was a post about Fair Housing Tester training being held at Suffolk University.

Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant shared an update on an issue he discussed with the commissioners in January. At that January meeting Bryant explained that two brothers, one of whom is disabled, applied for an inclusionary unit and were denied. The application was denied because the disabled brother did not have a credit score. One of the reasons he never was able to build up a credit score is because he receives SSI, has not worked for some time, and has never had a credit card. A reasonable accommodation letter was submitted on behalf of the disabled brother by Housing Division staff, asking the property management company to waive its policy regarding credit scores.

After several rounds of communication with the management company they decided to waive the credit policy and allow the disabled brother to move in.

II. Update on Specific Activities

AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing): Welcome two new Fair Housing Commissioners—Patrice Faulkner was welcomed as a new Fair Housing Commissioner and she shared that she is very excited about joining. She also mentioned that she has lived in Somerville for nine years, loves her neighborhood and wanted to get more involved in her community. Natasha Sierra, the other new Fair Housing Commissioner, was unable to attend the meeting. Natasha has been to previous meetings, prior to her approval.

Property Owner Workshop update: Bryant confirmed with the commissioners that the Property Owner workshop will take place on April 24th from 5:30 to 7:00pm in the Auditorium room of the Somerville Library-Central Branch. Dennis noted that it was important to inform property owners of the City's Lead Safe Program and also asked how we could convince property owners to attend the workshop. Bryant responded to Dennis' inquiry by sharing that there likely would be a presentation on the City's lead safe program and that outreach to property owners would consist of informing them of services and programs the City offers that they may find beneficial and informative.

Housing Discrimination Tester Training-Bryant shared with everyone that a housing discrimination tester training class will take place at Suffolk University on March 7, 2019 at 5:30 PM.

III. Announcements/Updates

Housing Needs Assessment: Bryant informed the commissioners that a member of the consultant team that the City hired to work on the 2019 Housing Needs Assessment will be at the next Fair Housing meeting on March 28th. The consultant will be present to hear from the commissioners regarding what they believe are the most pressing housing issues and needs in Somerville.

Bryant confirmed with the commissioners that moving forward all the monthly Fair Housing Commission meetings will take place on the 4th Thursday of each month at 4:00pm.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Rona and seconded by Claudia and *approved* unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:01 pm.

Documents distributed at meeting:

- Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Tester Training Flyer