

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

Liaison

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade

Jose Filho

Dennis Fischman

Rona Fischman

Meeting Minutes

May 10, 2018

42 Cross Street

Somerville, MA

1st Floor Conference Room

1:00 pm

The meeting began at: 1:01 pm.

Attending: FHC members Jose Filho, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman; City staff, 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 27th 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 Jose Filho and unanimously *approved*.
- Facebook page update: Dennis shared that the Facebook post that got the most reach was on the issue of racial discrimination in mortgage lending. He also shared that the posts that get the most engagement are the ones related to landlord/tenant issues.
- Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant reported on several communications he had:
 - First phone call was received on April 17 from a person identifying herself as Emily, who shared with Bryant that she was told by her landlord there would be no rent increase in her new lease. When she received the new lease there was a \$100 rent increase and a provision for her and the other tenants in the house to clean the premises of snow. When she saw this she got in touch with the Landlord's broker and told him that the landlord promised no rent increase and that having tenants be responsible for snow cleanup was illegal. The next day or so Emily received an email from the broker informing her that her lease would not be renewed. She contacted the broker and landlord to get an explanation, but has not received a response. Emily shared that she thought this was retaliation for her commenting about the illegal snow cleanup provision. She also thinks it may be a Fair Housing violation because she has a three week old child which she believes the landlord knows about. There was no substantive evidence that Emily shared with Bryant that would prove the lease was not renewed due to her having a child. A couple of days later Bryant spoke with Emily and she stated there was still no response from landlord/broker. She also stated that she was testing the unit for lead.

- Paula Taylor called Bryant and shared with him that she felt she was discriminated against by a broker or property owner named Stan, because she had a Section 8 voucher. She had been looking for an apartment and saw an ad for a two bedroom apartment on Cross Street in Somerville. She contacted Stan via text message about the apartment and he asked her if she had a Section 8 Voucher, to which she responded in the affirmative. He then asked her if she was ready to submit money for the unit. Paula found this question problematic, but still responded by saying she did have the money and was ready to pay. Afterward, Paula never received a response from Stan, even after several follow up text messages and phone calls. Thankfully, Paula did find an apartment on Broadway near Somerville, but was upset about this experience. Bryant called Jacques Realty Group who placed the ad on craigslist and left a voicemail, but never had back from them.

Bryant also shared with the Commissioners that he is flagging Craigslist ads that contain discriminatory language and emailing the party that posted the ad. Dennis shared that we should still let people know that we are monitoring advertisements, even if we do not try to formally file complaints against them.

Rona shared that in her experience many buildings are not up to code, making it more difficult for the apartments to pass inspection and Section 8 tenants to find an apartment. Joe commented on the same topic; he noted that Section 8 inspectors will immediately look for certain defects when they enter an apartment and if those defects are present, the apartment will fail the inspection.

Mike followed up on the Fair Housing issue at 379-385 Broadway discussed at prior meetings, by sharing that the City Solicitor, David Shapiro, was assessing information to determine to forward the case to the Attorney General's office and claim the City is an injured party in this matter.

II. Update on Specific Activities

- Bryant shared a draft of the press release for the Assessment of Fair Housing report with the commissioners.
- AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing)-Mike shared with the Fair Housing Commission an article about several housing groups suing the Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD for ceasing municipal submissions of the Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH). HUD claimed that the AFH is onerous and difficult for municipalities to fully comply with.
 - Mike shared that the City of Boston did not submit an AFH to HUD by the due date and had asked for an extension. HUD subsequently suspended all AFH submissions.
 - Rona proposed drafting a press release that conveys that the City of Somerville cares about Fair Housing and put forth the effort to comply with the AFFH.

- AFFH-related items:
 - Bryant shared that he has updated the Frequently Asked Questions portion of the Fair Housing Commission website to reflect common questions and answers people may have related to Fair Housing.
 - Rona shared that she is almost finished with the tenant handbook but needs help to convert the tenant handbook to Microsoft word.
 - Bryant shared with the Commissioners that he has not yet received any resumes or statements of interest for the vacant commissioner position. Mike mentioned that we could re-open the search, and also look for specific applicants based on prior resumes the Housing division has received for other Boards such as the Condo Review Board.

III. *Fair Housing Event at Mystic Activity Center*

- Bryant shared his thoughts on how the event was and what he thought were the positives and negatives about the event. He added it may be useful to do a general housing event next year, because that would encompass more city programs and more people would be interested. He noted, however, that he wasn't sure if staff would have enough time to put an event like this together.
 - Dennis remarked that the proposed housing event should include information about affordability since fair housing and affordability are intertwined.

IV. Commissioner Reappointment

- Bryant shared with the Commissioners that there was no set schedule for the re-appointment committee and that he looked at Minute TRAQ, but did not see any new updates.
 - Mike added that other committees like the Legislative committee have been meeting frequently, which may be precluding the Appointments committee from meeting and they may be waiting to do multiple appointments at one time.
 - Bryant informed Dennis that J.T. Scott was the Chairmen of the Reappointment committee.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Dennis and seconded by Joe and *approved* unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 2:02pm.

Documents distributed at meeting:

- Draft of City of Somerville Assessment of Fair Housing press release.