

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING TASK FORCE

*c/o St. Lawrence County Planning Office
48 Court Street
Canton, NY 13617-1169*

315-379-2292 (Phone)

315-379-2252 (Fax)

stlawco.org/Departments/Planning/AdvisoryBoards/FairHousingTaskForce



Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2021
Via Zoom

- 1. Call to Order and Determination of a Quorum.** Chair Fred Hanss called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM. A quorum was present.

Members Present: Fred Hanss; Lashawanda Ingram; Mike McQuade; Chris Nyman; Jim O'Neill; Amy Plumadore; John Tenbusch.

Others Present: PJ Herne, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York; Matilda Larson, Planning Office; Bob Beckstead, Watertown Daily Times

- 2. Adoption of the Agenda.** Larson asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. *The agenda was unanimously adopted* (J. Tenbusch / J. O'Neill).
- 3. Approval of May 27, 2021 Meeting Minutes.** *The meeting minutes were unanimously adopted* (J. Tenbusch / J. O'Neill).
- 4. New Business.** None.
- 5. Old Business.**

- a. Update regarding status of evictions in St. Law. Co.** P.J. Herne reported an uptick in the number of eviction application filings, due to recent Supreme Court decisions, and to the end of Gov. Cuomo's moratorium in NYS at the end of August. While the NYS eviction moratorium was re-established on September 2nd, there is some confusion among attorneys about how these will apply.

Herne is recommending that clients applying for Emergency Rental Assistance (ERAP) speak to SLC Dept. of Social Services (DSS) or Maximizing Independent Living Choices (MILC, in Massena). His reason is that the application process requires scanning documents and submitting electronically; these functionalities are often not available to low-income clients. He noted the recent report that over 400 ERAP applications have been submitted by SLC, only 3 have been accepted/funded.

Herne felt that the State wasn't prepared to properly process applications. He reported that NYS is among the lowest-performing states in terms of getting ERAP funds out to renters and landlords. He pointed to problems with ERAP:

- 1) If a tenant has moved, the tenant and their prior landlord are no longer eligible for ERAP assistance;
- 2) ERAP assistance includes provisions including that the landlord will not evict the tenant going forward; the landlord will not increase rent; etc.

Herne reported that some landlords just want to get the tenant out of the unit. McQuade concurred.

Herne stated that evictions can still happen, in cases where property damage is alleged, or terms of a lease have been violated. He noted, however, that standards of proof are higher than before.

In answer to questions, Herne reported that any eviction cases filed between Aug. 31st and Sept. 2nd would likely be stayed due to re-imposition of a moratorium.

- b. Update on administration of Emergency Rent Assistance Program (ERAP). In the absence of Courtnie Toms, Matilda Larson reported on the memo sent by Toms on September 2nd (see attached). Per Toms, in St. Law. Co., there have been 414 ERAP applications completed and submitted by Sept. 2nd; of these, only 3 have been funded. Larson reported for Toms that applications require information/input from both tenants and landlords; given the sometimes strained landlord-tenant relationships alluded to above, such cooperation may not be forthcoming.

Larson noted that MILC has processed approx. 235 applications; DSS had processed approx. 180 applications.

Larson reported that Toms had noted a number of problems with the application/filing process. Toms also indicated a number of cases where landlords and tenants are not cooperating to complete/submit applications.

Larson then reported on several tables that Toms had provided. These included:

- 1) ERAP payments by Jurisdiction
- 2) ERAP payments made in St. Lawrence County (3 cases);
- 3) Communities in SLC where ERAP payments were made (2 in Ogdensburg; 1 in Gouverneur);
- 4) Applications by County.

Fred Hanss recommended that this report be sent to NYS representatives (State Senators and Assemblypersons). John Tenbusch suggested that the memo be shared with the SLC Board of Legislators first. ***By consensus, it was agreed to present to the BOL, then send to State legislators.***

- c. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing.

- 1) Larson reported that the Planning Office assists with an annual survey conducted by JCC Center for Community Studies to re-insert several questions into its current survey about whether tenants have experienced some sort of housing discrimination. Survey results have not yet been released; they will be shared with the BOL before they are released to the public.

- 2) Fair Housing Training. Larson showed a map of the Village of Potsdam's zoning district map. After describing the various zoning districts, she showed the locations of single-family units, two-unit structures, and multi-unit buildings.

Larson will try to calculate the assessed values for housing units in Potsdam; she will then try to map the locations of low-value housing (presumably substandard; presumably where marginalized persons live).

P.J. Herne suggested that a community-wide or even county-wide list of landlords be maintained; he felt that this would assist people to find rental units.

6. Reports.

a. Updates from FHTF members

- 1) P.J. Herne reported that additional rental/mortgage assistance funds may become available; NYS is negotiating with the federal gov't regarding regulations.
- 2) John Tenbusch reported that the Planning Office has applied for CDBG-COVID funds to do repairs to homes.
- 3) Tenbusch also reported that the Planning Office will apply for CDBG funds to continue its long-time housing rehabilitation programs.
- 4) Mike McQuade suggested that the County might use CDBG funds to help LMI households to purchase and rehabilitate houses that have been foreclosed by the County. There was general discussion about the concept. ***Tenbusch will report back on the feasibility of the concept.***

7. Announcements.

- a. Next Meeting date: Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 9:00 am.

8. Adjourn.

The meeting adjourned by consensus at 10:02 AM (M. McQuade/J. Tenbusch).

Respectfully submitted,

John Tenbusch

Planner II