

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

August 25, 2022
Via Zoom

1. **Call to Order and Determination of a Quorum.** In the absence of the Chair, Matilda Larson called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM.

Members Present: Amy Casiuk; Lashawanda Ingram; Connie Jenkins; Christine Martin for Annette Bowman; Mike McQuade; Chris Nyman. Matilda Larson attended as staff. ***A quorum WAS NOT established.***

Others Present: Bob Beckstead, NNY Newspapers; Sally Santangelo, CNY Fair Housing; Pamela Weed-Nichols, NYS Attorney General's Office – Watertown.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda.** The agenda was accepted by consensus.
3. **Approval of Meeting Minutes, May 26, 2022.** Due to lack of quorum, the Minutes of the May meeting could not be approved.
4. **Old Business. None.**
5. **New Business.**
 - a. **Fair Housing Stakeholder meetings: Oct. 4 and 5.** It has been five years since the most recent Assessment of Fair Housing was conducted.
 - Staff are planning another round of stakeholder meetings for October 4th and 5th.
 - Stakeholders from last set of meetings (April, 2017) included court personnel, realtors, code enforcement officers, property managers, municipal officials, service agency staff, etc.
 - Staff plan to hold an evening meeting with tenants, probably in the evening.
 - Possible venues in Massena include the Municipal Building, Massena Community Center, on Beach Street, or Fellowship Hall at the First United Methodist Church.
 - Sally Santangelo suggested that food be available for a tenants meeting, and/or other type of incentives/giveaways.
 - Sally might use a similar format as was used five years ago.

- Chris Nyman suggested that his office (CDP) could include information about tenants meeting(s) in recertification material; these go out the first of every month.
- Matilda suggested that Diversity Officers from local colleges might also be invited to attend.

b. Virtual Presentation by Federal Reserve Bank of NY.

- Matilda reported that finding housing data for rural areas is a problem. The Federal Reserve Bank does provide research.
 - Matilda will contact their Community Development staff.

6. Reports.

a. Updates from FHTF members about recent activity

- Connie Jenkins reported that the Church & Community Program is always busy over the summer. She reported that she has seen an increase in displaced/homeless people this summer. She noted that, in Ogdensburg, police have pushed out homeless people by closing city parks overnight.
- Christine Martin reported that the North Country Housing Council reported that her office is proceeding with the CDBG COVID-Rehab program. She also noted that people keep calling with housing related problems (accessibility issues, etc.) and there is no money to help them.
- Sally Santangelo reported that CNY Fair Housing is still working on a FH complaint in Potsdam. A case was filed with HUD.
 - Her agency has been doing some advocacy nationally; they have used some stories from St. Lawrence County while doing this work.
- Matilda Larson reported that the County has suspended its homebuyer assistance program. She noted that house sales prices have risen to a point where typical LMI buyers are now priced out.
- Mike McQuade reported that he is seeing some new homes being built in Canton. He noted that home sales have become a bidding war between buyers.
 - Mike also mentioned a lack of access to housing rehab grants.
- Chris Nyman reported that CDP has focused on decreasing voucher utilization rates. He attributed this problem to increasing rental rates, and a reduction in available housing.
- Pamela Weed-Nichols reported that there has been a number of complaints against landlords, especially concerning security deposits.
 - There has been a level of frustration about people being put on waiting lists for assistance; there is not enough money to fully fund programs.
- Amy Casiuk reported that Legal Services is taking on clients again; meetings are held by phone.
 - Courts are up and running.
 - Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) is still available.

- Matilda reported for Courtney Toms that:
 - The Emergency Solutions Grant – COVID (ESG-CV) is out of funding. That program had provided rental arrears, security deposit, etc., for clients less than 50% of Area Median Income (AMI).
 - The Solutions to End Homelessness Program (STEHP) is still working with clients under 30% of AMI. This program helps with rental arrears and first-month rent.
 - Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) is still open to apply. ERAP can help forestall eviction proceedings.
 - MILC will attend a meeting in Ogdensburg regarding homelessness on September 22nd.
- Matilda reported that there will be a Housing Forum held in Plattsburgh on Saturday Sept. 24th. This is sponsored by the Clinton County Housing Task Force.
 - Amy Casiuk reported that Legal Aid will try to set up a table at that event.

7. Announcements.

- a. Save the Date: Fair Housing Stakeholder meetings to be held October 4th and 5th.
- b. Next Meeting date: Thursday, November 17, 2022 at 9:00 AM.
- c. Mike McQuade reported that a housing complex on Factory Street in Gouverneur with 96 units is being renovated; it is scheduled to become affordable housing.

8. Adjourn. The meeting adjourned by consensus at 10:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

John Tenbusch

Planner II