

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

May 26, 2022
Via Zoom

1. **Call to Order and Determination of a Quorum.** Chair Fred Hanss called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM.

Members Present: Fred Hanss, Chair; Lashawanda Ingram; Mike McQuade; Jim O'Neill; John Tenbusch; Courtnie Toms. Matilda Larson attended as staff.

A quorum WAS established.

Others Present: Bob Beckstead, NNY Newspapers; Amy Casiuk; Christiana DeForge; P.J. Herne; Katie Geidel; Kateri Huska; Christine Martin; Jason Pfothenauer; Pamela Weed-Nichols.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda.** The agenda was accepted by consensus.
3. **Approval of Meeting Minutes, November 18, 2021 and February 24, 2022.** The Minutes of the previous meetings were approved (J. Tenbusch / M. McQuade).

4. Old Business

- a. Fair Housing Webinar, April 28, 2022. Held in conjunction with CNY Fair Housing, of Syracuse.
 - Approx. 20 persons attended.
 - Presenters included Sally Santangelo, CNY Fair Housing; P.J. Herne, North Country Legal Aid; Courtney Toms, Maximizing Independent Living Choices; Ed Sachs, Reachout.
 - Focus was on addressing new challenges in housing during this COVID era.
 - Presentation slides were distributed to FHTF members.
 - Larson reported on 2021 Annual Community Survey results, compiled in June 2021 by staff at Jefferson Community College.
 - Question: were respondents looking for housing?
 - Question: did respondents feel they were discriminated against when buying or renting a home?
 - Question: how did respondents' personal finances change during COVID?

- Question: What was respondents' access to quality housing?
 - Data were displayed re: increased sales prices for houses in St. Lawrence County.
 - Data were displayed re: distribution of Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program by Zip Codes in St. Law. Co.
- b. Update on Rent Relief programs
- Courtnie Toms reported that MILC has been helping tenants to apply for ERAP. She has been told that the new NYS budget would be able to make payments on behalf of tenants who had applied before March 31st.
 - Applications for ERAP continue to forestall eviction proceedings.
 - Per Toms, most people contacting her agency are requesting help through the Emergency Assistance – COVID, which pays rental arrears for 6 months, pays rental deposits, etc. She expects to expend all program funds by the end of July 2022. Another program, designed to assist homeless persons, has stricter qualifications and fewer applicants.
 - P.J. Herne reported that, since the end of the moratorium on evictions, the number of cases has exceeded Legal Aid's capacity; they have had to restrict client intake.
 - Herne reported that some landlords have refused assistance under ERAP; they just want the tenants out.
 - o He asked, what happens to the money that was earmarked for that landlord? Does it / how does it get reprogrammed?
 - Herne reported that he has 50-60 cases on his desk at present.

5. New Business.

- a. 2021 Annual Community Survey results from JCC
- Matilda reported that 13-16% of persons who were looking for housing during the last 6 months reported that they felt they had been discriminated against.
 - This seems to be consistent with reports from prior years.
- b. Suggestion/s for year-end Fair Housing event
- Matilda reviewed the Fair Housing instructions provided by the NYS Office of Community Renewal (OCR awards CDBG funds). **See attached.**
 - She then reviewed possible activities as set out in the AFFH Checklist.
 - o She suggested that the FHTF might “encourage community input on fair housing matters” by holding a public meeting on fair housing”.
 - o Those in attendance agreed by consensus to hold a public meeting.
 - Fred Hanss reported that Matilda had provided a review of fair housing issues in the Village of Potsdam zoning code to their Planning Board. The Village Planning Board is beginning to follow up on that review.
 - Lashawanda Ingram asked who are the protected classes that are reporting housing discrimination issues. Larson reported that female tenants report sexual harassment from landlords; persons with physical disabilities who need reasonable accommodations; and those who have support animals.
 - P.J. Herne reported that his office sees mostly cases related to income status.

- Pamela Weed-Nichols (NYS Attorney General's office, Watertown) reported that tenant-landlord issues are most common. She directs many people to the ERAP program.
- John Tenbusch reported on a recent complaint regarding a tenant who had been working with MILC. While the complaint seemed actionable, Tenbusch was not able to follow up with the client.
 - o Tenbusch reported on a case in Potsdam from 2021, where disabled tenants living on the second floor of an apartment building were essentially marooned when the landlord removed the lift to the second floor. This case was referred to CNY Fair Housing; it is still being adjudicated.

6. Reports.

a. Updates from FHTF members

- John Tenbusch reported that there is an open application for CDBG housing programs. He noted that the Planning Office is not planning to apply this year.
- Pamela Weed-Nichols reported that she had been by NYS Office for the Aging for information on how SLC NY CONNECTS program relates to the Coordinated Entry System for homeless persons.
 - She suggested that the County might be required to follow up.
 - Courtnie Toms indicated that she is familiar with these programs. She provided a short description.

7. Announcements.

- a. Next Meeting date: Thursday, August 25, 2022 at 9:00 AM.
- b. Matilda announced that Katie Geidel has volunteered to serve on the FHTF. She indicated that Biographical forms from any candidates will be forwarded to the Board of Legislators at some point in the future. The selection process typically takes several months.

8. Adjourn. The meeting adjourned by consensus at 9:45 AM (Tenbusch/McQuade).

Respectfully submitted,

John Tenbusch

Planner II

Fair and Equitable Housing Office

www.nyshcr.org

E-mail: FEHO@nyshcr.org

V. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (see page of the APR instructions)

Recipients of federal funds have a duty to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH) pursuant to the Fair Housing Act. New York State will monitor the efforts of local government grantees to satisfy and certify their own duty to AFFH. In general, activities that AFFH should promote non-discrimination and ensure fair and equal access to housing opportunities for all. The Grant Administration Manual, Chapter 5 Section VII(E), provides additional information regarding fair housing obligations. To ensure compliance with the AFFH requirements the Recipient is required to:

- a. Display fair housing posters and distribute fair housing materials prepared by New York State, the municipality, US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), or fair housing organizations to community residents, landlords, real estate professionals and lenders;
- b. Pass a fair housing resolution that demonstrates a "good faith effort" in complying with fair housing requirements. The fair housing resolution adopted by the Recipient must also be publicized and promoted within the community; and
- c. Designate a fair housing officer who is familiar with the fair housing regulation, have him or her trained on their duties and responsibilities as a fair housing officer, and, through means reasonably calculated to reach the community, publicize the existence of the fair housing officer as the primary point of contact for all fair housing related issues.

The Recipient shall carry out the AFFH actions within one (1) year of the award of funds and provide to HCR's Office of Community Renewal proof of the activities undertaken as a record of the municipality's activities to satisfy its AFFH requirements.

In addition to the abovementioned required activities, the Recipient's AFFH Checklist should identify which of the below activities will also be undertaken. The below checklist does not include every fair housing activity that a municipality could or should undertake. It is however a good starting point of increasing community awareness, ensuring that clear procedures exist for addressing fair housing complaints, expanding the types of housing choice within the municipality, and generally providing all people with the opportunity to live in a community of their choice without discrimination.

If a Recipient intends to complete an action not included in the AFFH Checklist to satisfy one of the categories from the AFFH Checklist, it must apply to Fair and Equitable Housing Office (FEHO) for permission to do so. Questions related to fair housing obligations and/or the AFFH Checklist must be addressed to HCR's Fair and Equitable Housing Office at (518) 473-3089 or FEHO@nyshcr.org.

Recipients must be prepared to begin reporting on efforts to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing on an annual basis. Reporting will occur on an annual basis through the OCR Annual Performance Report (APR) that is due in January of every year or when submitting a FINAL APR.

AFFH Checklist:

I. Encourage community input on fair housing matters

1. Hold an annual public meeting on fair housing. Provide to HCR an agenda, meeting notes, and reports concerning the steps that will be taken to address fair housing issues raised at these meetings. Include list of attendees/sign-in sheet, location and date.

II. Ensure public policy affirmatively furthers fair housing

1. Sponsor, or work with a community development/planning organization, rural/neighborhood preservation, or fair housing organization to conduct a survey to assess the community's housing needs, including barriers to fair housing choice.
2. Survey special housing needs of minorities and women to determine possible effects of discrimination.

III. Promote fair housing education

1. Elected officials, municipality staff in charge of planning, zoning, building, housing, community and economic development, and their third-party consultants attend a fair housing training program.
2. Expert provides a fair housing education and training program for real estate professionals, including developers, sales and rental agents, lenders, and property managers.
3. Conduct a meeting with financial institutions that serve the community to discuss the importance of providing financial assistance for housing in all geographic areas and to all residents in the community.