

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING TASK FORCE

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Meeting Minutes

November 28, 2023

1. **Call to Order and Determination of a Quorum.** Matilda Larson called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM.

Members Present: Bob Santamoor; Katie Geidel; Amy Plumadore; Mike McQuade; Maureen Rickett (Designee for Andrea Montgomery); Jim O’Neill; Tiffany Pray; Mike Zagrobelny; Matilda Larson (Designee for Jason Pfothenhauer); Courtnie Toms. **A quorum was established.**

Others Present: Sally Santangelo, CNY Fair Housing; Pamela Weed-Nichols, NYS Attorney General’s Office; PJ Herne, Legal Aid Society of NNY; Bob Beckstead, Watertown Daily Times; Amy Casiuk; Robert Hershey.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda.** Larson offered staff-suggested changes/additions to the agenda. Under new business: “Discussion with partner agencies”, and the adoption of the 2024 meeting calendar. Under old business: “Planning Office comments on the County draft assessment of housing”. The modified agenda was adopted unanimously (Santamoor/Geidel).

3. **Approval of August 22nd Meeting Minutes.** The minutes for the previous meeting were approved (O’Neill/McQuade). Santamoor abstained.

4. **New Business.**

- a. Discussion with partner agencies on fair housing complaints in St. Lawrence County and testing services.

1. PJ Herne, Legal Aid Society of NNY:

- From 2019 – present, they have seen cases of income discrimination. Some local housing authorities have had cases brought against them due to them not accepting housing choice vouchers. They have also seen cases for reasonable accommodations for people with physical and mental disabilities.

2. Pamela Weed-Nichols, NYS Attorney General’s Office:

- Cases have been brought against property owners who do not comply with State laws regarding security deposit return. The law states that the tenant's security deposit must be returned within 14 days from when the property owner takes possession of the apartment; some property owners have tried to put clauses into leases that extends this requirement.

3. Sally Santangelo, CNY Fair Housing:

- There is one case currently in litigation in Potsdam that was referred by the Fair Housing Task Force. In 2023 there were 17 complaints in St. Lawrence County out of a total of around 350; this is consistent with other counties. Most of the complaints were disability related which is the same as across the Country; some were for physical disabilities and some were for mental disabilities. They mostly had to do with reasonable accommodations and modifications. The second most common cases (~20%) came from source of income complaints. There were also some sex discrimination complaints that mostly had to do with harassment or sexual orientation. CNY Fair Housing has also contracted to do additional testing (12 total) until March 2024 with funding through HUD and NYS; \$2.2 million were sent out statewide across six fair housing enforcement agencies.
- Larson: Can testing data be shared for the County Housing Assessment?
- Santangelo: Data at a high level can be shared.
- Larson: How can testing be incorporated into the assessment?
- Santangelo: There will not be many tests for St. Lawrence County because they are based on county population. However, CNY Fair Housing has added a second testing coordinator so there will be more testing capacity this coming year.
- Larson: We could meet later to discuss scope of work, and we can meet with municipalities to discuss the possibility of offsetting the costs for testing.
- Santangelo also added that she could provide staff with more resources for mapping for the assessment.

b. Adoption of the 2024 Meeting Calendar.

1. The 2024 meeting calendar has the FHTF meeting on the fourth Tuesday of February, May, August, and November. Larson suggested the following changes:
 - Tuesday, 5/28 could be changed to Tuesday, 5/21 to avoid conflicts with Labor Day holiday weekend.
 - Tuesday, 11/26 could be changed to Tuesday, 11/19 to avoid conflicts with Thanksgiving.
2. The 2024 FHTF meeting calendar was unanimously adopted with the suggested changes (McQuade/Santamoor).

5. Old Business. Santimaw reviewed maps that he had added to the draft assessment per the suggestions of task force members at the August 22nd meeting. Larson stated that staff will continue to make revisions to the assessment, and in 2024 will present the final draft to the

task force for approval, and then to the Board of Legislators for formal adoption. Santimaw also gave a summary of the 11/9/2023 fair housing training that he attended given by Sally Santangelo and CNY Fair Housing. Sally offered more detail to the summary, and stated that they wanted to offer another training in the North Country before March, either hybrid or virtually.

6. Reports.

- a. Updates and announcements by those in attendance.
 1. Bob Santamoor said that there have been improvements made to the Housing Authority in Canton. New paving has been done to 35 & 37 Riverside Dr. and cameras were updated at Law Lane.
- b. The next Fair Housing Task Force meeting will be Tuesday, February 27th at 10:00am. The location has yet to be determined.

7. Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 10:53 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Preston Santimaw

Planner I