



CITY HALL • 100 STATE STREET • BELOIT, WI 53511

**MINUTES
BELOIT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
AND HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION**

Wednesday, June 17, 2012 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM by Chair Matt Finnegan.

Present: Commissioners Matthew Finnegan, Joseph Hansen, Marilyn Slonicker, Councilor Charles Kincaid and Staff Representative Teri Downing. Commissioner Alexis Siatos arrived at 5:48 PM. Excused: Commissioner Lawrence.

2. Approval of Minutes of the January 18, 2012 Meeting

Commissioner Slonicker moved for approval of the minutes of the regular meeting held on January 18, 2012 and Commissioner Valdez seconded. The motion carried.

3. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

4. Discussion of Fair Housing Goals

a. Duties and Activities of the EOHRG other than Fair Housing and Enforcement

Staff explained that the EOHRG has within its duties and powers, the discretion to undertake a variety of activities that facilitate fair housing in Beloit. The Chair requested discussion that identifies activities the EOHRG could be doing during periods of little or no enforcement or consultation activity.

Councilor Kincaid asked staff if there are specific areas that additional help could be used. Staff indicated that outreach and education is an area that could have more activity and summarized past outreach and education activities, such as seminars, and the mock hearing.

Commissioner Valdez proposed reaching out to Community leaders and organizations to let them know the EOHRG and Fair Housing Ordinance exists. He said that educating them regarding fair housing would allow them to pass the information to clients and general public who may be experiencing fair housing issues. Commissioner Hansen pointed out that we do not have anyone from the lending community on the Commission.

Councilor Kincaid pointed out that the ordinance lists a broad range of duties that the EOHRC could perform in the form of education and recommendation.

Commissioner Finnegan suggested outreach to the Latino community because some residents have limited English proficiency (LEP) so have a higher risk of being taken advantage of in real estate transactions. Commissioner Slonicker shared an experience of poor housing conditions in an apartment complex that due to LEP, the residents were not aware of their housing rights were and were unaware of how to report poor conditions. Commissioner Finnegan suggested having an EOHRC Commissioner attend a Latino Service Providers Coalition meeting and/or a Stateline Literacy Council meeting to get an idea of specific issues residents with LEP may be facing so we can assist appropriately. There was further discussion about land contracts and how people may be taken advantage of because they are not fluent in English.

b. Create Strategy to Address Impediments for the Year

Staff suggested that the Commission develop a strategy each year to address impediments identified the City's most recent Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing.

Commissioner Valdez said that it is clear from the discussion before that the Commission feels more outreach is necessary to community organizations that have direct resident contact. He suggested the EOHRC develop marketing and educational materials that can be distributed to the agencies. Staff explained that the EOHRC has materials currently, and offered to send the materials to the Commissioners so they can review them.

Commissioner Hansen said with respect to Recommendation #7 he has received direct feedback from potential tenants on the low payment standards for two bedroom units in the Section 8 Program. He said that the tenants are being driven to substandard housing because they cannot qualify otherwise. Councilor Kincaid asked what is driving the low payment standards. Staff explained that the payment standards calculations are driven by federal rules. Commissioner Finnegan said that it is an impediment in many other communities and that maybe there should to be a strategy to work with other Cities to approach HUD as a group for a solution. A discussion followed about Beloit's need for more Section 8 Vouchers and the different types of specialty vouchers that HUD offers on a competitive basis.

Commissioner Finnegan suggested the Commissioners email other suggestions to staff if they think of any.

5. Discussion of whether to apply for 2013 CDBG Funding

Staff explained that the Commission funds fair housing enforcement and outreach activities with CDBG funding and has usually applied for this funding every other year. Staff recommended applying for funding annually in order to keep the Community Development Authority members and Council familiar with the EOHRC and its important activities. Staff requested input regarding whether to apply for \$15,000 or \$25,000 in the case the Commission would like to hire in 2013.

Commissioner Slonicker said that she believes the Commission should apply for the funding and if a consultant is hired that it be a local agency so they are familiar with the residents' needs. Commissioner Valdez suggested hiring an intern to assist with the education, community outreach, and possible development of materials that were discussed. Commissioner Finnegan agreed with the idea of hiring an intern.

6. Upcoming Events

Staff explained that last year the Commission decided to have the Fair Housing Investigator come to one meeting each year to give an update on Fair Housing complaints and asked if the Commission would like him to come to the next meeting. The Commission decided to have the Investigator come to the next meeting.

7. Adjournment

Commissioner Slonicker moved for adjournment and Commissioner Valdez seconded. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:47 PM by Chairperson Finnegan.

Teri Downing
Director of Community and Housing Services