



CITY HALL • 100 STATE STREET • BELOIT, WI 53511

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

Wednesday, January 15, 2014 at 5:30 PM

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Meeting was called to order at 5:35 PM by Vice-Chair Valdez.

Present: Commissioners Rick Valdez, Mike Zoril, Matthew Finnegan, Steve Howland, and Staff Representative Teri Downing. Commissioner Hansen excused via email.

Commissioner Marilyn Sloniker arrived at 5:40 PM and Commissioner Charles Kincaid arrived at 5:43 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes of the October 16, 2013 Meeting

Commissioner Howland moved for approval, and Commissioner Finnegan seconded. Motion carried.

3. Public Participation

There were no members of the public present.

4. Discuss Fair Housing Month Activities

a) Fair Housing Poster Contest

Staff asked whether the Commission wanted to conduct the poster contest again this year with the Merrill children and do the display again if you want.

Commissioner Howland asked whether we have involved other schools in the past. Staff explained that the Beloit School District has been contacted but have not received any interest. She also contacted the Boys and Girls Club last two years in but has not received a response.

Commissioner Zoril suggested inviting high school students to come and watch the mock hearing. He said he believes that is one of the reasons the whole country is in the position it is right now; because not enough people participate. He said by looking around this room and seeing all the seats are empty maybe there is something we can do to encourage some students to show up.

Staff explained the State has an essay contest in addition to the poster contest.

Commissioner Howland said that since the state is providing so many venues, posters, essays, videos; that it would be wonderful to have some participation. He

suggested that staff try to make contact again to attempt expansion of participation and response.

b) Mock Hearing

Staff explained that she has contacted the UW Law School but has received no response so far.

(Chairperson Sloniker arrived at 5:40 PM, and conducted the meeting from that point forward.)

Commissioner Howland asked whether the previous mock hearing was a valuable experience, and whether it generated any interest. Staff explained that it generated some interest. There were people in the audience and the Beloit Daily News was there. She also explained that she thought it was valuable for both the law students as well as the Commissioners. She said that this time, it would be a good test of the bylaws too.

Commissioner Finnegan said that since this is a quasi-judicial body helps the Commissioners so they are not stumbling around if a real hearing happened. He said it also helped commissioners sort out tenant law issues versus Fair Housing issues. He explained that there are many landlord/tenant issues and tenant “folk law” out there; like not being able to kick someone out at certain times of the year, etc. So the hearing helped the commissioners understand these things also.

Commissioner Zoril suggested there be a contingency plan if UW chooses not to participate. Staff said she would contact political science/public policy department or UW Rock County as a Plan B.

Commissioner Kincaid asked whether the proceedings be memorialized in video and staff said it could be arranged if the commission wanted it recorded.

Commissioner Zoril asked how long it would take before a hearing could be scheduled. Staff explained that the plan would be to have it in April, which is not only in Fair Housing Month but also around the time that final projects need to be in for college before finals start.

Staff explained that it about two to three weeks to get the fact pattern and related paperwork ready. She then sends it to the law students so they can prepare their cases, interview the witnesses, and interview the complainant and respondent. They need to have at least eight weeks to be able to prepare their cases.

She explained that each side gets different versions of the fact pattern because one version is from the complainant and one version is from the respondent. The professor receives a copy of both, so can make changes, and answer questions.



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Staff explained that this would take place on a Saturday, as it did last time to avoid scheduling conflicts and have the Forum to ourselves.

5. Discuss 2014 Annual Strategy to Address Impediments to Fair Housing

Staff explained that the Commission Equal Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing, which identified a number of Fair Housing concerns and impediments. The 2013 annual Strategy to Address Impediments to Fair Housing was provided for their review and updates.

Regarding 2013 Strategies A and B, which suggests use of an intern in developing materials, and conducting educational outreach: Commissioner Valdez asked if the EOC would have an intern each year to assist with Fair Housing education. Staff explained that she budgeted for an intern for 2014. Commissioner Kincaid asked what form education takes and staff explained that staff and perform educational seminars at various organizations such as Stateline Literacy Council and the Homeless Intervention Task Force.

Regarding 2013 Strategy C, which is to reach out to agencies that assist persons with limited English proficiency in order to combat unfair practices in real estate transactions and rental conditions: There was general discussion on assistance for people with limited English proficiency, specifically Spanish speaking residents. Staff explained that about 20 people attended the seminar at the Stateline Literacy Council, but real estate purchase transactions were not addressed. Staff explained that Dina Knibbs of Neighborhood Housing Services agreed assist with drafting educational materials to translate into Spanish.

Regarding 2013 Strategy D, regarding low Section 8 payment standards:

A general discussion of Section 8 vouchers followed. There were numerous questions of how the funding worked for the Beloit Housing Authority versus the privately owned company of Horizon Management. However, staff could not fully answer these questions. Staff agreed to forward information about the Beloit Housing Authority budget and demographic make-up of the Section 8 voucher holders and waiting list to the Commissioners who requested this information.

Regarding 2013 Strategy E, which suggests recruiting a member of the lending community to serve on the Commission: Commissioner Sloniker asked whether the Commission has any openings currently and if so whether there have been any recruitment efforts. Staff explained that there is one opening and that last year she attempted to contact local lenders but got no response.

Chairperson Sloniker asked whether three Commissioners would agree to seek out bankers to serve on the Commission. Commissioner Kincaid said he will check with his contacts at Blackhawk Bank for interest in the Commission. Commissioners Sloniker and Finnegan also



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agreed to reach out to lenders. Staff explained that the candidate must be a resident of Beloit in order to serve on this commission.

Regarding 2013 Strategy F, which is the development of by-laws for the EOC: Commission members mentioned that the Commission and staff have actively worked on this over the last 12 months.

Regarding 2013 Strategy G, which is to facilitate financial literacy programs throughout the City: Chairperson Sloniker suggested that since there are already financial literacy programs in the City, it would be more beneficial to refer people to those and have our fliers available to those programs. The Commissioner agreed.

The Commission decided to add a strategy that included assigning duties to Commission members and staff to carry out activities listed in the Strategy. This strategy would include having staff provide a summary report during the last meeting of each year on activities performed to meet the strategies.

The Commission decided to revise letter F to finalize for 2014 and review bylaws annually after that.

Commissioner Zoril asked how many strategies have been completed. He asked whether the Commission is spreading itself too thin since the Commission only holds six meetings per year. He suggested focusing on one to three topics per year.

Staff summarized the following:

- Strategy A: Completed for 2013
- Strategy B: Ongoing
- Strategy C: Ongoing
- Strategy D: No activity. It is difficult to address locally because it is a federal program.
- Strategy E: No activity. Attempted to recruit, with no response.
- Strategy F: Completed by next meeting
- Strategy G: No activity

Commissioner Zoril said that the Commission may be able to maximize their effectiveness by narrowing the goals.

Commissioner Valdez said that Strategy A regarding the intern is ongoing, and that many items were thoroughly discussed in regards to B and C also being ongoing. He said that the mortgage/lending recruitment will be able to assist greatly with Strategy G. He said he believes this is a good foundation to continue on with 2014. He said he believes that the Commissioner may see some gains being made for the first time since he has been on the Commission; that there may be something solidified.



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Commissioner Zoril asked if there is anything we can do locally regarding Strategy D; the Section 8 payment standards being so low.

Staff explained that the payment standards are issued by HUD based on a formula. She pointed out that for some reason the 2-bedroom payment standards are very low. Commissioner Finnegan said that the 4-bedroom payment standard is less than the 3-bedroom payment standard.

Staff suggested educating the community, because they have an effect on policy makers. She also suggested collaborating with other communities that have identified this as an impediment to find out what they are doing to address it.

Commissioner Valdez said that he believes Strategy D will have ongoing activities.

6. Commissioner Comments and Upcoming Events

Commissioner Sloniker asked for a synopsis of the 920 Park Ave. situation.

Staff explained that there have been property maintenance issues for quite a while, but nothing that would rise to the level of having to be posted unfit. There were things like roof leaks, trash & debris, and minor mechanical issues. There were orders issued, but no compliance. In August the roof was leaking so badly the entire third floor had to be posted unfit because the ceiling plaster fell down.

In December it was discovered that only two of the six boilers were working, and the boilers could not maintain 70 degrees. So the property manager and owner issued space heaters to all the residents. Since they were not using the space heaters as their primary source of heat, and the boilers plus the space heaters could maintain 70 degrees, the City had no grounds to post them unfit.

The week of Christmas, one of the boilers' pipes broke in two apartments on 2nd floor which leaked into twelve other apartments. As a result, these twelve units were posted unfit.

On December 30th the last boiler failed, so there was no heat. The Plumbing Inspector determined that it was imminent that more pipes would break during the upcoming severe cold weather. Inspectors determined the entire building needed to be posted unfit. A placard was posted on all units, and residents were given the informational sheet with contact information for assistance.

On January 2nd 2014 the residents were formally noticed by mail. On January 6th, 2014 City Inspectors discovered 16 families still living there. The rest of the pipes had broken over the weekend and water was pouring out over where the garage door is located. The City turned the water off at the curb at that point. The electricity was also turned off due to the danger to



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public health and safety, as water was coming in contact with electric appliances and systems.

The City is confident that there are now families living there now. However there are people breaking in and burglarizing the units where people who were displaced still had some of their items. Someone also rammed into the door and broke the door off the garage, which is now lying on the ground just inside the garage. Because of the water, the dumpsters are frozen to the ground and to the building, so they cannot be emptied. The City continues to attempt to work with the owner, and will abate any nuisances with contractors if allowable.

Commissioner Zoril asked what percentage of these residents were on public assistance.

Staff explained that the Housing Authority had not allowed Section 8 vouchers to be used at 920 Park for quite awhile because of the conditions. Staff did not know whether any other types of assistance were used by any of the residents.

Commissioner Kincaid asked if the property maintenance standards were different for general City compliance versus for Section 8 and Public housing. Staff explained that the standards are the same for all properties in the City, but there are different remedies. She explained that for properties that are not funded with Section 8, inspectors issue orders/citations to tenant or owner if necessary. If a property is assisted with Section 8 and it does not pass an inspection, in addition to the usual City remedies, the landlord's check and/or payment can be abated for as long as the unit is not in compliance.

The Commissioner wished Commissioner Finnegan and Commissioner Howland a Happy Birthday.

7. Next Meeting Date: February 19, 2014

Chairperson Sloniker announced the next meeting date to be February 19, 2014.

8. Adjournment

Commissioner Valdez motioned to adjourn, and Commissioner Zoril seconded. Motion Carried. Meeting was adjourned at 7:00PM by Chairperson Sloniker.

Date approved by EOC

Teri Downing
Director of Community and Housing Services