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Members

Esther Schlorholtz, Chair
Donna Rigg, Vice-Chair
Judy Korzenowski
Josephine McNeil
Tatjana Meschede
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CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Fair Housing Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Date: December 6, 2023

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Place: Virtual (Zoom)

Members Present: Esther Schlorholtz, Chair

Donna Rigg, Vice Chair

Judy Korzenowski

Josephine McNeil

Tatjana Meschede

Steve West

Alex Weiffenbach

Members Absent:

Staff Present:

Malcolm Lucas, Housing Planner

Jini Fairley, ADA/Sec. 504 Coordinator

Lara Kritzer, Director of Housing and Community
Development

Public Present:

Sharyn Roberts, League of Women Voters Newton

Malcolm Lucas, Housing Planner served as recorder, Esther Schlorholtz, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

To view meeting documents, [click here](#).

1. Approval of November 2023 minutes

- Upon a motion by SW, TM seconded the motion. The November 2023 minutes were approved 5-2-0, with two abstentions.

2. Confirmation of 2024 Committee Schedule

- ES reviewed the proposed schedule for 2024 and stated that the new time for the Fair Housing Committee meeting will start at 8:30 am moving forward. There will not be an August meeting and the meeting in July will be pushed to the second week of that month because of Independence Day. ES asked if there were any questions or comments and there were none.

3. Landlord/Tenant Training Program

- ES summarized last night's training. 50 people signed up, but the turnout was only 35 people. She mentioned that the committee should remind their contacts about the upcoming training on January 17th. ES stated that she would like to work with JK on generating some interest in participation.
- ES asked the committee if they had any comments on last night's training. JM asked if the invitation captured the identities of the participants to see what type of organization they belonged to. ES responded that this data was not captured initially but was added in after the first registrations. She said she added it as an optional feature because making it mandatory might mean that fewer people register. JM stated it would be interesting if the committee had that information to see who to target when training is happening. JM also stated that it would be great if a new tenant organization could be created in the City of Newton because it would be helpful and could be a significant improvement for renters. JF stated that she was hoping that the training would be more of a range of discussion, but she was pleased with both presenters and thought it was done well.

4. Zoning Update

- ES referred to the committee's letter to City Council members which was included in the meeting materials. She noted the importance of Fair Housing considerations in zoning decisions according to federal and state laws and thanked the members for their approval of the letter, which was sent prior to the recent deliberation by the Council. ES stated that, after lengthy City Council and related meetings, the City Council voted a Village Center Overlay District (VCOD) compromise that resulted in meeting minimal standards of the requirements of the state under the MBTA Communities Act. She described some of the significant changes that were made by City Council and expressed concern about potential Fair Housing aspects of the decisions. She noted that half of the village centers in the city were removed from the final proposal, the number of units were reduced significantly to a number just over the state's minimum requirements, new parking requirements were included, and there was substantial scaling back of various height and other zoning features that would have encouraged more housing, including affordable housing, to be built by-right as required by the MBTA Act. She said that affordable housing was made more challenging than earlier proposals and these decisions may have the effect of discouraging for-profit, and even nonprofit developers, from building new multi-family affordable housing because of the economic challenges of requiring a minimum of 50% affordable units to be built in each development, while also reducing height and other features that would have resulted in greater financial feasibility. She said that height limitations for building above retail space may make these properties infeasible, now allowing for only 2.5 stories above retail space. ES stated that the compromise decision also resulted in the removal of substantial commercial property that is in West Newton along the main thoroughfare, primarily along Washington Street, and adjacent to the commuter rail station. She noted that the City has been negotiating with the state to make key improvements in the West Newton commuter rail station and expressed concern about this decision putting this funding at risk. ES stated that the MBTA Act proposal from Newton must now be approved by the state. ES stated that she would like to continue to include and highlight zoning discussions in the FHC priorities because of its key importance to affirmatively furthering fair housing. ES

thanked TM for coordinating and inviting Amy Dain to speak at January's meeting. Ms. Dain has done a report for the Boston Indicators Project at The Boston Foundation, called Exclusionary by Design.

5. Fair Housing Statewide Proposals

- ES stated that she was in a CHAPA meeting with representatives of the Housing Navigator and many other groups and that she was pleased to see that there is some movement to be responsive on topics that the Lottery Subcommittee has been discussing. The proposals included improving fair housing marketing and outreach for all lotteries across the state. She summarized key features of the proposal, including streamlining, modernizing, and simplifying the lottery process. Related to streamlining, she said there was discussion about: a single set of requirements for outreach and marketing; establishing a standard content template for affordable properties reporting to Housing Navigator and My Mass Home; defining best practices in training for required marketing; and improved demographic data collection to use to inform on barriers to access, especially for those least likely to apply for affordable housing lotteries. Regarding modernization recommendations, she said the proposals included: requiring ongoing digital advertising for all available housing with links to Housing Navigator and My Mass Home; updating newspaper requirements and not requiring general circulation newspapers; requiring websites to identify affordable housing; and updating homeownership eligibility requirements to better fit needs, including for asset limits and retirement asset treatment. Recommendations on simplification included: instituting a common application or pre-application using simplified language and information requirements; removing requirements to verify eligibility before lottery; and clearer resale procedures.
- JM asked about the background for the recommendations and ES discussed the many groups that have been grappling with how to improve the lottery process including our own sub-committee and a recent study by The Boston Foundation's Boston Indicators Project that was also reviewed in our sub-committee. ES noted that the Housing Navigator has been playing a significant role in promoting reforms and reminded the committee of their meeting with us. ES said that it would be valuable for our sub-committee to learn more and to engage in the discussion state-wide. She said that it will be helpful for the sub-committee to keep members of the full committee informed about what it is doing on this important topic whose aim is to improve outcomes and reduce barriers for low- and moderate-income households in Newton.

6. Newton Lottery Process Follow-up

- This topic will be pushed to a later date.

7. Discussion of 2024 Committee Priorities & Subcommittees (See agenda items 8 and 9)

- ES stated that she would like to review the priorities that are listed on every agenda throughout the year. ES asked if there were any questions about reorganizing/grouping or edits/additions. There were not any questions. ES stated that the list of priorities that are on the agenda allows the committee to have these discussions on an ongoing basis because the list is included on every agenda and it's also consistent with public meeting law. ES recommended eliminating the sub-committee on fair housing literature, saying that it has not been active and committee members agreed to discontinue it. ES said that it is valuable to continue to have ongoing discussion about our priorities and what we are achieving and looks forward to ongoing input from the committee.

8. Subcommittee Updates

- **Lottery Results & Lease-ups Sub-Committee**

- No update

- **Membership & Nominating Sub-Committee**

- DR discussed the committee membership terms and mentioned that ES leadership will be expiring on March 11, 2024. DR asked the committee if there was any interest in taking on the chair role. There were no responses. DR stated that her term ends in June 2024 and her vice chair role is also up to other members to sign up if interested. DR stated that there have not been any breakthroughs in recruitment for new members. Lastly DR asked the committee if they had any leads with potential candidates to let her know and she has spoken with a long-time Newton resident that is a renter that was interested but the time of the meeting is a conflict. ES noted that all but two of the current committee members have terms that expire in 2024. All committee members expressed interest in continuing in their roles.

- **Fair Housing Award Sub-Committee**

- ES asked if anyone from the committee wanted to join this committee with her and discussed that she would like to hear nominations for the 2024 award if there are any. ES stated that the event will be scheduled in April 2024 but if busy they will push it to May 2024.

- **Fair Housing Literature Sub-Committee**

- The committee agreed to discontinue this sub-committee going forward.

9. Fair Housing Committee Priorities Discussion

FH Protected Groups

- **Promote housing choice for diverse populations to advance Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH), with focus on race/ethnicity, public subsidy, and disability**
- **Promote Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in Newton**
- **Promote effective processes/practices for new affordable homeownership and resales**
- **Promote improved practices for real estate professionals to achieve more housing choice for diverse populations**
- **Identify and work to overcome barriers to successful tenancies and to improve processes/practices for tenant selection in lottery and market rate multifamily rental housing**

Learning/Teaching

- **Enhance FH literature and website information and access for the public**
- **Promote FH training for real estate professionals, landlords, tenants, the public and committee members**

Data and Analysis

- **Promote data collection on multi-family rental and new homeownership occupancy**
- **Enhance Project Review of Housing Developments to advance AFFH**
- **Support AI/Consortium Fair Housing Testing and FH testing in Newton**

Collaboration

- **Collaborate with Related Newton Commissions and Committees to increase affordable housing for households of various sizes and lower incomes and to encourage increased funding for affordable housing**
- **Promote affordable housing production in coordination with other City commissions and committees**
- **Support federal, state and city initiatives that promote AFFH**
- **Collaborate with Human Rights Commission on Fair Housing Complaint Process**
- **Contribute to Newton's FH-related plans**
- **Address committee membership appointments with representation from Human Rights Commission and legal counsel with FH specialty**

Next meeting Wednesday, January 3, 2024

*Supplementary materials are available for public review in the Planning Department of City Hall (basement) the Friday before the meeting. For more information contact **Malcolm Lucas at 617.796.1149**. The location of this meeting/event is wheelchair accessible and Reasonable Accommodations will be provided to persons with disabilities who require assistance. If you need a Reasonable Accommodation, please contact the city of Newton's ADA/Section 504 Coordinator, Jini Fairley, at least two business days in advance (2 weeks for ASL or CART) of the meeting/event: jfairley@newtonma.gov or (617) 796-1253. The city's TTY/TDD direct line is: 617-796-1089. For the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS), please dial 711