

**CITY OF NORWALK
FAIR RENT COMMISSION
MAY 5, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Patricia Genuario, Chair; John Church, Vice-Chair; (7:45 p.m.)
Martin Bernard; Mary Geake; Johnnie Mae Weldon;
Brenda Penn-Williams; Richard Stumpf

STAFF: Adam Bovilsky, Director; Lawrence Patterson, Field Representative

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 p.m. by the Chairman.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM APRIL 7, 2010 MEETING.

The following corrections were made electronically and an edited version of the minutes was provided:

Page 1: Delete Human Relations/Fair Rent after Mr. Bovilsky's name under Staff.
Page 2: Under Director's Report, replace the with it's before Fair Rent Director.
Paragraph 3, sentence 3: After "tenant questions has increased because Norwalk, add "is becoming one of the last active Commission's..."
Sentence 4 add "the" before Fair Rent.
Page 3: Under case 1595-09, after the sentence, add "Mr. Bovilsky added that the complainant has filed a Withdrawal." , delete
In the motion for amending the agenda for 1597-10 change "discuss" to "add".

**** MR. BERNARD MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE
APRIL 7, 2010 MEETING WITH CORRECTIONS NOTED AND
SUBMITTED AN EDITED VERSION.**

**** MR. STUMPF SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Genuario then read the following report into the record:

Welcome and thank you for attending tonight's May 2010 meeting of the Fair Rent Commission. I have no report this evening other than to mention that our annual Spring Dinner will be held on Wednesday, May 26 at 6pm at O'Neil's Pub and Restaurant in SONO. I am hopeful that you will be able to attend. Remember, RSVP's are due to Jazmin with payment of \$25.00 per person by May 19th.

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Genuario, Chair

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Bovilsky presented his written report to the Commission and highlighted that there were 55 intakes during the month of April, and that there were 240 follow-up contacts in April, related to Fair Rent.

Mr. Bovilsky stated that he is happy to welcome Brett Aiello, who is currently finishing his second year of Law School at Quinnipiac University, as part-time legal intern this summer.

Mr. Bovilsky passed out a check list and asked members to indicate whether they wanted to opt out of receiving news or meeting packets at meetings, as an attempt to reduce paper.

Mr. Bovilsky stated that on Monday, the Board of Estimate and Taxation finalized the 2010-11 budget as proposed, with no further changes.

In the News:

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has listed Norwalk/Stamford metro area as the most expensive area in the country as part of their "Out of Reach 2010" report. He added that the report has been referenced in local newspapers and televised news programs revealing that the "Fair Market Rent" for a 2-bedroom unit is \$1,800, and that therefore in order for a family to spend only 30% of its income on rent and utilities, that family needs 4.2 full-time jobs at the state's minimum wage or earn approximately \$35 per hour in one full-time job. He stated that there were pages of interesting data, and added that copies of the report were available for the members.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Sub-committee Report on Rental Value Research

Mr. Church stated that the sub-committee met and is working on compiling information from outside sources relative to rental values. He added that there is a better system rather than compiling newspaper data, and they have a recommendation on how to best compile the data. He provided an overview of the objective of the committee as outlined at last month's meeting, and stated that the group consists of himself, Maria Borges-Lopez, and Wendell Simms.

Mr. Church stated that they spent some time and looked at rent surveys, and determined that the information taken is posted as asking price, and not necessarily the actual charged rent. He added that other sources of information include the HUD report, which is based on 2000 census data and updated by various means including the consumer price index, and approximately eight other sources.

Mr. Church stated that the Committee recommends that the best source of measure is to use CMLS that realtors use which provides a list, and can be reported by location and sale price, sorted by type/size of unit. He asked if this information was requested more frequently than each quarter and Ms. Genuario replied that she would recommend on a quarterly basis, to review, discuss, and bring to Commission. She thanked Mr. Church and his committee for the report, and the members were in agreement that this is useful information

b. New Website.

Mr. Bovilsky stated that a new city website is up and running on an internal level while questions and issues are being worked out. He stated that it looks very good and is a much easier site to navigate. He added that it is ADA compliant with various fonts sizes. Ms. Geake asked if it will be in English and Spanish, and Mr. Bovilsky stated it is translatable by clicking on a translation prompt. Ms. Geake asked when it will be up and Mr. Bovilsky stated that it is scheduled to be up and fully functioning by June.

NEW BUSINESS

a. National Housing Trust Fund

National Housing Trust Fund – Mr. Bovilsky stated that there is new legislation by congress in the works to develop a housing trust fund in the country and to grow it to have money to develop low income housing. He added that they are looking for agency sponsors to sign a petition, and Daisy Franklin was going to present the information. He stated that he will keep the commission up to date on further developments.

b. Other Connecticut Fair Rent Commissions

Mr. Bovilsky stated that one more new project was a review of the best practices of other Fair Rent Commissions across the state. He added that Jazmin had looked at twenty-one other Fair Rent Commissions in the state and did a survey and comparison to try to find out what they do and how active they are. Out of eighteen who responded, only a small number had active commissions that met recently, and added that many City Hall Departments reported that they did not have active information on complaints filed or the number of times their commission meets.

He added that he determined for many of them it was more in name than anything else, and there was a real lack of updated information at many town halls. He stated that

maybe we should consider a more formal survey to determine what are they doing and maybe get them together to discuss best practices, and to reach out to other cities and offer a sharing of information.

Ms. Genuario asked how many commissions are active with a staff that has meetings, but do not have actual hearings, and Mr. Bovilsky replied that many are active and some actually have hearings, but only three or four. Ms. Genuario then asked where do the complaints actually go, and Mr. Bovilsky responded that in cities without Fair Rent Commissions, there is no protection against excessive rents. Other matters can be brought to a local housing court. Mr. Patterson added that for most local housing courts, they only deal with evictions or security deposit refunds, and a citizen has no recourse but to pay the rent as requested by the landlord or to move out and find a new apartment.

Mr. Bernard said that had been a federation of Fair Rent Commissions with representatives from surrounding cities, and he had served as an officer of this group.

Ms. Penn-Williams asked about affordable unit availability at the new Avalon building, and Ms. Genuario responded that that was a condition of the building development.

Mr. Bovilsky stated that affordable housing is only required in the redevelopment agency zone where 10% of the units are to be set aside at a more affordable rent, in accordance with zoning regulations,

Mr. Patterson added that the definition of affordable is vague.

Mr. Patterson added that there was a new luxury apartment building on Westport Avenue listing rents for \$3,000. Ms. Penn-Williams asked how many units and questioned where these people are coming from and where the children will go to school. Mr. Patterson replied that there were approximately 250 units, and Ms. Penn-Williams stated that combined with the 250 at Avalon seems to have created a glut of higher priced apartments. Mr. Bovilsky added that the building is the former Pepperidge Farm building with a Norwalk address, and that has been converted to luxury apartments with a year-round health club, spa and other amenities. He stated that in theory with supply and demand, the more rental units there are ought to help lower rents.

There was no other New Business discussed.

REVIEW, DISCUSSION AND MOTIONS ON OPEN CASES

- a. Case #1596-10: 103 Ponus Ave. Mr. Patterson stated that the complaint was filed 04/01/10. FRC votes to hear 4/07/10. TN pays \$2,800 for a 3BR SFR house. HD inspects (T Cap) on 03/25/10. LP inspects on 04/05/10. Flooding damage and numerous repairs. 4/21 ADB meets with LL. 4/21 TCAP meets with LL. 5/4 status update on repairs. **Mr. Patterson recommended No Action.**

**** MR. BERNARD MOTIONED TO APPROVE NO ACTION BE TAKEN CASE #1596-10.**

**** MR. STUMPF SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- b. Case #1597-10: 42-50 South Main St. #204 . Mr. Patterson stated that the complaint was filed 04/05/10. FRC votes to hear 4/07/10. TN pays \$1,850 for a 1 BR (plus loft)/1BA. LP inspects on 04/07/10. Minor repairs. Tenant may be moving. 4/13/10 Tenant files withdrawal with FRC. **Mr. Patterson recommended to close the case.**

**** MR. CHURCH MOTIONED TO CLOSE CASE #1597-10.**

**** MS. GEAKE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PRESENTATION OF NEW CASES

Mr. Patterson stated that there were no new cases.

Mr. Bernard stated that his term is scheduled to expire next month, and he has decided not to be reappointed, and Mr. Bovilsky replied that he would speak to him regarding this.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. GEAKE MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MS. SIMMS SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox

Telesco Secretarial Services