

**CITY OF NORWALK
FAIR RENT COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 18, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Patricia Genuario, Chair; John Church, Vice-Chair; Mary Geake;
Maria Borges-Lopez, Martin L. Bernard

STAFF: Adam Bovilsky, Director

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:42 p.m. by the Chair, in Conference Room 101 of Norwalk City Hall. Ms. Genuario stated that this was a special meeting to review the 2009-10 recommended Departmental Budget, and that there would be no other business discussed.

DISCUSSION AND MOTIONS ON 2009-10 DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET

Mr. Bovilsky distributed the budget and read from his detailed written report, explaining the 2009-10 budget situation. He presented an overview summary that the city is defunding twenty-nine positions, and depending on the outcome of the recommended retirement package and collective bargaining with the unions, that number may change. He provided a summary of the department's field activity and highlighted that clearly the real issue is the defunding of the current Field Representative.

Mr. Bovilsky explained the issue with the City's budget and how it affects other departments is that of the twenty-nine defunded positions, there are nine positions currently vacant, and twenty are currently filled. On the issue of retirement, 58 employees are eligible for early retirement, 14 of whom are in positions currently being defunded. Six positions which are currently being defunded are not eligible for early retirement including the Fair Rent Field Representative. He indicated that there are different scenarios which could save the position. Also even if some of those things do occur, there is a serious concern that the Field Representative could "bump up", and he went into detail as what this would mean for this department. It is very hard and sad to eliminate services, but the department function would change operations to "appointment only" not the current walk-in/open door practice.

Mr. Bernard said that it is imperative to provide services, and that in the past the secretary used to learn as "on the job" involvement, and as a result do more tasks, but we cannot do that in these times. It was the Common Council that created the Fair Rent Commission in response to the city needs for the services it provides. Mr. Church stated that without the Field Representative if there was a need to go in the field, it would be the director who should have to go. The impact on the director would be very difficult.

Ms. Geake asked what would be done with advice on evictions, complaints, etc. Mr. Bovilsky said they would have to just use brochures to provide information and answer questions, but that the interactive part would be limited. Ms. Borges-Lopez asked what other options would be available, or if there was a possibility of meeting half way, with a part-time field representative, for example. Mr. Bovilsky replied that it would not only be a union problem, but a part-time field representative would be very limiting with instruction and training. Mr. Bernard stated that he was pretty sure that under the city code, this is a full-time position, and indicated that part-time would just not work. He explained that there was so much at stake with the experience that was gained with Mr. Patterson and his training on inspections, etc, that part-time or any kind of out-sourcing would take so much time with training, that it just could not be done.

Mr. Bovilsky again referred to his report and highlighted a brief summary of the history of the department, which was created in the 1960s-70s. It was merged to a department of five, then reduced to three in 1982. Since then the ADA responsibility was added, and there has been much work expected of only three people. Mr. Bovilsky restated the impact of this issue is not only a reduction by 1/3 of the total budget but in actuality a 50% reduction in programmatic staff. Of defunding the positions would result in a drastic cut in services not required by State or City codes. Unlike DPW for example, that will also have substantial cuts, but the percentage compared to a small department is not as dramatic for them but is devastating at 33% for the Fair Rent Department.

Mr. Bernard asked what was the process and what should the commission be prepared to do to avoid this defunding action. Mr. Bovilsky said it is the same as other departments that there is a public hearing with the Board of Estimation and Taxation on March 2. Prior to that meeting, he will meet with the mayor to have informal discussions. Mr. Church asked for a breakdown of complaints, and Mr. Bovilsky said he would have the information updated for the next meeting. Ms. Geake mentioned that with the state of the economy, there would be more complaints and referrals, which would make the department even busier.

Ms. Genuario then asked what the next steps would be, and what the department should be prepared to do. Mr. Bovilsky said he would informally speak to the Mayor, Finance Director and Personnel Director before the March 2nd meeting. Mr. Church asked what negative consequences would be to fight this. Mr. Bovilsky said it was a difficult position, not just for the Fair Rent Department, but for the Human Relations Department as well, and that the pressure is on to do what is best for the city, not just what is best for the department. Mr. Bernard stated that there are currently major projects that cannot be tackled due to lack of resources; and now with this situation, there would be a tremendous burden on the Director and Nilsa. Mr. Bovilsky stated that the true victims of this situation would be the low income families who cannot afford legal counsel, and the result is that there will be fewer and fewer places for them to turn to for help.

Ms. Genuario stated that the commission should keep their eyes and ears open, watch for articles in the newspaper, and hope that Mr. Bovilsky's discussions next week can have a positive outcome on this situation.

There were no motions relative to the 2009-10 Departmental Budget, only discussion.

The next regularly scheduled meeting is March 4, 2009 at 7:30 p.m., which will be held in Room 101 of Norwalk's City Hall.

**** MS. GEAKE MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. BERNARD SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox
Telesco Secretarial Services

