

**CITY OF NORWALK  
HUMAN RELATION COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
JUNE 17, 2010**

**ATTENDANCE:** Carol Frank, Chair; Daisy Franklin; Rev. Thomas Mahoney; Karen Tobin; Andrew Mattiello, Secretary; Julius Gamble

**STAFF:** Adam Bovilsky, Fair Rent/Human Relations Director

**OTHERS:** Margaret Suib, Esq., Fair Housing Officer

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Frank called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m. A quorum was present.

Ms. Frank suggested that the Commissioners might wish to hear Atty. Suib speak on her topic first. This was agreeable to all.

**\*\* REV. MAHONEY MOVED TO MOVE TO NEW BUSINESS ON THE AGENDA IN ORDER TO HEAR ATTY. SUIB'S PRESENTATION FIRST.**

**\*\* MS. FRANKLIN SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Margaret Suib, Esq., Norwalk Fair Housing Officer.**

Atty. Suib greeted everyone on the Commission and gave a brief overview of her job as the Norwalk Fair Housing Officer. Atty. Suib distributed a small booklet on Fair Housing. She then reviewed the key points that define fair housing such as discriminating based on "race, color, creed, national origins, ancestry, sex, marital status, age, mental retardation, physical or mental disability, lawful source of income, the existence of minor children or sexual orientation". The Fair Housing Act passed in 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. It has been amended a few times to include gender discrimination, families with children and those with mental handicaps. Atty. Suib then reviewed the various protected classes, including those landlords who would discriminate against a potential tenant based on their source of income.

Ms. Tobin then said that she had wondered about those illegal aliens who are working illegally, which she thought would make the income illegal. A discussion followed about this and how it could possibly impact housing.

Atty. Suib said that Norwalk has a local ordinance, which basically tracks the state and federal laws. She explained that when someone claims that there is housing discrimination, the case is referred to Atty. Suib for investigation. Atty. Suib said that she makes it clear to the complainant that while she is an attorney, she is not their attorney, but would assist them with a case.

If there are actual grounds for a case, it could be filed with one of four different groups such as with the Norwalk Human Relations Commission, and CHRO to name two. One advantage to the HRC is that the hearings are held at night, so that the parties involved do not have to take time off from work.

Atty. Suib added that there were additional design laws for those who are handicapped. All buildings that have been constructed since 1991 must abide by these Federal laws. Atty. Suib said that most of the time, the architects are not even aware of these laws and that she had had many conversations with builders and architects about these issues. She gave an example of a particular condo complex where the architect was totally unaware of these requirements, but after reading the Federal guidelines, designed a beautiful building that easily and subtly accommodates any potential handicapped tenants.

Atty. Suib said that Norwalk's Fair Housing Officer position and Fair Housing Advisory Commission were created in the mid-1980s as part of a settlement agreement (consent decree) arising from a lawsuit brought by the Norwalk Branch of the NAACP against the City over some proposed Norwalk Housing Authority developments in 1980. The Fair Housing Advisory Commission currently is commenting on an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice being prepared by the Redevelopment Agency, as required under the Community Development Block Grant program for HUD.

Mr. Bovilsky said that one of the requirements regarding the composition of the Fair Housing Advisory Commission is that there be a permanent representative from the Human Relations on the Fair Housing Advisory Commission. There are eight members, with NAACP, NEON, and the Norwalk Housing Authority, among those agencies that have seats on the Commission.

Ms. Tobin asked what the impact of zoning was on Fair Housing. Atty. Suib said that in most communities, it was the zoning issues that created segregation in housing. Atty. Suib said that one issue for Norwalk was the "Work Force Housing", because the name would seem to discrimination against those who don't work, for example, because of disability or age. It requires 10% in some developments, but not all. Inclusionary ordinances usually encompass the entire municipality. Ms. Tobin said that Norwalk was the only municipality that has adequate affordable housing and that the pressure should be on the surrounding communities. She pointed out that most of the affordable housing developments that are in the surrounding communities are really for the town's resident seniors. The surrounding communities barely have 4% affordable housing, while

Norwalk has over 10%. Ms. Franklin pointed out that Norwalk has more minorities. Ms. Franklin said that it would be important to take care of the affordable housing. Ms. Tobin said that Norwalk could not keep sustaining the affordable housing for the surrounding communities. Atty. Suib explained that Norwalk frequently gives residential preferences to address the concern that we provide affordable housing for people already living and/or working in Norwalk.

Rev. Mahoney asked if there were any protections for convicts or those with bad credit. Mr. Bovilsky explained that in Connecticut, after a period of time, some misdemeanors can be expunged from the record. Ms. Suib advised that no, under housing discrimination laws, people with bad credit or criminal records are not “protected”, meaning they could legally be refused housing based upon bad credit or criminal records.

Mr. Mahoney then asked about the primary source of housing funds. Atty. Suib said that due to the consent decree her position is funded from the City. In other instances, the Department of Justice and HUD provide subsidies for projects. Discussion followed about this and the impact of this on taxes.

The Commission thanked Atty. Suib for her presentation.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**\*\* MR. GAMBLE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF MARCH 18, 2010, with the staff recommended changes.**

**\*\* MS. FRANKLIN SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR IN FAVOR (FRANK, GAMBLE, MATTIELLO, AND REV. MAHONEY) AND ONE ABSTENTION (TOBIN).**

#### **CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT**

Ms. Frank said that Ms. Franklin has conducted an International Human Relations program at the Ely school and it was very good.

Ms. Frank suggested that when there are only few agenda items, it could be a good time for the Commission to host a speaker on a relevant topic.

#### **DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

Mr. Bovilsky said that next month that there would be a review of the budget because it is the close of the fiscal year. There has been one complaint that has been filed by a City employee regarding accommodation. This is noted in the monthly statistics. There is a part time Quinnipac legal intern working in the office during the summer. Mr. Aiello, the intern, started the first week of the month and it is working out nicely.

Mr. Bovilsky reported that currently the focus of the staff Human Relations projects is on an analysis for the Human Relations Affirmative Action plan and completion of the American's with Disabilities Act Transition Plan. This will include a review of City parks and buildings that have public programs to insure compliance.

Regarding paper reduction, Mr. Bovilsky said that the commissioners could indicate on a list whether they wish to have newspaper articles printed out for them. They can also indicate whether or not they wished to receive hard copies of the meeting information packets.

Mr. Bovilsky then gave a quick overview of four newspaper articles that were available for the Commissioners.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**\*\* MS. TOBIN MOVED TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS:  
(A) APPEAL OF CASE #228-08E AND;  
(B) CASE # 231-09N**

**\*\* MR. GAMBLE SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Commission entered into Executive Session to discuss two Human Relations cases at 8:00 p.m. They returned to public session at 8:28 p.m.

**\*\* MS. TOBIN MOVED TO NOT HEAR CASE #231-09N BASED ON THE FOLLOWING FACTS:**

- 1.) THE COMPLAINANT WAS A MINOR AT THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT,**
- 2.) THAT HER MOTHER FILED ON HER BEHALF,**
- 3.) COMPLAINANT IS NOW AN ADULT,**
- 4.) WISHES TO WITHDRAW THE COMPLAINT;**
- 5.) AND AS SHE IS THE PRIMARY WITNESS, NO LONGER BELIEVES THERE WAS RACIAL DISCRIMINATION.**

**\*\* MS. FRANKLIN SECONDED.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **BILLS AND COMMUNICATION.**

There were no issues to discuss at this time.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

(a) IHR Day Committee

1. Report from Ely School Declaration of the Rights of the Child Program, June 17, 2010.

Ms. Franklin said that Mr. Bovilsky, the staff and the staff at NEON were very supportive. She said that the program was about more than flowers, it is about people being treated fairly and living together cooperatively. It deals with people who live in other countries where illegal actions are performed. She said that the Declaration of the Rights of the Child document should be posted in schools and that children have the right to their race, creed or religion and also the right to be protected. The staff was trained by the Human Relations Commission and conveyed the message to the children clearly that will be important to try to help people rather than discriminate against people who don't look like others. The plaque at NEON Head Start announces that that group believes in those ideas.

Ms. Frank announced that there would be a free landlord seminar soon. Mr. Bovilsky and Atty. Suib will present information on issues related to landlords and tenants. She encouraged everyone to attend.

Ms. Franklin said that the City had given a session about the Freedom of Information Act. She said that she hoped that there would be another one and encouraged everyone to attend one. Mr. Bovilsky said that he would check to see if the Commission could have a speaker come to address the Commission on this topic.

## NATIONAL HOUSING TRUST FUND

Ms. Franklin announced that National Housing Trust fund was approved by the House. The Fund is to preserve buildings. One billion dollars would be designated for capital funding and 65 million would be designated for tenant vouchers. The bill will be voted on by the Senate soon.

## ADJOURNMENT

**\*\* MR. MATTIELLO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* MR. GAMBLE SECONDED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Sharon L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services