

Erie County Human Relations Commission

Minutes – September 26, 2017

Attendance

Commissioners: Bob Howden, Willie McAdory, George Morgan, Sean Calhoun, Tracy Leet, Connie Manus, and Amy Danzer

Staff: Joe Aguglia, Charlotte Scalise, and Wayne Harbison

Guests: Carol Loll, Michael John Rensel, and Jim Canfield

Commission Members Not in Attendance

Tony Logue could not be contacted about the meeting.

The position from Jay Brenneman on the Commission is still open.

Meeting was called to order at 6:08 pm

Approval of Minutes

Tracy Leet made a motion to approve the minutes from July. This was seconded by Sean Calhoun. They were approved unanimously. The document from August were notes as there was no quorum.

Directors Report

The county budget will begin being discussed in the next month or so. We expect that Doug Smith will ask Joe Aguglia to speak at a meeting with council. The schedule, however, has not yet been set.

The HRC ordinance revision includes gender identity separate from sexual orientation. Source of income was also added. Neither was of concern to anyone at the County Council meetings.

All the concerns that had been expressed at the County Council meeting were about criminal history related to housing, not employment. It was noted that there was a hope to provide protection to those who had criminal convictions that were long in the past that may have been preventing them getting housing. Joe Aguglia handed out another proposal to change the proposed definition of criminal history to be much more explicit and excluding a number of convictions.

Michael Rensel informed the commission of his history growing up in Erie. He said that as a landlord, he knows of individuals who want to rent from him who are actively selling drugs, who are involved in dog fighting or who have many criminal involvement accusations but not convictions. He does not want to rent to these individuals as he is afraid they will harm him and/or his family. He does not want to rent to anyone against whom he may have to testify. Bob Howden, looking at the proposed changes in the definition, said all the issues Michael Rensel brought up, with the exception of dog fighting, would already be included in the new proposed changes. Joe Aguglia modify the firearms section to include prohibited offensive weapons like knives.

Jim Canfield stated that landlords often do not get restitution when properties are damaged. He will not rent to those who are using drugs and he feels that drug use in the neighborhoods puts good, law-

abiding renters at risk. Bob Howden stated that the intent is that we provide an opportunity to those who are doing well but who had a conviction in the past.

Carol Loll commented that damage prevents subsequent renters from enjoying the housing as the landlord may not be able to cover the costs of all of the repairs. There was discussion as to the animal abuse bill that recently passed. It will be reviewed and that will be included into the exemptions listed. Carol Loll thanked the commission for having an open mind and looking into revising the exceptions that were presented tonight.

Willie McAdory stated to Michael Rensel that we should be offering housing to all Americans. Willie McAdory said that if people are criminals, they should be in jail. The landlords present stated that they know that there are people selling drugs and other illegal activities, but the police have not been able to file charges much less get a conviction. Michael Rensel said that he also takes into consideration whether the individual who has the conviction is working or relying on the income of the co-inhabitants. Those who aren't working present problems to him when he looks to rent to them as they may be obtaining money in illicit ways, usually drug dealing.

Bob Howden stated that the commission believes previously convicted individuals often are having problems getting housing although not with the landlords who are present or who have given other comments about the ordinance revisions. Because not all landlords are so responsible, the commission needs to ensure we can provide housing options so they can overcome their past problems and stay law abiding citizens. We need to ensure housing is available to people in every area in the county and that we are not putting those who have a criminal history in a general geographic area whether in the City of Erie or elsewhere.

Sean Calhoun asked where the ten years stated in the proposal came from. Joe Aguglia said the ten years came from Philadelphia and Chicago human relations ordinances.

The new proposed revision of the criminal history definition, largely the exemptions of crimes to be covered under this ordinance, was discussed point by point. There were concerns about including simple assault and harassment as those are often crimes committed by those who are younger and who made poor decisions. Neither of them could be a felony; they are misdemeanors but there are different levels of the misdemeanors. After discussion, the commission agreed unanimously that simple assault should be revised to include M1 only (simple assault as physical menace) as an exemption. Stalking was discussed but felt by everyone that it should stay in. Tracy Leet moved that harassment be taken out. This was seconded by Willie McAdory. The vote was six to one in favor of removing harassment from the exclusion.

Joe Aguglia explained that criminal mischief levels depend on the cost of the damage inflicted. Criminal mischief was discussed and unanimously agreed to be revised to exclude summary offenses from the definition. There was agreement to exclude summary criminal trespass. The discussion of the firearms language noted that there was previous discussion on including prohibited offensive weapons including firearms. Discussion on the controlled substance focused on possession vs. intent to sell. Several

members stated that, if it was over ten years and the person was still clean, they should be covered by the ordinance. It was unanimously agreed to leave the language as it is currently stated. The language on animal cruelty will be added as number nine to the list of exclusions. Sean Calhoun will email Joe the language of the new law.

Tracy Leet motioned that the changes stated above be included in the revision of the proposed ordinance changes. Sean Calhoun seconded. This passed unanimously. Joe Aguglia will include the changes discussed tonight, adding prohibited offensive weapons and animal abuse. He will then submit the revised ordinance proposal to County Council.

New Business

Sean Calhoun motioned to send the resolution to County Council for \$8,000 of CDBG funding to be used for commercials in the City of Erie as required by the City through which the money comes. This was seconded by Connie Manus. It passed unanimously.

Old Business

Tracy Leet moved that the general brochure as reviewed should be printed for hopefully less than \$1,000. Sean Calhoun seconded. This was passed unanimously.

Public Comment or Open Discussion

Landlords thanked the commission members for having an open mind and being willing to have the discussion as to how to best protect the landlords as well as other residents. Commission members explained that we understood that they were responsible landlords and that we are trying to provide only for the best for our community and that we certainly welcome their input.

Adjournment

Tracy Leet moved that the meeting be adjourned. It was seconded by Sean Calhoun and approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:47 pm.