

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor

Staff

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade
Patrice Faulkner
Dennis Fischman
Rona Fischman
Natasha Sierra

Meeting Minutes

May 27, 2021

Via GoTo Meeting Webinar

Online Video Platform

05:00 pm

The meeting began at 5:18 pm.

Attending: FHC members Claudia DeAndrade, Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman;
City staff, Bryant Gaspard.

Minute distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members and others attending; also posted to City website.

I. Standing Agenda Items

Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes from the April 22, 2021 meeting that had been prepared by Bryant Gaspard. Patrice Faulkner made a *motion* to accept the minutes which was seconded by Rona Fischman and unanimously *approved* by roll call vote.

Facebook page update: One of the Facebook posts that Dennis discussed was the question of the week, "What can my landlord use my security deposit for?" Dennis explained that the only things your landlord can use your security deposit for is any unpaid rent at the end of your lease or the cost of damages beyond normal wear and tear. Normal wear and tear includes the need for repainting, broom cleaning and replacing worn flooring. In addition, you should not be charged for the costs of repairs for normal wear and tear in common areas either. Your landlord should give you a receipt of every repair paid for by your security deposit within 30 days of the end of your lease.

The other Facebook post that was a question of the week was "I'm moving out of my apartment. How can I ensure I get my full security deposit back?" Dennis explained that when a tenant moves in they should walk through the unit with the landlord and make a note of any damages already in the unit. This document is called a "Statement of Condition." When you are preparing to move out, do another walk-through, comparing lists. If there are any damages, the tenant can repair it themselves before moving out, or the landlord will be able to deduct the cost of repair from your security deposit. Clean the unit thoroughly; all rooms should be swept and vacuumed, trash taken out and all items removed

Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Bryant informed the commissioners that there was one fair housing complaint received based on the protected class of disability. The complainant shared that a private landlord discriminated against her because she had two emotional support animals. The

landlord responded that she would not be able to live in the unit because she doesn't allow "pets". After speaking with the complainant Bryant made a referral to the Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Testing Program (HDTP). The complainant confirmed with Bryant that she communicated with staff at Suffolk's HDTP and they were investigating the complaint.

II. Update on Specific Activities

The Commissioners reviewed the candidate questionnaire that will be disseminated to all the candidates running for Mayor and City Council in Somerville. Dennis reminded everyone that the Fair Housing Commission is a non-partisan body that does not support or endorse any of the candidates. The questionnaire and the responses provided are intended to educate voters about the candidate's positions and views on fair housing. The commissioners finalized the questions on the questionnaire. Bryant shared that he would check with the City's law department to ensure that a consent form could be sent to the candidates and the questionnaire can be posted on the fair housing commission website and Facebook page. The Commissioners agreed that they would disseminate the questionnaire near the end of June and try to get back responses by mid-July.

Bryant shared that he is working with his colleagues to form a Fair Housing and Anti-displacement task force. The intent of the task force is for City staff, constituents and local stakeholders/community groups to review how fair housing and anti-displacement measures can be implemented in the City's zoning ordinance. Bryant thought it would make sense for a member of the Commission to be on the task force. Patrice shared that she was interested in being on the task force. The other Commission members agreed with recommending Patrice to be a member on the taskforce.

Bryant shared some recent news that the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts filed a lawsuit alleging that the Chicopee Housing Authority and its Executive Director violated the Fair Housing Act based on disability. According to the complaint, the Housing Authority violated the Fair Housing Act by failing to allow a tenant to transfer to a first floor or elevator accessible unit to accommodate her disability. Bryant reiterated that complaints based on the protected class of disability are common. He shared that it was important that reasonable accommodations are carefully reviewed and responded to.

III. Announcements

Some of the Commissioners made an announcement that it would be great to create a working collaborative with all the other fair housing commissions in the greater Boston area. Patrice remarked that it would be good to learn and hear what other commissions are working on in the local area.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Dennis Fischman and seconded by Rona Fischman and *approved* unanimously by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 6:29 pm.