



Meeting of
Fair Housing Task Force

Wednesday, July 23, 2014
7:00 P.M.

Village of Oak Park
123 Madison Street, Room 101
Oak Park, Illinois

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approval of the June 11, 2014 and June 25, 2014 Meeting Minutes
4. Public Comment
5. Information Interview
 - A. HOPE Fair Housing Center
6. Scheduling of next interviews
7. Adjourn

REVISED 07/03/14

**Minutes of the Fair Housing Task Force
Wednesday, June 11, 2014
Village Hall - Room 101**

Present: Members Pat Cesario, Joi Cregler, Larry Frazee, Gloria Merrill, Dawn Mueller, John Murtagh, Fr. George Omwando, Bill Planek, Bob Tucker

Absent: Chair Glenn Brewer; Members Andrea Ott and Meg Herman

Also Present: Development Customer Services Director Tammie Grossman, Community Relations Director Cedric Melton, Village Attorney Paul Stephanides; Oak Park Residence Corporation Executive Director Maria Saldana

1. Call to Order

Acting Chair/Member Tucker called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

See above. It was announced that member Scott Jensen will no longer serve on the Task Force due to his moving out-of-state and that Larry Frazee will be taking his place for the purposes of this meeting.

3. Approval of Minutes

It was moved by Member Merrill and seconded by Member Cregler to approve the minutes of the meeting of May 28, 2014. A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved as presented.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Work Plan Review

Acting Chair Tucker announced that the Work Plan was previously approved.

6. Information Interviews

A. Sherlynn Reid:

Ms. Reid stated that she moved to Oak Park in 1968 and her family was the first black family to get a mortgage and buy a home in Oak Park. She moved to Oak Park shortly after

the Village's Fair Housing Ordinance was passed. She worked for the Village beginning in 1973 as a Community Relations representative. She was named the Community Relations Director in 1977. She worked for the Village for 27 ½ years.

During her tenure, the Village worked on the goal that no residential rental building would be identified by its racial make-up. Ms. Reid worked to conciliate discrimination complaints with regard to fair housing at her level. Member Cregler asked Ms. Reid what happened if conciliation did not work? Ms. Reid stated that three (3) members of the Community Relations Commission would be assigned to a case. They would be given the background on the case and make a recommendation to the full Commission. The Commission would not impose monetary penalties or awards. It would impose stipulations on building owners, such as rent concessions. Cases could be taken to the federal level so that complainants could obtain monetary awards.

Ms. Reid was asked about community education efforts during her tenure. She stated that education efforts took many different forms. The most crucial element for these efforts was confidentiality so that questions could be asked freely she stated. Member Cesario asked how many cases involved people with disabilities. Ms. Reid stated 8-10%.

Ms. Reid stated that 5% or less of the cases she had during her tenure preceded to the Commission level. Conciliation was the goal, which produced results in a quicker and more efficient manner. Ms. Reid was asked by Member Murtagh whether current processes need to be updated regarding enforcement related to the Community Relations Commission pursuant to the Village Code and Ms. Reid agreed. Ms. Reid also discussed how the membership of the Commission was constituted during her tenure and the need to update the Code so that it is consistent with how the Commission is constituted.

Member Planek asked what could be improved or done differently regarding fair housing in Oak Park? She stated that more persons could be out in the community promoting fair housing and she also recommended more testing be performed.

B. Camille Wilson White:

Ms. Wilson White spoke regarding a fair housing complaint concerning herself and her fiancé at the time, and now current husband, which occurred in 1976 in Oak Park. Ms. White filed a complaint with the village regarding a landlord that showed an apartment to her. She was notified by Ms. Reid that a white tester had been approved for the apartment.

Ultimately, they did not rent the apartment that was the subject of the complaint. Member Cregler asked her to describe the processing of the complaint. Ms. White stated that the complaint went through the Community Relations Commission process and a hearing was conducted at which the landlord testified. Ms. Wilson White stated that complaint was handled very well. The ultimate outcome of the complaint was that a public apology was ordered from the landlord and the landlord was deemed to be in violation of the Village's Fair Housing Ordinance for 10 days.

7. Scheduling of Next Meeting Interviews

Community Relations Director Cedric Melton stated that he is working on setting the interviews for the June 25, 2014 Task Force meeting. Development Customer Services Director Tammie Grossman stated that July 9, 2014 is the tentative date for the HOPE Fair Housing interview.

8. Next Steps

The Task Force will hold its next meeting on June 25, 2014.

9. Adjourn

It was moved by Member Planek and seconded by Member Cregler to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 p.m. A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved.

**Minutes of the Fair Housing Task Force
Wednesday, June 25, 2014
Village Hall - Room 101**

Present: Chair Glenn Brewer, Members Pat Cesario, Joi Cregler, Meg Herman, Gloria Merrill, Dawn Mueller, John Murtagh, Fr. George Omwando, Andrea Ott, and Carol Southern

Absent: Members Patrice Myers, Bill Planek and Bob Tucker

Also Present: Development Customer Services Director Tammie Grossman, Community Relations Director Cedric Melton, Village Attorney Paul Stephanides; Oak Park Regional Housing Center Executive Director Rob Breymaier, Oak Park Residence Corporation Assistant Executive Director Beth A. Swaggerty

1. Call to Order

Chair Brewer called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. Roll Call

See above. Member Southern will be taking the place of member Scott Jensen who previously left the Task Force due to his moving out-of-state.

3. Approval of Minutes

Member Murtagh brought up amendments to the June 11, 2014 meeting minutes that he would like to see added regarding the interview of Sherlynn Reid. It was moved by Member Merrill moved and seconded Member Cregler to take up approval of the June 11, 2014 meeting minutes to the June 25, 2014 Task Force meeting. A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Information Interviews

A. Sandra Sokol

Ms. Sokol stated that is the retired Village Clerk for the Village of Oak Park. She worked as a Community Representative in the Community Relations Department from 1985 until 1993 when she was initially elected Village Clerk. She moved to Oak Park with her husband in 1972 and became actively involved in the community doing volunteer work and forming a community organization. Ms. Sokol and her husband attempted to move to

Oak Park in 1971 and could not find a place to rent, and they ended up living in Park Forrest.

When Ms. Sokol first moved to Oak Park, she volunteered at the Oak Park Regional Housing Center. She would attend Community Relations Commission meetings and bring up issues regarding housing and apartment rentals. She performed surveys and court watching and would attend court on problem buildings.

At the time she was hired by the Village in the Community Relations Department, the Director was Sherlynn Reid, and the first director of the Department was Chris Rhino. There were two community representatives at the time and eventually there were three. The Community Relations Department now consists of Cedric Melton. The Community Relations Commission dealt with a variety of issues at that time.

The main charge of the Commission and the Department was fair housing. She was exceedingly busy. They worked with realtors, the Housing Center, and landlords. They would get referrals from community organizations, agencies, and people looking for housing and would sit and work with them and talk about fair housing. There was constant communication with the Housing Center, with the Housing Authority, with the Residence Corporation, and the Village Board. As staff persons, they were required to attend Commission meetings and give reports.

Ms. Sokol was asked to describe the duties as a community representative. She responded that the three representatives had to deal with fair housing and folks looking for apartments and single-family homes. The representatives would discuss Chapter 12 and Chapter 13 of the Village Code with persons which they were in contact with. They would also refer people to the Housing Center.

The representatives worked with the schools and were liaisons to the school districts and parochial schools. Ms. Sokol was also the liaison to the Police Department. She went to neighborhood meetings almost every night in different parts of Oak Park.

Before Ms. Sokol worked the Village, she helped the Oak Park Exchange Congress with other persons from the community to showcase Oak Park. The Village also hired a public relations firm to showcase Oak Park, which featured education concerning housing. Also, the Oak Park Development Corporation performed public relations activities.

Member Omwando asked how her first being told not to move to Oak Park and then later on moving to Oak Park in 1972 affected her formative experience working in Oak Park?

Ms. Sokol stated that in 1971, they looked for an apartment and could not find one. People would not show them us apartments and they did not know why. In 1972, they chose to move to Oak Park. So, in 1972, they worked with a realtor who told them not to buy the house they bought at 300 South Taylor. At that time, there was only one bank that would give loans to people buying in Oak Park, which was St. Paul Federal.

Member Omwando asked why they were told not to move to Oak Park? Ms. Sokol responded that people felt that Oak Park was going to become like the Austin neighborhood on the west side of Chicago and rapidly experience racial change. This is why the Housing Center began and why the Village developed programs to make Oak Park open and have open housing and fair housing for everybody. It was a philosophy of the leadership at that time.

Member Murtagh asked Ms. Sokol whether more fair housing testing needs to be performed and Ms. Sokol agreed. Ms. Sokol stated that the Village cannot sit back and think things are great when they are not.

Member Herman asked Ms. Sokol if she formed demographic statistics while she worked in the Community Relations Department and if there were statistics regarding discrimination in housing? Also, how was it determined whether apartment managers or owners were discriminating? Ms. Sokol stated that the Department had statistics, data, and maps, including a confidential map. Buildings that were becoming racially segregated were tracked, as were neighborhood blocks. Because of this, ordinances were developed, such as those that made it illegal to post "for sale" or "for rent" signs.

Member Herman asked Ms. Sokol to give her recommendations as to what the Task Force should take to the Village Board? Ms. Sokol stated that the Village needs to look at its ordinances and laws and make sure they are followed.

B. Cedric Melton

Mr. Melton stated working for the Village as the Neighborhood Program Coordinator in 2001. In 2006, he started as the Community Relations Director. As the Director, he enforces fair housing on a complaint driven basis. He organized the Department into three categories: (1) landlord-tenant relations; (2) community outreach; and (3) special events and services.

Members Cregler and Merrill asked Mr. Melton what is being done now regarding fair housing? Mr. Melton responded that testing has not been done since 1999 until recently. The 2008 Analysis of Impediments recommended testing, but there was no budget to do it. In 2013, the Village appropriated funds for testing. In addition, Mr. Melton submitted to the task force a list of ongoing and current fair housing activities performed by his Department.

Member Cregler asked Mr. Melton for his recommendations for the Task Force. Mr. Melton recommends: (1) regular testing; and (2) a strong educational campaign. Member Ott added that residents should be educated regarding what discrimination looks like so that persons know when to call when they are victims of discrimination and who to call. Member Herman recommends that more resources be dedicated to the effort. Member Murtagh recommends a larger role for the Community Relations Commission.

7. Scheduling of Next Meeting Interviews/Next Steps

Community Relations Director Melton stated that he is working on setting up interviews for the July 9, 2014 Task Force meeting.

8. Adjournment

It was moved by Member Merrill and seconded by Member Cregler to adjourn the meeting at 9:01 p.m. A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved.