

Landlord-Tenant Relations Board
Wednesday, September 5, 2018 – 7:00 p.m.

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

301 King Street
Conference Room 1102 A&B
Alexandria, VA 22314

MEMBERS PRESENT: Katie Dilks, Michelle Frazier, Valerie Ianieri, Kaitlyn Massa, Jeanette Shepherd, and Elliott Waters.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Monique Banks

STAFF PRESENT: Melodie Seau

GUESTS PRESENT: David Bakhshae, Mark Hagood, Helene Butler, and Daud Barakat.

CALL TO ORDER

Jeanette Shepherd called the meeting to order at 7:05PM and opened the meeting to the public for comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

David Bakhshae and Mark Hagood discussed issues of concern regarding the apartments they rent at 301 South Washington Street/700 Duke Street. The building was formerly a United Bank and has been renovated with four apartment units on the upper level and a business (a massage spa) on the lower level. Mr. Bakhshae is the only tenant with a lease that requires that he pay water, and he assumes he is paying water bills for the remaining tenants.

Issues with the property include significant leaks, cracking walls and windows that won't open. There are major structural problems with the building. In the interior of the apartments there is water infiltration through almost every room. Water leaks through light fixtures and through walls and windows.

An additional concern for the tenants is the massage spa on the lower level of the building. Mr. Bakhshae and Mr. Hagood said that patron's cars park in resident reserved parking. The masseuses appear to live in the business, and the tenants are concerned that they are not free to leave.

The tenants have retained an attorney and will be escrowing rent in October. In addition, they have scheduled an inspection of the property with Code Administration. Melodie Seau said that contacting Code Administration to schedule an inspection is the most expedient way to address the tenants' concerns. Staff will coordinate with Code Administration.

Mrs. Helene Butler raised concerns regarding her apartment community. Mrs. Butler recently replaced her refrigerator as she preferred a better model than the refrigerator that would be provided by the property. In the past other management companies had reimbursed Mrs. Butler for the cost of what the property would spend on appliances, carpet, or other fixtures that she replaced in her apartment. However, the new management company, Morgan Properties, refused to share the expense of the refrigerator with her and will not reimburse her for any portion of the expense.

Mrs. Butler said that management will be installing individual washers and dryers in a closet in each apartment. Mrs. Butler does not want the washer and dryer installed because she does not want to give up a closet. Mrs. Butler also objects to management painting the outside doors in the property black. She said that in her culture doors are painted black when someone dies.

Additional concerns included erosion, water accumulation, mosquitos, racoons and rats. Mrs. Butler said that dumpsters are emptied and left in the parking lot, and that groundskeepers are blowing dirt on her car.

DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVE HOUSING TERMS

Ms. Seau distributed a memo in response to a proposal by Rev. Elliott Waters that the Landlord Tenant Relations Board consider adopting non-stigmatizing alternative language to refer to the various types of affordable housing programs. Rev. Waters proposed that the Landlord Tenant Relations Board adopt alternative language referring to housing that does not detract from, or reflect a lack of respect or regard for the dignity of those seeking housing assistance. Chairperson Monique Banks asked staff to draft a brief guide for the discussion.

Staff provided examples of housing terms defined in several City publications including the Housing Master Plan, the Route One Affordable Housing Strategy and the Old Town North Small Area Plan. Ms. Seau asked that the Board consider which terms were stigmatizing and how the Board's recommendations would align with other City agencies, boards, commissions as well as with regional and national housing providers and funding agencies.

Kaitlyn Massa said that changing the name of a program doesn't always eliminate the issues related to the use of housing assistance by persons in need. She noted that in previous years Housing Choice Vouchers were called Section 8 Vouchers. Ms. Massa said that landlords did not want to accept Section 8 Vouchers. She said that although the change in the program name to Housing Choice Vouchers sounded better, once landlords realized that it was the same program, they were still not interested in participating.

After additional discussion, Board members agreed that they would review future information with an eye toward identifying language and terms that are not compassionate. When identified, the Board will recommend replacing the language with terms that are inclusive and compassionate.

VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE EVICTIONS

Ms. Seau shared information regarding the Campaign to Reduce Evictions in Virginia (CARE). National data collected by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University revealed that five of Virginia's largest cities and three of its mid-sized cities have some of the highest eviction rates in the country. In April 2018 the New York Times published an article on evictions in Virginia, highlighting the Eviction Lab's data which indicate that Richmond had the second highest eviction rate in the nation in 2016. Other large cities in Virginia in the top 10 highest eviction rates in 2016 in Virginia include Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, and Chesapeake. Three Virginia jurisdictions (Petersburg, Hopewell, and Portsmouth) are included in the five mid-size cities with the highest national eviction rates in 2016.

On May 22, 2018, Virginia's attorneys, property managers, state and local officials, service providers, tenants, leaders of the faith community, and other interested persons and organizations came together for the initial meeting of the Campaign to Reduce Evictions (CARE). Four subcommittees were established – Court Practices and Forms, Pro Bono Services and Programs, Tenant Education, and Legislative Reforms.

Ms. Seau said that she attended the initial meetings of all four subcommittees and is a member of the Legislative Reforms subcommittee. Ms. Seau shared preliminary draft legislation that the Legislative Reforms subcommittee developed. Ms. Seau reported that Legislative Reforms subcommittee would meet again later in September, and that all CARE participants would meet again on September 25 in Richmond. Ms. Seau said that she would bring back all recommendations and that the Board could determine whether to recommend to City Council that the City support the CARE recommendations.

ANNUAL REPORT FOR FY2018

Ms. Seau distributed the draft Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2018. Board members reviewed the report and made several corrections. The report was approved with corrections with five members voting for approval and Rev. Waters abstaining.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The minutes of the June 6, 2018, meeting were approved with corrections.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50PM.