



OBSERVER REPORT

FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE (FHC) – November 21, 2022

Hybrid meeting at the Jacobi Community Center

LWVM Observer – Bonnie Grenier

Members Present -Chair Debra Larkin, Mimi Hollister, Teri McDonough, Deacon Joseph Whipple, Katie Farrell, Kurt James, Dirk Isbrandsten, Bob Neuss.

Guests: Select Board Member Erin Noonan and Thatcher Kezer, Town Administrator

At the October 17, 2022 meeting, Select Board Chairman Moses Grader made a presentation to the committee informing them that the Select Board (SB) would be reorganizing the Fair Housing Committee. The purpose of the reorganization is to strengthen the FHC by having town officials serve on the board, broadening the committee mandate, empowering them to put initiatives into action, and enhancing communications and interactions with other town boards/committees. On November 16th the Select Board voted to reorganize the Fair Housing Committee as follows:

- The committee would be comprised of nine members
- Representing the town would be SB member Erin Noonan; Thatcher Kezer, Town Administrator, and Becky Cutting, Town Planner
- An individual representing the Marblehead Housing Authority (Teri McDonough), the Disabilities Commission (Katie Farrell) and the Task Force Against Discrimination (Deacon Joe Whipple). (All three are serving as current members of the FHC.)
- Three continuing members of the FHC (Dirk Isbrandtsen, Debra Larkin, and Mimi Hollister)

Extended discussion revolved around which of the three current members would continue to serve as voting members of the FHC. The three members not continuing as regular members of the FHC would focus on advocacy and community outreach and would vote only in the absence of a regular member. Kurt James and Bob Neuss both offered to serve as alternate members. Frank Evans was voted the third alternate member. (Kurt James serves on the Housing Production Plan Implementation Committee (HPPIC) along with FHC members Dirk Isbrandsten and Teri McDonough.)

Additional discussion focused on the roles of the FHC and the HPPIC going forward. Erin suggested that the HPPIC schedule a meeting for December to discuss where each committee might focus their efforts. The 25 strategies of the HPP to increase affordable housing should be reviewed and a determination made as to where each committee would direct their efforts. (The HPPIC has not met since October 2021).

Coordination and communication between the FHC, HPPIC, and the Planning Board (PB) is critical to successfully advance options for affordable housing in Marblehead. Community outreach and education must be a focus to garner citizen support for affordable housing projects. ECCO (Essex County Community Organization), Harborlight Community Partners and Cathy Hoog from the Salem Housing Authorities will all be valuable resources and community partners in furthering the efforts of these committees.

Discussion about the role of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) included the suggestion that it act as the “banker” for proposed affordable housing projects. Questions remain as to how the AHTF would grow their funds and how these monies would best be utilized.

Members weighed in on the Planning Board’s public meeting on Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as a possible way to increase affordable housing units in Marblehead. Katie highlighted the need to bring accessibility of ADUs into the conversation while the PB is still in the process of developing a warrant article on the matter. While the cost of making ADUs accessible may be prohibitive in many situations, Katie suggested that at the point of permitting, members of the Disabilities Commission could be brought in for recommendations as to how to enhance accessibility.

At the end of the meeting, Lou Meyi, a frequent attendee at FHC meetings and a self-described “adjunct contributor,” praised committee members and reminded them of the many accomplishments of the FHC over the years.