

June Human Rights Commission Meeting
St. Cloud City Hall

Wed June 17, 2015
6 pm – 7 pm

Commissioners Present: Eunice Aadjai, Judy Foster, Rachel Wexelbaum, Val Young

Number of attendees: 97

Accompanying documents: List of Housing Forum Issues, Human Rights Statement with General Agenda, and

Human Rights Commission Introductions and Explanation of Role of Human Rights Office:

- Eunice introduced the commissioners and read “The Roles and Activities of the St. Cloud Area Regional Human Rights Commission”
- Eunice introduced Matt Glaesman from City Planning, who is responsible for planning and zoning of housing in St. Cloud
 - Matt explained the acronym CDBG = Community Development Block Grants
- Eunice introduced Louise Reis, Executive Director of HRA
 - According to Reis, 700 units of low income housing units exist in St. Cloud, along with 862 vouchers. 72 vouchers are reserved for veterans. 131 slots are for rental assistance for the homeless

Goals for Today’s Meeting

Eunice identified the goals of the meeting—recap of last month’s meeting, review and priorities issues and solutions from May’s notes, and form a working group to continue the work on housing and homelessness.

Discussion

Review of Issues and Solutions

Rachel reviewed the list of issues and potential solutions brought up at the last meeting with attendees, and asked if anything was missing. To the best of her ability, Rachel added those potential solutions that attendees did not see listed from the May meeting. The working group will strategize and prioritize the solutions to work on.

Attendees at the June meeting added the following solutions to the list:

- Change zoning laws to apply to tiny houses
- Form a city-supported tenants’ rights organization (education about application fees, background check)

- City Council should pass a tenants rights ordinance
- City of St Cloud and SCSU should collaborate on housing for homeless and services for homeless
- More communication about local, county, state, and federal advocacy--connect with Rhonda Otteson, Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless
- Contact Jodi Slick, Executive Director of Equilibrium 3 in Duluth—she worked with the City Council to transform old schools and dormitories into low income housing / housing for the homeless
- Recognizing special needs of LGBTIQ folks related to housing / homelessness
- Recognizing special needs of trafficked minors and homeless youth under 18
- More housing education and services specifically for youth experiencing homelessness
- Advocate for integration of day centers in other parts of the city and for other types of low income residential centers / service centers
- BUILD HOMES AND PUT PEOPLE IN THEM! Just like in Utah:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/04/17/the-surprisingly-simple-way-utah-solved-chronic-homelessness-and-saved-millions/>

A question that was brought up was whether or not St. Cloud had a city law against giving food and drink to the homeless. The response to that question was NO. At the same time, Pastor Carol made a claim that there were “no compassion zones” in St Cloud, where day centers for people experiencing homelessness are not placed. While Pastor Carol claimed that only zone I-9 (the zone for industrial parks) allowed for day centers, Matt Glaesman said that C5, C4, and downtown East St. Cloud also had zoning for day centers. This needs clarification.

Another issue was brought up from a Somali community leader. He said that new Somalis are not able to rent due to discrimination against Somali population, and that they often do not have credit due to religious restrictions in taking interest-based credit.

Pastor Carol said that the day center on I-9 was unconditional in that they could build the center no questions asked. Other shelters would be conditional—they require planning commission and City Council approvals.

Review of Working Group Proposal

Judy led the discussion of the working group proposal. She differentiated between addressing “fierce urgency” and long term strategic planning. She stated that those who have the need to address “fierce urgency” should volunteer at Place of Hope or the other service providers that work with the homeless, or (based on an attendee’s announcement that ReSTORE offers free materials on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays to build homes) she said to get involved with that attendee and work on it. Judy reminded people that it takes time to make policy changes.

After reading the proposal to the group, Judy asked if people had questions or suggestions about the proposal. Attendees suggested the following:

Membership: The proposed list of members should include:

- At least one systematically disenfranchised individual (LGBTIQ, ethnic minority, person of color, etc)
- A Spanish speaking person from the Latino community who can work with Spanish speaking people experiencing homelessness or struggling to find low income housing
- Contractors and laborers who know building code and zoning laws
- Representation from the builders association and realtors association who know building code and zoning laws
- Representation from the medical community who does outreach (check with Nystrom Associates)

The Somali community leader said that he would mention this to their imam so that they could come up with a plan to raise money to help people in the Muslim community find housing.

Judy will collect the list of volunteers for the working group, and will serve as convener for the first meeting. The working group will make their minutes available to all who attended the May and June meetings on housing and homelessness. The working group will discuss what they want to prioritize based on community feedback and needs. The working group should try to harness the energy in the room, develop a structure for ongoing feedback. The working group should conduct a needs inventory, develop long range goals, and establish timelines.

Conclusions

The impressions of the meeting from attendees were mixed. Some believed we were on the right track, while others thought the commission was not doing enough. Those interested in working on long term solutions put their names and contact information on the volunteer for the working group list. Judy explained that she would be the convener of the working group and they would work on goals from there.

Eunice reminded people to take a look at the tiny house built by the Youth Build program in Kandiyohi County, donated to the St. Cloud Coalition for Homeless Men.

Meeting adjourned 7:10 pm

Next meeting Wed July 15 6 pm St Cloud City Hall