

Meeting with the Mayor

Thu June 19, 2015

St. Cloud City Hall

4:00 – 5:15 pm

Attendees: Eunice Aadjei, Rich Cousin, Mayor Kleis, Rachel Wexelbaum, Mike Williams

Introduction: Rachel gave a brief description to the Mayor of the May and June Human Rights meetings that we had to discuss housing and homelessness in the region. Rachel pointed out the numbers of attendees at each forum, as well as the percentage of attendees currently experiencing homelessness. Based on attendance at each of these meetings, and sense of urgency displayed, Rachel told Mayor Kleis that this is a major issue to work on with the City Council. From here, we received some schooling from the Mayor:

- City Council is a policy board and not a governing body
- Homelessness is a regional issue, and should be addressed by the Joint Powers Board
- [While no one spoke up about this at our June meeting] the Mayor stated that he created a Regional Homelessness and Housing Task Force, of which many of the people invited to participate in our working group are a part (including Matt Glaesman). Mayor Kleis suggested that the Human Rights Commission put someone on that task force. [According to Judy, however, this group has not met in a long time.]
- The abovementioned Task Force, according to the Mayor, has already worked on providing housing and services to homeless veterans. They have expanded housing for homeless veterans by the VA, and consider this work complete, and now are going to work on another population experiencing homelessness.
- If we do form a working group, the Mayor's suggestion was to work with HRA (appointed by Mayor Kleis) to apply for CDBG money. Also, according to the Mayor, there are vacant houses in St. Cloud. Work needs to begin with HRA on rehab—purchase of properties, tearing them down, and rebuilding on those spaces.
- The Chief Human Rights Commissioner (Rich's boss) has actually declared addressing housing and homelessness in Minnesota a priority. He may have information to share with us.

Criminal Background Checks and Rental Applications: Rachel informed the Mayor that a great number of people seeking low income housing do not get it based on criminal background checks. Also, landlords do not communicate to potential renters of what will disqualify them from housing prior to collecting their background check fee. Rachel told the Mayor about a forum attendee who paid \$350 in criminal background check / rental application fees because the landlords did not communicate what would disqualify her. According to the Mayor:

- Criminal background checks are not a city issue
- The City of St. Cloud ordinances *suggest* that landlords perform a background check but do not require it by law. [While it is true that SCSU hires seem to get a “free pass” when it comes to renting, other people are not so lucky.]
- This is an issue to bring up to the state legislature, and the Mayor actually supports our perspective on this—that consumers should be informed up front of what would disqualify them

prior to any exchange of money taking place. Also, the Mayor supports our perspective on expunging certain crimes from one's criminal record after a certain amount of time.

- The Mayor will have Matt Glaesman look into what type of education is provided to landlords and people interested in renting on criminal background checks. According to the Mayor, the Crime Free Housing Bill states that landlords have to say up front not to apply if you have certain things on your record.

Resource Center for the Homeless: Rachel told the Mayor that one of the solutions that arose from our May meeting was to create a resource center that would be a one stop shop for HRA education, rental application assistance, and other related services. The Mayor suggested that SCSU and the city collaborate on this. Rachel also informed the Mayor that the people want more collaboration between SCSU and the city to address housing and homelessness.

Build more houses and put people in them: Question arose in regard to SCSU Welcome Center SCSU student apartments. According to the Mayor they are now at 70% capacity and keep their rents high so as not to compete with the private rental properties. At the same time, two dorms are getting torn down and Tech High School may become an open space. Rachel told the Mayor about 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). Mayor Kleis knows the Mayor of Duluth—Don Ness—and would be willing to talk with Jodi Slick and Mayor Ness about this more. Rachel will send Mayor Kleis and Mike Williams her contact information. Also, Rachel told the Mayor about the state of Utah nearly eliminating homelessness simply by putting them in homes and then taking care of their problems later. Rachel will also send the Mayor and Mike Williams this information.

Next Area Cities Meeting (some time in August) will address homelessness in the region, and Mayor Kleis would like to invite some state legislators to this meeting. Stay tuned!

[This is where Eunice asks Rich, "Will you be there?" And Rich says, "You know how I spend my summers—I coach my son's Little League team." In front of the Mayor and Mike Williams]

Money for Human Rights Commission: Eunice asked when the St Cloud Area Regional Human Rights Commission will receive a budget. Rachel brought up Ray's case. Rachel restated the numbers at the last two meetings, what materials she needs to do promotion and outreach, and that we need reimbursement for these promotion expenses (business cards, brochures, registrations for tables at events, etc.). Mike looked very nervous. Rachel will email Mike for budget information and CC the Mayor on these emails until we have a response.

In general, the meeting was positive; Rachel suggested that we have quarterly meetings and the Mayor was open to this.

Meeting adjourned 5:15 pm

