



City of Madison

City of Madison
Madison, WI 53703
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Meeting Minutes - Approved EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

Thursday, July 11, 2019

5:00 PM

Warner Park Community Center
1625 Northport Drive, Room 3
Madison WI 53704

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 PM by Rainey-Moore.

Present: Corinda Rainey-Moore, Danielle Dieringer, Zach Madden, Rebecca Kemble, Charles McDowell, Richelle Andrae, Caitlin Badsing, Luke Schieve, Bethany Matson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A motion was made by Madden, seconded by Dieringer, to Approve the Minutes from June 13, 2019. The motion passed by voice vote/other.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Latoya Greer spoke about the experience of residents at the Ridgecrest Apartments. She has seen police being called on young boys of color at an alarming rate. She has seen single mothers and elderly tenants being treated unfairly. She has tried to talk to the property manager and the owner but receives no productive communication when attempting to address these issues.

Yer Yang is a resident at Kennedy Heights and has been for 14 years. There were minimal issues until the new property manager came on about a year ago. The new manager does not communicate changes in the rules and policies, resulting in an increase of 10 day notices being given to residents for issues like children being at the park. The property manager is tracking tenants activities, making note of who is coming and going from the apartments and at what times. The property manager has threatened to charge the tenant for any broken equipment at the parks as a way to deter kids from being out and playing. Her family predominantly speaks Hmong and is unable to read English, but the property manager will not provide any translated documents that are in regards to notices or rule changes. They feel that they need to stay inside their home and avoid going outside in order to avoid conflict or receiving additional 10 day notices. Her family feels imprisoned in their own home.

Davette, a Kennedy Heights residents, also shares about how the new manager that came on about a year ago has had a significantly negative impact on living in these apartments. She explains that the kids are not allowed to be outside unless they are being supervised directly by their parents. If there are children outside the manager will confront the kids about who they belong to and why they are out there. The kids are afraid of the manager and called her

the "mean lady." The manager often calls the police on the kids and the police have told her that the kids being outside is not a police matter. Davette also mentions that she has seen notes that the manager takes about tenants activities like how many people enter and at what time, and then how many people leave and at what time. She has considered leaving this apartment but Kennedy Heights is owned by Meridian group, which also owns 27 other complexes in the city, particularly the low-income apartments. The property manager has provided bad references to other apartment complexes as she has tried to find other housing. Employees of Meridian group have been noted as saying the manager is there to help "you people", told tenants they should get a second income if they don't like the low-income housing they are in, and that those who do not speak or read English should just learn the language.

Cho Yang has been a resident at Kennedy Heights for seven or eight years. She informed us that when her husband passed and she had family members coming to her place to provide support and help, the property manager had one of her family members vehicles towed, despite knowing why they were there. There are such strict visitor rules and policies that they feel they cannot celebrate their culture and participate in their traditions because they are centered around community and family gatherings. If they attempt to have these gatherings, there are consequences for them and their visitors. She once received a 10 day notice instructing her to clean her house or be evicted.

Pha Vang is an outreach coordinator working in the Kennedy Heights area. He has seen tenants who are non-English speakers be taken advantage of and forced to sign contracts that they don't understand and were not offered any translation services. Meridian group once told a tenant that they need to pay \$4000 in backrent but when Pha investigated this, they were unable to establish how exactly they came up with that amount. He had to step in and evaluate the discrepancies and found that they owed less than \$1000 in backrent and this was due to the property manager not notifying the tenants of changes in their monthly rent costs for almost 6 months.

Julio, who works at the Tenant Resource Center, spoke about the issue of apartment complexes having towing companies on hand to tow any vehicle in violation of parking rules. He says that this has been an increased activity throughout the city and there is speculation that there are some complexes or people that are removing registration stickers from license plates in order to give cause to tow the vehicles. The primary company that is being used is Prairie Land Towing. He mentions that the apartment complexes tended to tell tenants that the police department is the one who towed their vehicle but they find out that the police department does not tow vehicles from private property and therefore, it is the apartment complex that is having them towed.

DISCLOSURES AND RECUSALS

Badsing discloses that through her work she has connections to Meridian Group and Kennedy Heights in regards to the food bank.

Dieringer discloses that her employer, YWCA, does place residents at properties that are managed by Meridian Group.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. [56220](#) Housing Concerns at Kennedy Heights, managed by Meridian Group

The commission is alarmed by what they are hearing about Kennedy Heights and neighboring complexes in regards to the behavior of property managers and possible discriminatory acts towards people of color, people of low income, and of those that speak a different language than English.

To start addressing these issues, the commission will invite Meridian group, the Commonwealth Management Corp., CDA, and the City of Madison Attorney's Office to attend the next EOC meeting in August. The commissioners will submit questions to these agencies beforehand so that there can be a productive conversation about how to improve the housing conditions.
2. [55039](#) 2019 Commission Elections

Corinda Rainey Moore was reelected as the EOC President. Danielle Dieringer was elected as the Vice President. Zach Madden was reelected as Secretary.

The two additional commission members to sit on the Executive Committee will be Richelle Andrae and Caitlin Badsing.
3. [56642](#) EOC Appeals Committee

Charles McDowell offered to step out of the EOC appeals committee. Richelle Andrae will move from alternate to a core member and Luke Schieve volunteered to be the alternate.

The appeals committee shall consist of Zach Madden, Melanie Ramey, Richelle Andrae, and Luke Schieve (alternate).
4. [56243](#) Nominations for Rev. James C Wright Award

Attachments: [Brandi Grayson - Wright Award Nomination 5-24-2019.pdf](#)
[Brandi Grayson - Wright Award Nomination Form.pdf](#)
[Mario Garcia Sierra Wright Award Nomination_MGS_05242019.doc](#)
[Wright Award Rating Sheet.docx](#)

Commission members submitted their rating sheets for the two nominees, Mario Siera Garcia and Brandi Grayson. The scores were counted up and Brandi Grayson received the majority. The commission members were in agreement that her grassroots work and commitment to civil rights issues made her an excellent award recipient.
5. [56219](#) Discuss adding Salary as a Protected Class

It was decided that there should be an assessment of our current protected classes in the city of Madison to see if salary can be incorporated into an already existing one. The commission wants to ensure that all of our protected classes are being created with a clear and intentional purpose so they do not want to rush into adding another one.
6. [56618](#) Discuss why the Unemployment Protected Class is not applicable to housing complaints

The commission has learned that the state of Wisconsin has created a preemption that would not allow for unemployment to be protected under housing complaints. It was also discussed that it would be a challenge to have that as a protection under housing complaints because housing providers have a right to verify income and the capacity to pay rent.

7. [56617](#) EOD Manager Monthly Report

Attachments: [7.11.19 EOC Briefing.pdf](#)

See attachment.

FUTURE TOPICS

The commission would like to receive an update from the city's new intra-agency housing committee on their interpretation and feedback from reviewing the Goals and Approaches to Housing Discrimination in Madison report.

The commission would like in updates on the Landlord and Tenant Committee Best Practices Guide about was in the works earlier this year.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by McDowell, seconded by Schieve, to Adjourn at 7:33 PM. The motion passed by voice vote/other.