

Housing Public Forum
West Central Community Center
October 11, 2007
2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Council members present: Devin Beach, Gilbert Garza, Linda McClain, Al Neely.
Staff: Rob Honan-Executive Director; Grace Doyle –Executive Assistant
Others: Guy McManus and Kathy Bunze –ASL interpreters; Jeanette Murphy from Seattle CIL; Trina Forest from Lakewood CIL; Dudley Bowers from DVR; 16 members of the public,

Introduction of guest speaker, Marley Eichstaedt from the Northwest Fair Housing Alliance, by Rob Honan, Executive Director of the SILC

Eichstaedt talked about a range of issues relating to housing for persons with disabilities. The following is a summary of her presentation.

Definition of who is disabled The Federal law (Americans with Disabilities Act) does not recognize temporary disabilities or disabilities that can be mitigated. The Federal definition is narrower than Washington’s law.

McClarty vs. Totem Electric was a recent court decision in the state of Washington where the Federal definition was used. The outcome of this case was that Washington is now back to using its more liberal definition of a disability.

Service animals: HUD recognizes therapeutic animals, as well as trained service animals. The Federal courts use the reasonable accommodation analysis. Washington courts have been requiring evidence of training to qualify as a service animal.

In summary the state has a more “lenient” approach to housing but a more restrictive approach to service animals.

Condominiums. The legislature is investigating the conversion of low income apartment rentals into condominium conversions in this state. They are to convene in December 2007 to further discuss this issue.

(Segue: Rob Honan asked new members and others to introduce themselves.)

Honan brought up some pending federal legislation relating to Section 8 reform, and asked Marley had heard about this. She had not. Linda brought up Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA). There was further commentary on the Section 8 Lottery application. The list is only 2500 long; a month after closing, the drawings will begin.

Linda McClain emphasized the importance of keeping Housing agencies apprised of their address. Often people end up getting kicked off the wait list simply because they moved and the paperwork went to their former address.

McClain continued, “What’s frustrating to me is that when there’s new construction in the area, where is the enforcement to make sure the builders are aware of accessibility?”

Eichstaedt mentioned that there is no jurisdiction on local officials to make sure that they follow through with new construction to make sure it’s fully accessible.

Honan asked: “What kind of training do landlords receive about ADA accessibility?”

Eichstaedt: We have very little funding to train landlords, but have done some workshops. We do have contracts with some of the bigger property management companies. Further discussion on self-advocacy ensued. As a responsible disabled person, they (the person with a disability) must often educate the smaller landlords.

Clarification given between reasonable accommodation (i.e. service animal, etc) or a modification (ramp, grab bars, etc.)

A pet deposit is not required if the animal is a service animal, but the person has to bring verification that the animal is a service animal.

The Spokane Homeless Coalition was mentioned in relationship to fair housing.

Linda McClain added that there are opportunities in Spokane above and beyond Section 8.

There was a question raised as to what is the landlord’s responsibility if he/she has an elevator that is not working? Eichstaedt mentioned that it really depends on the situation; is the landlord waiting for a part, etc.

Further discussion on what is a Fair Housing issue and what is an ADA issue, plus the frustrations of dealing with all of the bureaucracies and constant run around. People with disabilities become frustrated with the process.

A member of the audience mentioned the Center for Justice, legal aid, as a resource.

McClain and a woman from CORD spoke on the JIMS program.

Further discussion on hidden disabilities vs. those that are more recognized.

Conversation around specific and personal situations related to housing in Spokane and the entire state.

McClain spoke about the recent A.P.R.I.L. conference in Missoula, MT. There were several housing workshops at this conference.

Thank you to our guest speaker and to the audience for attending the public forum today.

Respectfully submitted by,

Grace Doyle
Executive Assistant