



## **Minutes**

### **City of DeKalb Human Relations Commission April 6, 2021**

The Human Relations Committee (HRC) held a regular meeting on April 6, 2021 in the Second Floor Training Room at the DeKalb Police Department.

#### **A. Roll Call**

The following members of the HRC were present: Larry Apperson (Chair), John Walker, Norden Gilbert, Nadine Franklin, and Joe Gastiger. Lisa King was absent.

Other City officials/staff present:

- Bill Nicklas, City Manager
- Jerry Smith, Mayor
- David Byrd, Police Chief
- Joshua Boldt, Assistant City Manager and Staff Liaison to the HRC

Local Landlords and Property Managers invited to the meeting:

- Jim Mason, Mason Properties
- Will Heinisch, DeKalb Area Rental Assoc. member and Rental Unit Owner/Landlord
- Mike Pittsley, Pittsley Realty, and DeKalb Area Rental Assoc. member

#### **B. Approval of Agenda – Additions/Deletions**

Larry Apperson asked for a motion to approve the agenda. A motion was made by Norden Gilbert and Seconded by Joe Gastiger to approve the agenda. The agenda was approved by a 5-0 vote.

#### **C. Approval of Minutes – February 16, 2021 Regular Meeting**

Larry Apperson asked for a motion to approve the HRC minutes recorded on February 16, 2021. Joe Gastiger noted John Walker was “John Taylor” on page three and requested an alteration. Joshua Boldt took note and effected the change as requested. A motion to approve was made by Norden Gilbert and Seconded by Joe Gastiger. The minutes were approved by a 5-0 vote.

#### **D. Public Participation**

Mayor Smith thanked the commission for their service during his mayoral term. Mayor announced he would defer the next mayoral appointment to the commission for the next mayor term, which starts May 10, 2021.

Joe Gastiger and Larry Apperson expressed gratitude for the Mayor and the City’s progress.



## **E. Old Business**

### **1. Police-Community Relations**

Bill Nicklas provided an update to the Police Chief search by introducing Police Chief David Byrd to the commission. Bill Nicklas provided a background on David Byrd and his Illinois State Police resume. Bill Nicklas noted David Byrd's commitment to the DeKalb Police Department and at large community.

David Byrd introduced himself to the HRC. David Byrd provided a background on himself. David Byrd expressed thanks and excitement to the HRC.

Bill Nicklas stated the community's development of the "Belonging" philosophy is just as important as economic progress and he believes David Byrd's appointment is a part of the community's growth. David Byrd and Mayor Smith thanked the commission and left the meeting.

### **2. Landlord-Tenant Review (Continued)**

#### **a. Tenant Legal Services**

Larry Apperson announced he and Norden Gilbert met with Professor Cain (Zeke Giorgi Legal Clinic and NIU Professor of Law). Larry Apperson described Professor Cain's assessment of the legal services assistance requested from the DeKalb Tenant's Association. Professor Cain was in support of the assistance proposal but believed he could not help with creating a legal not-for-profit organization. Professor Cain also communicated their legal clinic could not assist with a class action suit. Professor Cain is going to further evaluate with his two other legal services colleagues about tenants' requested services which could be supported and the interest in creating a separate tenant-housing legal clinic. He will report back to Larry Apperson and Norden Gilbert at their April 16<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Norden Gilbert stated the proposed tenant-housing legal clinic appeared in doubt in his opinion. He suggested the HRC should contact the NIU Student Legal Assistance, but this wouldn't assist non-students. Larry Apperson indicated that the NIU Student Legal Assistance service is funded by student fees and, as such, other funds would be needed to expand this service to non-student renters assuming the NIU Student Government would be willing to add these non-student renters.

Larry Apperson also explained that the current law school clinics are currently located in Aurora and Rockford. There are three clinics: a Criminal Defense Clinic that assists those charged with misdemeanors and some felonies; Civil Justice Clinic that assists with orders of protection, family law; and a Health Advisory Clinic that helps file for social security disability and unemployment compensation. The clinics are staffed by NIU Law Students who are interested in these areas of law and supervised by an NIU Law School professor who also has an interest in the clinic's law focus. The expansion to support tenant housing law would also need students and a professor interested in this legal area.



Joe Gastiger stated he would be surprised if NIU Law Student interests did not align with housing law due to the Law School's interest in public interest law. Norden Gilbert stated housing law would be a new venture for the law school. Larry Apperson said this housing clinic may not be possible at this time but may be developed at a later time.

**b. DeKalb Landlord Follow-up Discussion**

Larry Apperson reported meeting with Mike Pittsley. Larry Apperson provided all present members a copy of Pittsley Realty's "Welcome to the Neighborhood" form which lists community assistance resources. Larry Apperson expressed appreciation for the form.

Mike Pittsley stated Opportunity DeKalb could be the central leader of the Annie Glidden North neighborhood. Larry Apperson said the HRC should become involved with Opportunity DeKalb.

Larry Apperson said Will Heinisch has made a suggestion to form a sub-commission group to focus on positive changes to DeKalb's Municipal Code Chapter 10. Will Heinisch described how the first drafts of the DeKalb Landlord Tenant Handbook started. As noted above, Will Heinisch suggested a sub-committee group should form to study the current handbook. Will Heinisch stated he believes the handbook should be reduced. Will Heinisch noted examples of property checkups as being obsolete. Will Heinisch believed language should be written last and finished with a summary form document. Jim Mason also provided a history of how the first Tenant-Landlord Handbook started. Jim Mason expressed support for updating the handbook and offered his legal experience as a resource to the HRC. He explained how a number of years ago he was the rental ombudsman available to assist tenants with rental problems. He suggested that such an advocate be considered for reintroduction for the benefit of tenants questions/concerns.

Joe Gastiger stated Hunter Properties is the focus and the handbook cannot solve the Hunter Properties issue in DeKalb. Joe Gastiger wished to have staff refer to other communities affected by Hunter Properties for what they have done.

Will Heinisch described the delinquent status of Hunter Properties and how tenants could succeed against Hunter Properties. Will Heinisch deferred to Jim Mason. Jim Mason described health & safety concerns and the case law successes tenants have with Judges. Jim Mason concluded tenant education is the best tool for tenants. John Walker stated Mason Properties rents to qualified tenants. John Walker described tenants needing to step up for themselves.

Will Heinisch described the scale of Hunter Properties' legal structure being outside of DeKalb's experience.

Joe Gastiger stated he disagreed with the notion tenants need to step-up and he is concerned for the people inside the buildings needing assistance. Jim Mason referred to the potential negative outcomes of IL HB 163 on police reforms. Conversation ensued.



Bill Nicklas supported reducing and summarizing the Landlord Tenant Handbook. Joe Gastiger suggested Tenants should know who to contact for assistance. Bill Nicklas invited the HRC and present guests to an event on Blackhawk Rd to promote community education. Bill stated our City Legal staff have been guided by Hunter Properties' experience with other Cities. Bill stated Hunter Properties will receive a Ridgebrook Special Service Area (SSA) on this year's tax bill. Bill stated the City had an ownership interest in the Campus Cinemas property and potentially the Hillcrest Plaza property.

Jim Mason stated he would be interested in having NIU host a landlord-tenant education social event. Will Heinisch offered the sub-committee working on finding correct communication method (snapchat, NIU Ombudsman, etc.) for the HRC to educate future DeKalb tenants. Mike Pittsley and John Walker supported the community event on April 24<sup>th</sup> for the neighborhood.

### **3. Update on Public Remote Access to Meetings**

Larry Apperson asked Joshua Boldt about the City Staff position on remote access to Public Meetings. Joshua Boldt expressed support for the ZOOM platform and stated it will be the continued access platform unless a scheduling conflict arises. Joshua Boldt and Larry Apperson agreed if there is a recognized scheduling conflict, a meeting date can be changed, or Microsoft Teams could be used.

### **G. New Business - None.**

### **H. Adjournment**

Larry Apperson noted the next HRC meeting date of May 4, 2021. Larry Apperson asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Norden Gilbert and seconded by John Walker. The motion was approved by a 5-0 vote. The next HRC meeting will be May 4, 2021.

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**Joshua Boldt, Assistant City Manager & HRC Liaison**

**Minutes approved by the Human Relations Commission on 05/04/2021.**