



THE CITIZEN S ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR HOUSING MATTERS

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING OF NOVEMBER 19, 1987

Members present: Raphael Podolsky, Diana Crouse, Kevin Tierney, Richard Tenenbaum, Robert Kor, Melanee Harris, Joseph Wincze, Sheldon Hosen, and Patricia Wallace

Others present: William Boardman, Joseph Zabbideo, Marie Langan, and Cynthia Teixeira

Members absent: Joseph Stafford, Elaine DiNigris, Ethel Austin, Reginald Walker, and Aura Diaz

(1) Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Chairman Raphael Podolsky at 1:12 p.m. in the conference room at the Connecticut Bar Association, 101 Corporate Place, Rocky Hill, Connecticut. Following introduction of those present, Mr. Podolsky explained that terms of all members had expired on June 30, 1987 and so far 14 members have been appointed by the Governor to new terms. Mr. Podolsky further explained that after the Governor has completed making all appointments, the Council would consist of 27 members from housing court districts and 9 members from non-housing court districts. He further explained that under a 1987 law, Council members who fail to attend at least half of the Council meetings will be deemed to have resigned. Therefore, it will be necessary to show in the minutes which members are absent in order to keep a record of attendance.

(2) Approval of minutes: Mr. Kor made a motion that the minutes of the meeting of 12/22/86 be approved. This motion was seconded by Ms. Harris and passed unanimously. Ms. Crouse distributed to members copies of the minutes of the telephone conference of July 27, 1987. Mr. Tierney made a motion that the minutes of that conference be treated as minutes of the full Council. This motion was seconded by Ms. Harris and passed unanimously. Ms. Harris then made a motion to approve the minutes of the conference of 7/27/87. This motion was seconded by Mr. Kor and passed unanimously.

(3) Financial report: Mr. Podolsky explained that in the past the Council had depended upon charity donations to cover expenses of the Council. He explained that there had been a previous donation from Fairfield County Foundation, and there is presently \$61.98 in the bank. He also explained that there had been a previous donation from the ~~Signa~~ Foundation of \$350. He pointed out that we can now use the Department of Housing for photocopying and mailings, but funds are needed to cover other expenses which would not come under the Department of Housing. He further explained that the conference call of July 27 cost much more than he had expected (\$172.25), and he asked the members if they felt the Council should pay for half of the cost and have legal services program pay the other half. Mr. Wincze made a motion to pay for the cost of the conference call out of the ~~Signa~~ Foundation donation of \$350. This motion was seconded by Ms. Harris and passed unanimously. Mr. Podolsky explained that the ~~Signa~~ donation is through the Capital Region of the Council of Churches. Mr. Wincze

then made a motion that the Council request \$350 more from the Signa Foundation. This motion was seconded by Ms. Harris and passed unanimously.

(4) Housing court clerks: Mr. Wincze explained that after interviewing 7 candidates for the clerk position in the Norwalk-Bridgeport Court, Geoffrey Hammer (who lives in Bloomfield) was hired as the new clerk as of December 15. Mr. Podolsky mentioned that the former clerk of that court, Richard Preston, was hired as the Housing Prosecutor for Eastern Connecticut.

Since it was expected that other housing specialists would be arriving late at this meeting, the Chairman went on to Item #6 on the agenda.

(6) Housing court judges: Mr. Wincze reported that Judge Morton Riefberg started in September as the new judge for the Norwalk-Bridgeport Court, and a reception for the new judge and the new clerk is planned for the end of December or early January. Mr. Podolsky pointed out that judges' terms begin in September and March, and therefore the Council needs to start the process of considering recommendations approximately three months in advance. Mr. Kor explained the change of judges for the Hartford Housing Court, and explained that Judge Doyle is now the judge for the Hartford Court, but it is not known whether this might be changed again. Judge Ramsey still continues in the New Haven Housing Court. Mr. Wincze pointed out that it would be better to refer to the reception as "an open house" instead of a reception since the main purpose is to inform the community about the court and its function. Mr. Podolsky pointed out that the statute specifically states that the Council can make recommendations for the vacancies for judge in each of the housing courts, and he stated that Judge Ment has been extremely receptive to hearing our recommendations.

(7) Future plans: With regard to election of officers for the Council, Mr. Podolsky suggested that one possibility would be to either hold the elections at the next Council meeting or delay the elections for one meeting beyond that in order to provide the members with an opportunity to get to know each other before electing officers. He pointed out that the statute simply states that the Council chooses its own chairman. He explained that the executive committee consists of 5 members, the chairman, the secretary and 3 vice chairpersons who are actually the chairpersons of each of the three area sub-committees.

With regard to a training session for new members, Mr. Podolsky stated that it was his hope that it could be arranged for the next Council meeting to have State Housing Commissioner, John Papandrea, Judge Ment, at least one housing specialist, one housing clerk, one prosecutor, and one council member to give a brief historical background of the Council. However, Mr. Podolsky pointed out that if more members are not appointed between now and the next Council meeting, the Council might wish to delay the training session so that more members could attend. Several possible locations were discussed for the training session including the conference room at the State Department of Housing, but it was pointed out that parking would be a terrible problem there and that particular meeting room is quite small. Pat Wallace pointed out that it is important for the members of the Council

to learn about each other and get to know each other in order to work well together, and she suggested possibly considering having a luncheon tied to a Council meeting to provide this opportunity. She mentioned the Connecticut Hospital Association in Wallingford as a possible location for a luncheon and training session. Council members generally agreed that election of officers should be deferred to a later time after new members have an opportunity to get to know each other.

At this point, since no additional housing specialists had arrived at the meeting, the Chairman returned to Item #4 on the agenda.

(4) & (5) Restructuring of positions for housing clerks and housing specialists: Mr. Podolsky explained the proposal to repeal the position of Chief Clerk for Housing Matters and instead established the position of Director of Housing Clerk Operations which would include additional responsibility for overseeing the non-housing court districts as well as training. He pointed out that there is also a proposal to establish the position of Director of Housing Specialist Operations because the judicial department wants clear lines of authority from top to bottom. He pointed out that this was the subject of the telephone conference in which members of the Council participated in July, and since that time there have been further considerations and discussions within the judicial department. He explained that originally the proposal viewed the two positions as co-equal, but the judicial department has since proposed to change that so that the chief housing specialist would be responsible to the chief housing clerk who would then be responsible to the chief who is over all civil operations. He said that under this proposal all housing specialists would report to the chief housing specialist and all housing court clerks would report to the chief housing court clerk. The 2 housing specialists who were present at this meeting, Marie Langan and Cynthia Teixeira, complained that they had not been informed that these proposals were even under consideration. A lengthy discussion ensued considering these proposals. The question arose as to whether the titles would use the word "chief" or "director". It was pointed out that the title of "director" seems to convey a higher level of bureaucracy. Mr. Podolsky pointed out that these proposals remain in flux right now, and apparently nothing definite has been decided yet. It was also pointed out that there may be a need for some oversight at the top because of "roving" housing specialists in the non-housing court districts. Questions also arose concerning the 2 job descriptions and whether or not they had been tailored with any particular applicant in mind. Mr. Tenenbaum stated that he objects to the writing of any job description so narrowly that very few could qualify to apply. Council members generally agreed that both job descriptions ought to be re-considered. Pat Wallace made a motion that the Council recommend that the job description for Director of Housing Specialist Operations should not require a post-graduate degree, as it now states. This motion was seconded by Mr. Tenenbaum and passed unanimously. Pat Wallace also made a motion that the Council convey to Judge Ment there ought to be better communication to the staff of the housing courts concerning matters that are under consideration which would affect their jobs. This motion was seconded by Mr. Tenenbaum and passed with 5 in favor, 1 opposed and 1 abstention. The question arose as to whether this is properly within the jurisdiction of the Council to become involved in such an issue, but no definite decision was reached in this matter.

With regard to the hiring of "roving" specialists, Mr. Podolsky explained that he and Mr. Kor looked at and screened resumes for Eastern Connecticut, but Western Connecticut is just now being advertised. They pointed out that it is still not clear where the "roving" specialists will be based.

(8) 1988 projects: Members decided to postpone the discussion of the Eastern Connecticut Housing Court until a later date. With regard to analysis and monitoring of criminal prosecutions, Pat Wallace suggested that the Council explore the possibility of finding and using law students to check court records. Mr. Podolsky asked Sheldon Hosen to contact each of the three law clinics at Yale University, University of Bridgeport and the University of Connecticut to determine if law students would be willing to check docket sheets and note decisions of criminal cases within the housing court system, and Mr. Hosen agreed to do so.

With regard to telephone access to housing courts, Mr. Podolsky asked that someone check the blue pages of the various telephone directories to determine if any toll free lines have been installed. Mr. Tierney agreed to do this and follow up on the Council's recommendation included in our Bi-Annual Report. Mr. Podolsky pointed out that the most obvious need for a toll-free line is from Stamford to the Norwalk Housing Court since approximately half of the cases in that Court are from Stamford. Mr. Hosen also pointed out how hidden the listing for the housing court is under the State Judicial District in the blue pages. Others agreed, and Mr. Podolsky asked Mr. Tierney to also check into this to determine if there might be a better way of listing the housing court so that people needing the court would be able to find the listing.

A discussion ensued concerning telephone problems within the Hartford Housing Court, and following the discussion, Mr. Tenenbaum made a motion that the Housing Prosecutor should be on the same phone system as the housing court clerk. This motion was seconded by Ms. Harris and passed unanimously. With regard to other problems which should be placed on future agendas of the Council, members mentioned that there is a parking problem for staff in all of the housing court districts.

Time and location of future meetings:

In discussing the possible location for the next Council meeting, three locations were mentioned, the Connecticut Bar Association room in Rocky Hill, the Connecticut Hospital Association offices in Wallingford, and the conference room at the Department of Housing, but everyone noted that parking would be a serious problem at that particular location and the room is very small. It was agreed that the Chairman would aim for the next meeting to be held the week of January 25, and it left to the best judgement of the Chairman to make the arrangements for time and location of that meeting.

(9) Judicial complaints: Pat Wallace mentioned a particular situation concerning a landlord who felt that he did not receive a fair hearing or fair treatment in the New Haven Housing Court. This

was mentioned only as an example so that the Council could discuss the question of how the Council should deal with this type of complaint whenever such a complaint is received. Members agreed it is not the function of the Council to review whether or not a case was handled properly by a judge in a housing court. It was agreed that the Council would receive such communication for informational purposes only but that the person writing the complaint should be referred to the proper authority which is the Judicial Review Council. Mr. Tenenbaum offered to write a form letter to be used by the Council to refer this type of complaint to the Judicial Review Council.

(10) List preparation: It was agreed by all members that each regional sub-committee should update its mailing list for use in sending invitations for housing court receptions and other possible mailings to community agencies concerned with the functions of the housing court.

(11) Other business: Mr. Podolsky mentioned that there is a problem in the Hartford Housing Court accommodations in which the Public Works Department is putting up walls which would prevent the public from getting to the housing court clerk's office. Mr. Tenenbaum made a motion that the Council recommend that we have input into this matter to ensure that the counter be available to the public. This motion was seconded by Mr. Kor and passed unanimously.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Diana Crouse, Secretary