



CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR HOUSING MATTERS



Reply to:

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING OF October 13, 1988

Members present: See attached attendance sheet.

Others present: See attached attendance sheet.

1. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 1:40 p.m. It was agreed that there will be no smoking in the meeting room during Council meetings, including before meetings and during meeting breaks.
2. Minutes: The minutes of the May 5, 1988, meeting were approved.
3. Financial Report: Kenneth White reported that, as of September 30, 1988, the Council's treasury balance is \$432. The money is held for the Council, at no charge to the Council, by the Capitol Region Conference of Churches, which is a non-profit 501(c)(3) agency through which grants for use by the Council have in the past been made.

a. CIGNA, which has been giving the Council \$350 per year, has notified the Council that it will not make any additional contributions. The Department of Housing now pays our mailing and printing costs, and other money is needed only for open houses. We have budgeted \$150 per open house, although recent open houses have been less expensive. There are likely to be three open houses this year, since Judge Anthony DeMayo started in New Haven on September 1, 1988, and the housing court judges in Hartford and Bridgeport are both in their third terms.

b. Kenneth suggested that, in order to raise more money, Council members ask agencies or corporations for which they work for contributions to the Council. An alternate suggestion was that the Council attempt to raise about \$300 per year from a single contributor, such as an insurance company, which should be enough to fund open houses.

4. Biennial Report to the General Assembly:

a. Procedure for Writing the Report: The statute that created the Council requires that we submit a report every two years. It is due on January 4, 1989. The procedure used two years ago was to assign one person to draft the report after discussion of the issues, to circulate the draft in advance of the Council's next meeting, and then to meet to approve or modify the report. Raphael Podolsky agreed to write and circulate a draft. Final action on the report will be taken at the Council's December meeting.

b. Possible Issues to be Covered:

1. Eastern Connecticut Housing Court: Several Council members from eastern Connecticut questioned the need for a housing court there. Bill Sadek suggested that the housing courts could be expanded statewide by setting

up two new courts -- one that would combine Danbury, Litchfield, Waterbury, and New Britain and one that would combine New London, Norwich, Danielson, and Middletown. Rockville would be added to Hartford, and Ansonia-Milford and Meriden would be added to New Haven. There would be some costs associated with creating new housing courts, which means that the legislature would have to provide additional funding. Discussion on the proposal was inconclusive. The Eastern Connecticut Subcommittee was asked to present a recommendation at the December meeting.

2. Housing Code Prosecution:

a. Prosecutor's Manual: It was reported that the Chief State's Attorney's Office is drafting a prosecutor's manual, which seems to be following most of the recommendations in the Advisory Council's prosecution guidelines. An early draft of the manual has already been circulated for comment to Council members. Any revised draft that becomes available will also be circulated.

b. Coverage of Non-Housing Court Districts: It was reported that the Hartford prosecutor is now covering Middletown as well, but Litchfield, Danbury, Ansonia-Milford, and Meriden remain uncovered. The Council continues to support 100% coverage throughout the state.

3. Telephone Book Listings and Toll-Free Lines: The Judicial Department has still not implemented the Council's 1987 recommendations for expanded blue page listings and for toll-free access to the court from Stamford, Enfield, and Bristol. A subcommittee of Diana Crouse, Rick Margenot, and Kevin Tierney was appointed to meet with Bill Sadek to work on implementation of the Council's recommendations.

4. Adequacy of Housing Court Staffing: The housing courts' staffing problem is of particular concern. Bill Sadek reported that there is a hiring freeze because of the state's budget problems. Therefore, staff turnover has created staff shortages. Hartford and Norwalk need to have temporary positions converted to permanent ones, and Hartford needs an additional full-time clerical person. The Hartford court has been attempting to recruit volunteers, and the Hartford staff no longer has time to type small claims forms for litigants. There is also a need to make the temporary assistant clerk positions permanent, so that the clerks can have full pay and benefits. In addition, the housing specialist vacancy in Hartford created when Fran Calafiore became statewide chief specialist has still not been filled, leaving Hartford with only 1.5 specialists.

5. Distribution of Housing Court Opinions to Libraries and Clerk's Offices: The housing courts collect legal opinions written by the various housing court judges. Numbers are assigned to each opinion, which is copied and bound and distributed to the housing courts and the state libraries. The geographic area courts do not receive these bound copies. Newly issued opinions go to the housing courts but not to the state libraries. There was discussion on how to make newly issued opinions more accessible; and Bill Sadek was asked to explore whether they could be sent to the state libraries.

6. Statewide Availability of Pro Se Forms: Bill Sadek reported that all forms are now available, although some are being revised.

7. Housing Court Locations: It was reported that it is possible that the Hartford Housing Court might eventually be moved, possibly to the Little Aetna Building on Elm St. There was also discussion of the location of the Norwalk Housing Court, which has inadequate space.

8. Quality of Facilities: Concern was expressed that housing court facilities be maintained in quality condition. It was noted that the acoustics in the New Haven court are quite unsatisfactory. Dissatisfaction with the location of the Waterbury court was also noted.

9. Procedures for Stipulated Judgments: Questions were raised about the new housing specialist forms. There are about a dozen different versions of the stipulation form, each slightly different from the others. It was suggested that the variations are confusing and could be better handled with a consolidated form. There was also objection raised to procedures in Bridgeport and Norwalk, under which the parties cannot fill out the stipulation forms themselves but must wait for a specialist, even if both parties are represented by lawyers. In addition, there was concern raised that the specialists will not come to Norwalk except on the days that the court is sitting in Norwalk. Finally, there were questions about whether the record-keeping required of housing specialists was excessive.

5. Housing Prosecution Studies: Kenneth White has agreed to be the recipient for housing code prosecution docket sheets, but Bill Sadek has still not agreed to have the clerks' offices supply them. He raised questions about confidentiality rules and burden on housing court staff. He said, however, that he was optimistic that the problems could be overcome.

6. Observation of Magistrates: Hartford is using magistrates to hear small claims cases. Magistrates are lawyers who are paid by the Judicial Department to do this. The Advisory Council has not been involved in the assignment of magistrates. There have, however, been no complaints about the magistrates who are presently sitting, and the system seems to be working well. Subcommittee chairs were asked to try to arrange observations of the magistrates in their districts.

7. Open House Invitation Lists: This matter was tabled.

8. Prosecution for Bounced Checks: Morris Czaczkes said that the housing prosecutors would not prosecute a tenant for bouncing a rent check. There was some disagreement as to whether prosecution is or is not appropriate. A subcommittee consisting of Morris Czaczkes and Aura Diaz was appointed to find out current prosecutor policy, with the understanding that the Council had as yet taken no position on the issue.

9. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Lynn Waters
Secretary

ATTENDANCE LIST -- October 13, 1988

Council members

Ethel Austin
Diana Crouse
Morris Czaczkes
Aura Diaz
Elaine DiNigris
Glenn Falk
Bruce Fontanella
Joelen Gates
Sr. Suzanne Gebrian
Mellanee Harris
Robert Kor
Laura Boudreaux Kozin
Peter Maffly-Kipp
Rick Marrgenot
Raphael Podolsky
Peter Rotella
Joseph Stafford
Richard Tenenbaum
Kevin Tierney
Lynn Waters
Kenneth White
Joe Wincze
Joe Zibbiddeo

Others present

Frances Calafiore
Manfred Rehm
William Sadek