

BCB NAACP Housing Committee

Report of the Chair

Committee Overview:

The Housing Committee is an unratified committee and currently has one member (the Chair), and two potential committee members. During the summer and fall of 2020 the current chair was part of a housing working group made of former BCB NAACP members, and convened on the BCB's zoom account. A lack of data, a complicated affordable housing structure, and a local unwillingness to recognize current segregation at the municipal and county scale, were identified as challenges to ensuring fair housing. Solutions identified were local anti-gentrification/displacement policies and progressive fees/taxes to fund affordable housing initiatives; grassroots organizing, education and advocacy; refinement of current affordable housing incentives at the state level; and, improving county wide data collection.

The Housing Committee will be a majority rules committee. We will be responsive to our community, effective in our advocacy, inclusive and welcoming of all, and pro-active in dismantling structural housing discrimination. We will work to establish strong process-based committee functions covering; meeting structure; project and task management; inter and intra-committee communications; community outreach; discrimination complaints; and educational programming offered to branch members. Process based committee functions may serve to provide clear guidance to committee members on responsibilities and time requirements--hopefully making the tasks of the Housing Committee less intimidating, and ensuring a functionally resilient committee.

While it is in the Chair's opinion that the Housing Committee begin by offering a training program (time to be determined by committee member's schedule) and focus on an initial pilot project. The Chair must first recognize that as a majority rules committee our Inaugural Strategic Action Plan requires a vote.

Activity Overview (Feb-April 11):

The Chair took the approach of setting up initial lines of communication with local housing organizations--to introduce the committee, and learn about the landscape of housing decision makers in the county. The Chair also sought out educational and training opportunities for topics such as NAACP parliamentary procedures and affordable housing with a particular emphasis on Community Land Trusts and Community Development Corporations. From the discussions with numerous non-profit housing organizations and the City of Pittsfield a distinct patterned emerged--access to quality and stable housing for People of Color in the county is determined

by “the market” and there has never been a time in our country’s history where “the market” equitably valued People of Color. The conclusion of the Chair is there is a need for systems change. If Housing is the gateway through which Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness reside, Housing is a fundamental human right, akin to clean air and water, freedom from fear, want and violence.

February:

In mid-February the President contacted Kamaar Taliaferro, and requested he accept the nomination for Chair of the Housing Committee. After ample discussion the nomination was accepted.

March:

March 8 White Learning Circle mentorship discussion with the Chair. A list of questions was submitted by the circle that were in part stimulated by the suggested readings and recent local news.

March 10 the Chair virtually attended Pittsfield Annual CDBG Public Input Session.

March 15th and 22nd the Chair advocated for a “local option: transfer fee” to State Rep. Farley-Bouvier.

March 18th and 19th the Chair virtually attended national NAACP training on new federal pandemic legislation. The first two presentations were focused on ensuring access for Communities of Color to March federal pandemic relief legislation.

March 22nd Seeking additional clarity on resources and access for County residents a conversation was had between the Chair and BCRHA Executive Director Brad Gordon. Tentatively discussed a presentation/training in summer for the Housing Committee.

[March 23rd](#); the Chair virtually attended Pittsfield Housing Authority Proposed Annual Plan and 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan. [The PHA did not follow up regarding questions](#)

March 25th and 26th, the Chair virtually attended the national NAACP training on Fair Housing 101. Explored protections offered by The Fair Housing Act of 1968. The Chair also virtually attended a Community Land Trust Ambassadorship Training offered by Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (and partners).

March 27th the Chair virtually attended the opening panel and discussion of Housing is a Human Right conference offered by Greening Greenfield. Followed up with Professor Brian Sargeant of Umass Amherst, who agreed to give a presentation at the general membership meeting--the Chair suggested the June meeting.

March 31st the Chair virtually attended Working Cities Wednesday event, in which an AARP grant opportunity was presented.

April:

[April 6th-11th](#) the Chair worked in collaboration with Westside Legends, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, to apply for the AARP grant.

April 7th General Meeting. The Chair introduced the Housing Committee, Professor Brian Sargeant's proposed June presentation, and outreach to county Housing Organizations to develop lines of communication with the Housing Committee.

April 8th The Chair attended the Grey to Green BRPC Initiative's advisory group meeting. Introduced the BCB NAACP Housing Committee to the working group. Sincere interest appeared to be shown in volunteering for the committee--one group member has since joined.

April 9th. Housing Committee and BRPC Executive Director introduction. Discussed collaboration, Berkshire County--Regional Housing Strategy Draft Plan, local historical housing discrimination.

Week of April 12th: Housing Advisory Group meeting, convened by BRPC. City of Pittsfield City Council meeting, [commented](#) on proposed zoning overlay district ([see item 8](#)). Pittsfield Housing Authority [Regular Meeting](#). Fair Housing and Civil Rights Conference workshops--the chair to follow up with Dr Tiffany Manuel on narrative crafting for the branch. Introductory meeting with Executive Director of Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Elton Ogden. Introductory meeting with [CHAPA](#) Municipal Engagement Initiative associate Lily Linke. Spoke with Sharnice Jones of 18Degrees on joining the Housing Committee, and potential mentorship opportunities for youth of color--(ROPE. Steven Sumpter. Boys and Girls Club).

Week of April 19th: Housing is a Human Right Conference workshop on Community Housing Trusts. NAACP Executive Committee meeting. CHAPA Affordable Housing MEI 101. NAACP Office of the General Counsel, Legal Redress Series 2 training. NAACP Direct Action/Mobilization Training.