

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING TASK FORCE

*c/o St. Lawrence County Planning Office
48 Court Street
Canton, NY 13617-1169*

315-379-2292 (Phone)

315-379-2252 (Fax)

stlawco.org/Departments/Planning/AdvisoryBoards/FairHousingTaskForce



Meeting Minutes

August 22, 2023

1. **Call to Order and Determination of a Quorum.** Matilda Larson called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM.

Members Present: Chris Nyman; Mike McQuade; Jason Pfothenauer; Courtney Toms; Mike Zagrobelny. Matilda Larson and Preston Santimaw attended as staff. **A quorum was not established.**

Others Present: Sasha Henderson, St. Lawrence University Public Interest Corps Intern

2. **Adoption of the Agenda.** The agenda was accepted by consensus.
3. **Approval of Meeting Minutes, May 26, August 25, and November 17, 2022; May 23, 2023.** Due to lack of quorum, the Minutes of these meetings could not be approved. Larson suggested that they be accepted by consent of the members present. There were no objections.
4. **New Business.**

- a. Updated Socio-Economic & Demographic Data for New Fair Housing Assessment – Sasha Henderson, St. Lawrence University Public Interest Corps Intern
 1. Henderson reported on the data she collected for the New Fair Housing Assessment.
 - Larson commented on County demographic data stating that it may take into account persons who are incarcerated which influences data on non-white households. She also pointed out that the four universities between Canton and Potsdam are doing the same.
 2. Santimaw also presented slides on poverty, median income, labor force participation rates, and vacancy rates from 2017-2021.
 - Zagrobelny asked about the national poverty rate for that same time period, wondering what the correlation might be.
 - Larson suggested that a slide could be included as a comparison.

3. Henderson also presented slides on ELA and math proficiency rates by school district for the county. Henderson stated the data could be incomplete due to a lot of it not being reported.
 - Larson mentioned that during COVID, some school districts did hybrid learning and some did not, and this caused parents to take their children out of school for homeschooling. It is difficult to know proficiency rates for homeschooling because those who are being homeschooled may not be participating in standardized tests.
 - Henderson recalled that for AP tests, she would have to go to the school providing the test and take it there.
 - Zagrobelny brought up that the NY state tests have gone through huge changes in the last eight years, and around seven to ten years ago, there was a movement to opt out of these tests, which could have altered the data being collected from them.
 - Henderson also mentioned that these numbers are not being reported by various categories of students such as students with disabilities, who are economically disadvantaged, migrant students, etc. and this could make it unfair to compare them at all.
4. Henderson stated that factors contributing to low labor force participation rates include increased dependent care needs due to an aging population, higher unemployment benefits, a fear of contracting COVID at work, and slower population growth. Larson also attributed a decline in labor force participation rate to limited access to childcare services.
 - Zagrobelny wondered if a contributing factor could be that the minimum wage has been rising steadily for the past seven years. This could cause people who have had to work more than one job to make ends meet to now only have to work one, which could bring down the participation rate.
 - Larson stated that the labor force participation rate is not that nuanced. It is essentially two categories: those who are in the labor pool with employment and the unemployment rate accounts for those in the labor pool who cannot find work. So it is not based on how many positions of employment one holds, but whether or not one is employed at all.
 - Henderson stated it would be interesting to see the statistics for labor force participation rate in 2023 since we are more than three years removed from the onset of COVID.
5. Larson mentioned that in the Towns of DeKalb, Hermon, De Peyster, Macomb, and Morristown, the percent of the noninstitutionalized population living without health insurance was likely due to the high concentration of Swartzentruber Amish.
6. Henderson and Santimaw made comments about vacancy rates in the county being skewed by vacation homes along the St. Lawrence River and at camps.
 - Larson brought up a comment made in a previous Fair Housing Task Force meeting that homeowners have recently been lowering their standards to households that are “livable”.

7. Henderson finished her presentation with some conclusions. Areas disproportionately burdened by poverty may also suffer from housing quality issues; those living below the poverty line may have less access to certain services compared to those not economically disadvantaged; investment in accessible and affordable housing is necessary as more people are aging and/or living with one or more disabilities; there should be an effort to distinguish between poor quality housing and Amish housing that intentionally live with limited facilities.
- b. After the presentation, Larson outlined the next steps that she and Santimaw plan to take in updating the Fair Housing Assessment for the next meeting in November. These include:
 1. Prepare an updated map of households that have participated in the First Time Home Buyer Program from rounds 21 – present.
 2. Prepare an updated map of homeowners that have participated in the County’s Homeowner Repair Program from 2014 – present.
 3. With help from Chris Nyman, look at program impacts through the Housing Choice Voucher Program.
 4. Discuss with CNY Fair Housing on reports quantifying complaints concerning fair housing.
 5. Discuss with staff from Legal Aid if they have been involved with complaints since the last assessment was prepared.
- 5. Old Business.** Larson reviewed a memo drafted by the Planning Office and submitted to Housing and Community Renewal regarding their Assessment of Fair Housing. Larson, along with John Tenbusch and Jason Pfothauer reviewed the state’s proposal to address fair housing issues and provided feedback.
- 6. Reports.**
- a. Updates and announcements by those in attendance. None.
 - b. Larson said Connie Jenkins has stepped down from her seat on the Fair Housing Task Force due to limited availability; Larson stated that the Planning Office plans to reach out to religious/faith-based organizations to fill this vacancy. She also asked if anyone had suggestions for anyone who may be interested.
 - c. Larson extended her thanks to those willing to be reappointed as their terms come to an end.
 - d. The next Fair Housing Task Force meeting will be Tuesday, November 28th at 10:00am. The location has yet to be determined.
- 7. Adjourn.** The meeting adjourned by consensus at 11:07 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Preston Santimaw

Planner I

