



TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD

MEETING MINUTES

FAIR RENT COMMISSION

November 2, 2023 at 6:30 PM

West Hartford Town Hall Room 314

I. Meeting Opening

A. Call to Order: Interim Chair Nastajha Ortiz welcomed everyone and started the meeting at 6:32 pm.

B. Roll Call

Present: Commissioners Nichole Berklas, Nastajha Ortiz, Bruce Wittchen, and Kyle Zelazny.

Commissioner Alexis Safo-Agyeman participated virtually.

Commissioner Ashley Rigby was absent.

A quorum of members was present.

C. Approval of Minutes from July 27, 2023 Meeting

Motion made by: Kyle Zelazny

Motion seconded by: Bruce Wittchen

Vote: Motion passes unanimously

II. Discussion of Commission Membership

On October 24, 2023, the Town Council accepted the resignation of Sal Tripoli from the Fair Rent Commission.

III. New Business

A. Explanation of Administrative Hearing Guidelines

Interim Chair Ortiz advised that everyone was present for the purpose of holding a hearing. The court reporter was present. Interim Chair Ortiz noted that the parties were notified of the hearing via regular and certified

mail, ensured that all parties were present, and went over the hearing procedures.

B. Case #2023-03, Vernon v. Westwood Apartments Owner, LLC

Commissioner Zelazny swore in all parties and their witnesses.

Interim Chair Ortiz called the Complainant to the podium. The Complainant introduced Complainant's Exhibits A-S, then provided testimony as to why the Fair Rent Commission Complaint was filed. At 6:50 pm the Complainant's Exhibits B-F, which contained videos, were shown to all present. Interim Chair Ortiz then gave the Respondent the opportunity to ask questions of the Complainant through her. The Commissioners were then given the opportunity to ask their own questions of the Complainant.

Interim Chair Ortiz then called the Respondent's agent to the podium. The Respondent's agent introduced Respondent's Exhibits 1-3, and provided testimony at 7:18 pm. Interim Chair Ortiz then gave the Complainant the opportunity to ask questions of the Respondent's agent through her. The Commissioners were then given the opportunity to ask their own questions of the Respondent's agent.

The Parties then had the opportunity to make closing statements. Following closing statements, the Commissioners proceeded with deliberations. Commissioner Zelazny recused himself due to a conflict and did not participate in deliberations.

Interim Chair Ortiz made a motion that rent was excessive as to be harsh and unconscionable. The members took a vote which passed unanimously at 7:52 pm.

Interim Chair Ortiz made a motion to reduce the rent to and refer the matter to the West Hartford Bloomfield Health District, with the stipulation that the parties were to report back to the Fair Rent Commission by the first week of May for further discussion. Commissioner Berklas seconded the motion and a discussion followed.

Commissioner Wittchen made a motion for the rent to remain at the current rate until which point the bathroom is refinished, and the apartment has been inspected by the West Hartford Bloomfield Health District. Following the inspection, the parties may mutually agree on a new rate. Discussion followed.

Interim Chair Ortiz made a motion to reduce the rent six months and refer the matter to the West Hartford Bloomfield Health District. Also to refer the matter to the Fair Rent Coordinator for further mediation. Parties shall report to the Fair Rent Commission by the first week of May 2024 for further discussion. Commissioner Berklas seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Interim Chair Ortiz made a motion that if the parties are unable to reach a resolution through mediation, the matter will be referred back to the Fair Rent Commission for a continued hearing to be held on or before the first Thursday in May of 2024. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Berklas and passed unanimously.

IV. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:17 pm.