

**REAL ESTATE & HOUSING SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, April 21, 2021**

**3:30 pm**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Call to Order**

Danita Nias, subcommittee co-chair, called the meeting to order at 3:31 pm. Tiffany David, of the City of West Palm Beach Mayor's Office, took attendance of participants for the meeting record. Danita Nias called for approval of the previous meeting minutes.

**April 14th Meeting Minutes**

No comments were made about the April 14<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes; the meeting minutes were unanimously approved as distributed.

**Presentation: Housing & Code Enforcement in West Palm Beach**

Tiffany David introduced the presenter, Ms. Valerie Luster, City of West Palm Beach Code Enforcement Officer. Ms. Luster has 32 years of code enforcement experience and has served as a landlord for 17 years. Prior to joining the city as a code enforcement officer, she worked at the City of West Palm Beach Housing Authority as manager for the code enforcement office and was an inspector for the Housing and Urban Development Agency.

**Q&A**

Ms. Luster told subcommittee members that she has been with the Code Enforcement Office for 19 years. She elaborated more about what the Code Enforcement Office does and her role as a code enforcement officer and answered questions from subcommittee members. She stated that code enforcement officers would go out and inspect a property regardless of who called and can go inside if invited. Otherwise, they are only allowed to inspect the outside front-yard area. Code enforcement officers only inspect a rental property once at the beginning when the license is obtained and cannot inspect after unless they are called/invited to.

When they are inspecting, the officers make sure that the units are up to housing quality standards (whether inside and/or out) and if a unit is not, can intervene. They do not get involved with civil issues like evictions, those issues are directed towards Fair Housing. She described the Code Enforcement Office's relationship with the Police Department, stating that there are many interviews where police assistance is needed and gives them better enforcement abilities. During the pandemic, the office carried out virtual inspections by having people submit pictures of their properties. Subcommittee



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members thought that submitting pictures could be a way to have consistent inspections vs. one-time rental inspections. Officers follow chapter 162 for code violations which states they must give a person a reasonable amount of time to come into compliance. When it comes down to time given, it's between the code officer, magistrate, and the violator compliance. Property owners are responsible for anything on their property, which is why violations are tied to the property owner vs. the tenant.

One challenge Ms. Luster notices is that tenants are afraid to call the office in fear of tenant retaliation from the landlord or potential involvement with law enforcement. Another challenge she notices is that code enforcement officers have limited grounds when it comes to inspecting properties (can only be invited in, can only inspect front yard, etc.) She said that if the office could carry out inspections more frequently, especially in blighted areas, many of the problems wouldn't be as bad as they are. It can also relieve tenants' fears of calling the office.

### **Discussion: Assessing Progress and Strategies Towards Initial Priorities**

Kayla Elson shared on her screen a list of ideas/recommendations that subcommittee members have brainstormed the past few meetings that relate to each of the priorities. Kayla Elson then asked if subcommittee members had any additional ideas to add to the list. Under priority one, Parisa Hamzesh suggested adding the beautification of neighborhoods by partnering with schools/youth programs that can carry out this work. Ontario Davis-Johnson recommended adding increasing fees on rental receipts to create new funding that can be used towards rehabilitation or housing programs. Another idea is to identify strategies and invest resources to identify landlords without rental licenses. Under priority two, Ontario Davis-Johnson suggested adding the idea of creating a partnership between the city's marketing department and home ownership programs to spread the word about these programs. Members also discussed incentives for landlords and details specifically outlined when applying for a license and the requirements stated that landlords must follow.

### **Public Comment**

Suzanna Cabrera, attendee, made comments through the chat box. She thanked subcommittee members, stated that the pandemic could have impacted landlord payment, and suggested targeting re-inspection efforts on habitual offenders. She also asked if a recording for the last minute was available.

### **Next steps: June 12 Action Summit**

Kayla Elson will share the list of ideas with subcommittee members. She encouraged subcommittee members to spread the word about the Action Summit. The team is working on getting physical collaterals distributed to different places and to send ideas their way for distribution or coordination to receive physical collaterals. The finalized digital collaterals will be sent as a package to subcommittee members.



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## **Adjournment**

Danita Nias thanked subcommittee members for their participation/engagement. Antoinne Wright, subcommittee co-chair, thanked everyone as well and adjourned the meeting at 5:01 pm. The next meeting will be on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 3:30 pm on Zoom.

## **ATTENDANCE**

### Guest Speakers:

Valerie Luster, Code Enforcement Officer

### Public:

Craig Glover  
Suzanna Cabrera

### Present:

Danita Nias, Subcommittee Co-Chair  
Antoinne Wright, Subcommittee Co-Chair

Ontario Davis Johnson, Subcommittee Member  
Parisa Hamzetash, Subcommittee Member  
Maricela Torres, Subcommittee Member  
Michael Odum, Subcommittee member

Tiffany David, City of West Palm Beach Mayor's Office  
Kayla Elson, Justice & Sustainability Associates  
Milena Almetica, Justice & Sustainability Associates  
Emma Lipsky, Justice & Sustainability Associates

### Absent:

Ezra Gene Saffold, Subcommittee Member