

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

**Wednesday, August 11, 2021**

**3:00 p.m.**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Call to Order**

AJ Wright, subcommittee co-chair, called the meeting to order at 3:07 p.m. Tiffany David, of the City of West Palm Beach Mayor's Office, took attendance of participants for the meeting record. Kayla Elson, of Justice & Sustainability Associates, reviewed the agenda and turned it over to the guest speakers.

This is an additional meeting prior to the normally scheduled subcommittee meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to give subcommittee members more time to discuss housing for immigrant communities.

**Presentation: "Housing Challenges for Immigrant Communities" with  
Neighborhood Renaissance & Legal Aid Society**

Terri Murray, Executive Director of Neighborhood Renaissance introduced herself and gave background on Neighborhood Renaissance. Neighborhood Renaissance supports families/individuals by strengthening their financial position. They have assisted 200+ low and moderate-income families become homeowners, rehabilitated and created 250+ affordable homes, and invested \$46 million over eight years in minority and underserved neighborhoods. She then provided anecdotes on situations where she has seen housing situations where immigrants were discriminated against, taken advantage of, and lived in extremely poor housing conditions. Terri Murray gave three recommendations for subcommittee consideration: The first is to hire professionals to study the current housing situation in immigrant communities (impacts, barriers, areas affected, etc.); second is to invest in and engage with existing organizations that serve immigrant populations; and third is to expand educational programs for newcomers (such as financial literacy, code requirements, etc.).

Eneami Bestman, program manager and staff attorney for Legal Aid Society Palm Beach County (PBC), introduced herself and gave background on Legal Aid Society PBC. She specifically works in the Fair Housing Project. Eneami Bestman defined the Fair Housing Act, which covers federal, state, and local provisions. She explained that at the federal level, there are seven classes that are legally protected from housing discrimination including race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, or disability. Palm Beach County has four additional protected classes including age, marital status, gender identity/orientation, and sexual orientation. Legal Aid Society PBC



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strongly supports the recommendation of increasing educational programs and resources. She noted one challenge that Legal Aid Society has encountered is the fear from many undocumented residents of enforce their tenant rights because of potential deportation threats. Ann Marie Puente, staff attorney for Legal Aid Society Palm Beach County, recommended considering rental and legal assistance for undocumented households.

### Discussion

Tiffany David asked guest speakers for examples of other cities implementing any solutions that satisfactorily addressed the issues mentioned above. Terri Murray said Minnesota has very specific educational programs that are targeted towards their newcomer population. Tiffany David then asked what guest speakers recommend the city do to address urgent housing situations. Eneami Bestman responded that if a tenant does not have basic necessities (water, electricity, gas, etc.) then the tenant can write a rent withholding letter.

Eneami Bestman clarified that citizenship is not a protected class federally or in the county, but that subcommittee members could potentially recommend adding additional protected classes. Parisa Hamzetash, subcommittee member, asked further clarification questions around the study Terri Murray suggested and Neighborhood Renaissance's \$46 million investments. Terri Murray clarified the purpose of the study and how the investments were invested. Michael Odum, subcommittee member, asked if undocumented folks are protected from deportation if they come forward to enforce their rights. Eneami Bestman responded that their documentation status does not need to be disclosed when seeking legal guidance, it would most likely be the landlord reporting to deportation. Ann Marie Puente recommended creating a user-friendly design and language of education materials. She also recommended creating an alternative legal system such as a mediation or alternative dispute resolution program that is accessible and safe for immigrants to seek legal assistance.

Subcommittee members then discussed their top recommendations made by guest speakers and ways to incorporate them into their draft policy areas. AJ Wright noted that education seemed to consistently rise to the top of priorities, and is a starting point to empower immigrants (undocumented or not) who are seeking help. Ontario Davis Johnson recommended that the city have a standard lease landlords would have to use. AJ Wright countered that there are still those who do not have official leases. Maricela Torres agreed, and Michael Odum clarified that this is something the city can control and could also be a good place to start. Maricela Torres requested that a study of the housing issues facing immigrant communities be included in a recommended idea from this subcommittee.



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## Next steps

Parisa Hamzetash asked about the process for moving the draft policies forward for Task Force review. Kayla Elson explained that the goal is consensus of what ideas the subcommittee wants to come out. She then explained goals and expectations for the next meeting.

## Adjournment

AJ Wright adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m. The regularly scheduled subcommittee meeting will take place on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 3:30 p.m. on Zoom.

## ATTENDANCE

### Present:

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

Emma Lipsky, Justice & Sustainability Associates

### Guest Speakers

Terri Murray, Executive Director of Neighborhood Renaissance

Eneami Bestman, Staff Attorney at Legal Aid Society

Ann Marie Puente, Esq., Staff Attorney at Legal Aid Society

### Absent:

Danita Nias, Subcommittee Co-Chair

Ezra Gene Saffold, Subcommittee Member