

FAIR HOUSING TASK FORCE

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

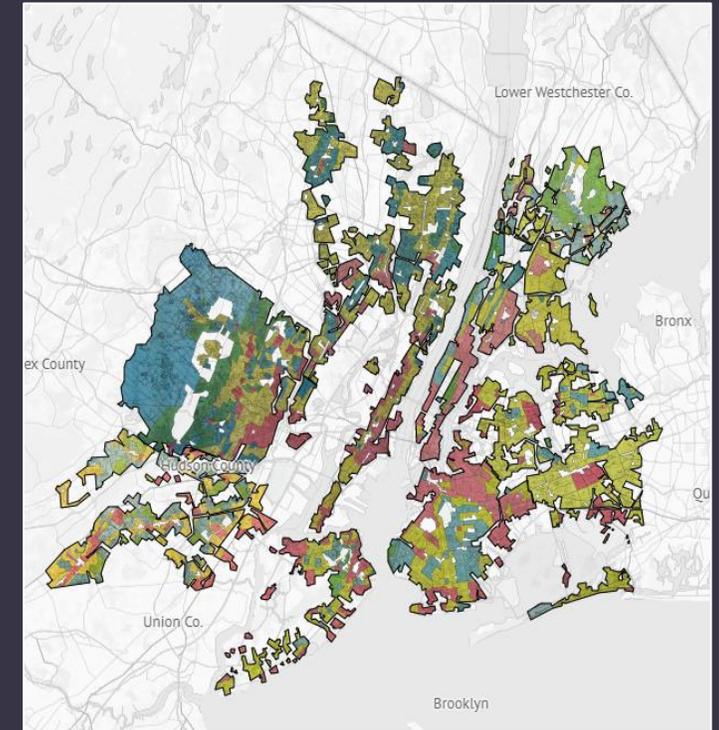
- Legislator Samuel Gonzalez
- Legislator Steven Flotteron
- Dawn Lott, HRC
- Lynda Perdomo-Ayala, HRC
- Bo Patten, Long Island Board of Realtors
- Elaine Gross, ERASE Racism
- Ian Wilder, Long Island Housing Services
- Dr. Georgette Grier-Key, NAACP Long Island Coalition
- Froebel Chungata, NYS Division of Human Rights
- Hon. Frank Schellace, Long Island Hispanic Bar Association
- Mitch Pally, Long Island Builders Institute
- Pilar Moya-Mancera, Latino Justice
- Sharon Mullon
- Nancy Vargas-Johnson

INTRODUCTION

- The Fair Housing Task Force was established by Resolution 1210-2019.
- Initially scheduled to start in March 2020, delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- First meeting of the Task Force was held through Zoom on July 14th, 2020.
- Two Public Hearings were held virtually on October 22nd, 2020 and on February 10th, 2020.
- Mission of the Task Force was to review the Suffolk County Human Rights Law and to strengthen County protections against impermissible real estate practices.
- In total, the Task Force held 8 Meetings and 2 Public Hearings from July 14th, 2020 through May 27th, 2021.

BACKGROUND

- Suffolk County has a long history of redlining and segregation, dating back to the earliest suburban development in the 1930's resulting from Federal Housing Administration (FHA) guidelines and Home Owner Loans Corporation (HOLC) maps which tied an area's credit-worthiness to race.
- The Fair Housing Task Force was convened in response to *Newsday's* three-year investigation conducted as part of "[Long Island Divided](#)" which found extensive evidence of racial steering and unethical real estate practices.
- A Brown University study found that the Nassau-Suffolk metropolitan area was the [10th most segregated County nation wide](#) among similarly sized municipalities.
- Segregation has in fact increased within Long Island's schools, according to a [2017 ERASE Racism study](#), the number of students attending diverse districts has more than doubled all while enrollment in majority-white districts has declined by nearly 40%



RECOMMENDATIONS PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 1210-2019: AMENDMENTS TO THE SUFFOLK COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

- The Task Force found the language of § 528-9 of the Human Rights Law to be largely sufficient, but identified two possible additions:
- Adding history of criminal convictions to the list of protected classes within § 528-9.
 - This would follow State law which has made arrest without a conviction a protected class and “Ban the Box” legislation enacted in 2020 by Suffolk County, which prohibited employers from inquiring about or requiring applicants to disclose criminal convictions on an initial job interview, unless questions are authorized by applicable, overriding law.
- Adding Limited English Proficiency (LEP) to the list of protected classes under § 528-9.

INCREASED SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

- Funding should be provided for Fair Housing Testing in order to strengthen the County's enforcement of existing housing discrimination laws:
 - A minimum of \$12,000 annually is recommended to be made available for the Human Rights Commission for the express purpose of fair housing testing.
 - A minimum of \$50,000 should be provided annually to the Human Rights Commission to employ Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) in order to meet demand and better investigate housing cases.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS, FINDINGS AND DETERMINATIONS

DETERMINE IF SUFFOLK COUNTY IS MEETING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) REQUIREMENTS

- Currently, Six (6) Suffolk County Towns receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding by way of the County.
 - The County has the ability to *not* provide the Towns these funds if they do not work to affirmatively act to encourage fair housing or follow fair housing requirements.
- Precedent set in *Westchester v. United States Department of Housing and Urban Development* finds that Suffolk County could be held liable if these Towns do not work to affirmatively act to ensure fair housing.
- The County should develop it's own guidelines to ensure these Towns meet fair housing requirements in order to receive CDBG funding from the County.

REAL ESTATE LICENSING

- Educational programs for Real Estate Licensees should be developed, and anti-bias training should be required for those found to violate real estate ethics.
- An Advisory Rating System should be established by Suffolk County for real estate licensees.
 - Such an anti-discrimination rating system could be based upon those established for banks under the Federal Community Investment Act (CRA).
- The public should be able to look up real estate licensees who are in good standing on Suffolk County's website.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

- The County should put together Public Service Announcements and videos discussing housing discrimination to educate residents about when they are being discriminated against.
- A “Tenant Bill of Rights” should be created and distributed to assist renters facing eviction.
- Outreach efforts should not be limited to English, and should include other commonly spoken languages in Suffolk County, including Spanish and Haitian Creole.
- All different races, ages, familial statuses, languages and religions should be included in a social media campaign conducted in collaboration with community organizations.

COUNTY CONTRACT CHANGES

- The County should require that all their vendors associated with real estate work to affirmatively further fair housing as a listed requirement in any Request For Proposals (RFPs) issued by the County.
- This would include banks and insurance companies that the County does business with amongst other vendors.
 - Banks which have a strong record of community reinvestment could be favored, for example.
- The Task Force recommends that these same requisites be enacted by agencies such the Suffolk County Landbank and the Suffolk County Industrial Development Agency.

PROVIDING HOUSING TO COUNTY RESIDENTS

- Diversification of Housing Stock
 - Zoning is recognized as one of the root causes of redlining and segregation on Long Island, changes to zoning law would enable a more even distribution of a wider variety of housing stock.
 - Not only affordable housing: This can also include handicap accessible, multi-generational, multi-family, and mixed used smart housing.
- Providing Veterans Housing
 - Towns and Villages must correctly calculate incomes for Service Connected Veterans who may be eligible for Housing Choice Vouchers.
 - The County should work with the Department of Veterans Affairs disability benefits in the calculation of annual income in order to help more Veterans apply for housing benefits.

FUTURE PLANS

- Establish a standing Fair Housing Advisory Board
 - An Advisory Board which could meet quarterly should be established to discuss specific issues that arise relating to fair housing.
 - The Advisory Board would be able to follow-up on the implementation of reforms at the State and County level and take a more broad look at fair housing issues.
 - Potentially include Nassau County and Town and Village officials in order to take a broader view of fair housing issues.
- Follow-up with State officials regarding the implementation of fair housing laws. Including [S6874A/A8903](#): and [S945B/A6866](#).
- Ensure the State supports Fair Housing efforts by providing adequate funding to the County, and housing partners.

ANY QUESTIONS?