

## **FAIR HOUSING HEARING**

September 10, 2007 – 6:30 p.m.

Patrick Harris of the Portsmouth Intercity Development Corporation presented to the Hillsboro City Council a program explaining what is available from his organization. Since there are CDBG monies available in the jurisdiction; there is also a Fair Housing Awareness Seminar.

Mr. Harris handed out materials that would help to explain what some of the laws are and what procedures must be followed as well as the role of the Portsmouth Intercity Development Corporation. Mr. Harris said that the “The Ohio Landlord/Tenant Laws” was their rule book. He said that they also use the Federal Fair Housing Program which he said was modeled after the program in Ohio since the program existed in the state before the federal program existed.

He said that their role in Highland County is to assure full housing opportunities for all home seekers in Highland County, to alleviate discriminatory housing practices within Highland County, to strengthen and maintain fair housing opportunities in all areas and to encourage and assist in vigorous enforcement of the Fair Housing Laws and to achieve full public awareness of the individual’s housing rights.

He said that elected officials may get a call regarding discrimination first but they (Portsmouth Intercity) are the referral source. If and when that call comes the call needs to be sent directly to them. Their numbers were in the material that he handed out and they have a newly established toll-free number to help cut down on some of the cost. He said that everything that was in the packet; the Ohio Landlord/Tenant Law sets out the minimum requirements of both the landlord and the tenant. It is a general awareness in the community of the rights and duties involved in renting a place to dwell in the State of Ohio.

Under the laws; both the landlord and the tenant have duties and obligations. These apply whether there is a written lease or not. None of the duties can be changed by lease. The landlord and tenant are always held responsible to the duties. When a tenant moves in the landlord should notify the tenant in writing of the owner’s name, address and/or designee in case they need to contact them after hours. He said that if an owner refuses to maintain the property or breaches his obligation; then the tenant should take the rent when it is due; to the clerk of courts and it will be applied to an escrow account. When the court is satisfied that the obligation has been met; then they will release the funds to the landlord.

He said that in the packet there was a list of terms; discriminatory terms, discriminatory advertising, false representation, block-busting and it gives a whole list of terminology and illegal acts and gives definitions. He said that normally with Portsmouth Intercity, what they do when they get a complaint; when that call comes into their office, they have thirty days to respond. Normally what they do unless that tenant tells them that they

don't want them to contact the landlord; they immediately get both parties version of whatever is going on. He said that there are two sides to every story and they try to mitigate to get to the bottom of what is actually going on. If it is an issue where it seems that there has been a discrimination issue; what they will do is ship that up to Columbus to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. The Civil Rights Commission has one hundred and twenty days to respond to the claim. If it has to go into court then you would have representation by the Civil Rights Commission's legal team so you would not have any legal costs at that time.

He said that since he had been at Portsmouth Intercity they have not had any discriminatory issues that they have had to send to the Civil Rights Commission. They have had the typical landlord/tenant situations. He said that that is normally what happens as they try to reach some kind of reconciliation between the landlord and the tenant. A lot of the time it is miscommunication. He said that they act as the referee, mitigator or whatever is needed to bring that to a head.

He said that most of the calls just want information. He said that the City of Hillsboro is excellent and the City of Greenfield is excellent but in some of the rural areas where there are no housing codes; it is a bit more difficult. He said that once he lets the landlord know that they are subjecting themselves to the possibility of a fine or seizure of their property or both, he said that they pretty much fall in line.

Mr. Holt asked if Mr. Harris would send him some more the Ohio Landlord/Tenant booklets as he often uses those in the office.

With no further information or questions to come before the Council, the hearing was closed.

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Beverly Brown, Secretary