



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

FAIR HOUSING

8/15/2023

In 1968, the United States federal government enacted the Fair Housing Act, which protects individuals and families from discrimination in the sale, rental, financing, or advertising of housing. It would be amended in 1988 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, family status, and national origin.

In Columbia County, the Fair Housing office is headed up by county Fair Housing Officer William Fisher. A Hudson High graduate, Mr. Fisher served 5½ years in the National Guard and four years on active duty before returning to this area. Subsequently, he spent 38 years as vice-president of loan operations with the Hudson City Savings Institution, and also spent time as a volunteer on the Fair Housing Advisory Board.

In the big picture on the housing front today, said Mr. Fisher, "We're trying to be sure that tenants and landlords get the representation they need. A big issue right now is affordable housing. What I'm seeing is people who possibly could be displaced because properties are being sold, rents are going up, and that type of thing. I don't want to leave out the anxiety feature that these people experience if for instance, they get a notice of termination of tenancy, or a letter on a lease violation."

"Not all evictions are the result of non-payment," he added, "because what I see is properties being purchased and new owners want to go through renovations and things like that, or they want to raise the rents, so you see long-term tenants experiencing the possibility of being evicted. I always try to put myself in the place of someone receiving a notice like that. It can scare the daylights out of someone."

Mr. Fisher points out that people don't always realize that only a court can set the date when a tenant has to be out on a warrant of eviction. "They'll get a 14-day notice and wonder, where am I going to go in 14 days? They also don't realize that 14 days means 14 business days, so that gives them more time than they think. But again, it's only after those 14 days go by that the landlord can even petition the court to commence the eviction proceedings."

The Housing Advisory Board is staffed by Theresa Mayhew, Bertram Downes, Jeffrey Fineout, Brenda Adams, Carol Michael, Dominick Merante (chair), Gail Paone, Rev. Kim Singletary, Kylie Proper, Letty Malin, Lisa Dixon-Watson, Stephanie Snyder, Barbara Palmateer, Theresa Joyner, Claire Cousin, and Daniel Rockefeller. "It's a pretty good cross-section of folks who know the community, and are interested in helping the community," said Mr. Fisher.

The Fair Housing Office website can be found at <https://sites.google.com/columbiacountyny.com/ccfairhousing/home>. Mr. Fisher can be reached at 518-828-0342 and wms123123@live.com

Next time, I'll examine some of the laws and strategies that may come into play in landlord/tenant situations.

This is part one of a two-part series.