



Broome County Safe Housing Task Force – Core Group
Wednesday, October 10, 2-3pm
Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Dr. Tonia Thompson (Superintendent – Binghamton City School District), Sharon Sorokin (Assistant Corporation Counsel – City of Binghamton), Chris Faber-Mosely (Attorney – Legal Services of Central NY), Josh Phelps (Director – Environmental Health), Sonja Bennett (Deputy Commissioner of TA – Department of Social Services), Larry Sal (Landlord – Sall Associates), Pam Guth (Director of Community Health Services – Rural Health Network of South Central NY), Tom Costello (Director – City of Binghamton Code Department), Christina Cramer (BC Executive’s Office), Mark Schuster (Co-Chair – BC Health Department), Rebecca Rathmell (Co-Chair – Southern Tier Homeless Coalition)

1. Timeline, Structure & Priorities

- a. 6 months total
 - i. 3 months – Core Group to meet biweekly and communicate in between meetings to focus on generating ideas, gathering data, developing policy proposals, etc.
 - ii. 3 months – Executive Committee to review recommendations and begin adoption
- b. Three priority conversations to start
 - i. Collaborative Protocol between DSS & municipalities
 1. In what ways can County/municipalities work together to improve efficiency and effectively tackle unsafe housing?
 2. Internal process development rather than policy.
 - ii. Rental Registration/Licensing
 1. Potential amendments to existing code ordinances and shared services models
 - iii. Broome County Land Bank
- c. Funding Collaborative will likely be discussed to bring together public/private/philanthropic dollars to support implementation.

2. Collaborative Protocol: Health & Safety Violations

- a. BCDSS TA & Legal and City of Binghamton Code & Legal met late last month to discuss Spiegel Act reporting and trainings re: Building Blocks & basic building code. Access to Building Blocks expected January 1st. City of



Binghamton indicated a willingness to revise the current Rental Registration ordinance and is considering including “Source of Income” as a protected class in local law. Also, clarification re: third party referrals was discussed: Code can take third-party referrals; however, tenant must allow access.

b. Spiegel Act discussion

i. Questions and concerns in application

1. “Dangerous, hazardous, or detrimental to life & health” a determination of the Code office; per Tom, interpretation varies. Department notifies DSS & “stop-rent” is issued.
2. Larry posed the question, “If landlords have multiple units within a single building, is rent withheld for all units in the building or just the one where violations were identified?” (Further clarification needed.) Also, “Without income, how are they (landlords) expected to fix the problem?”
3. Tenants are informed of “stop-rent” via a letter from DSS however no information re: their rights are included. Rebecca to seek guidance from NYS OTDA & connect with Chris/Sharon to draft support document. Tonia advised re: ensuring guidance is developed with appropriate literacy levels in mind.
4. Group acknowledged that lowest-income tenants often do not report health/safety violations to Code for fear of retribution (i.e. retaliatory eviction). Code cannot access indoors without cause – even so, tenant must allow access.

c. Data Sharing

- i. Tom referenced data sharing recommendation from [2011 Broome County Code Enforcement Operations Report](#), stated “we’re about 2 years away from realizing those recommendations” (i.e. Building Blocks)
- ii. Tonia inquired re: public access to Building Blocks; also recommended having “a tenant at the table.” Sharon stated information re: code violations is public knowledge & may be FOILED or public may call to inquire but not currently posted – “Public portal a year away”

1. Rochester’s use of BuildingBlocks:

<http://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=21474837029>



- iii. Sonja stated Spiegel Act reports are currently only coming from Town of Union, City of Binghamton, Endicott, Health Department. DSS has reached out to rural offices but have not received responses.
- iv. Per Sonja, sharing public assistance address information is against statutory confidentiality. She will discuss with DSS Legal.
- v. Tonia stated school districts may be able to provide support if data re: Spiegel Act can be shared.

3. Rental Registration

- a. Currently law in Binghamton and Johnson City.
- b. Per Tom, discussions re: the ordinance were highly contentious. When it rolled out the City saw 50% participation from landlords & about 50% of registered units were inspected. Stated that the logistics of inspections was the barrier – “inspecting vacant units is much easier than inspecting occupied units.” His concern is a punitive approach as opposed to affirmative measures. Group agreed any effort would need to be heavily incentivized.
- c. Per Sharon, aspects of the current ordinance unconstitutional but amendable.
- d. Enforcement resources the barrier to implementation. How do we get there?
 - i. Compare to municipalities where it is working (e.g. Rochester, Syracuse)
 - 1. Rochester:
<http://www.cityofrochester.gov/article.aspx?id=8589935004>
 - 2. Syracuse: <http://www.syracuse.ny.us/rentalregistry.aspx>
 - ii. Per Tom, Schenectady a regional code enforcement model. State currently working on programming and tool to encourage this.
 - iii. Discussion re: effectiveness of court-based violation processes. Per Tom, “it’s too easy not to register.” Mark stated Rochester transitioned enforcement to a ticketing bureau. This will be included in further Rental Registration discussion.
- e. Larry encouraged the group to “raise the bar” re: language used – “undesirable landlords/undesirable tenants” as opposed to “slumlord/slumtenant”
- f. Pam encouraged defining “low-income” – 200% FPL, 30-50% AMI?

4. Action Items

- a. Clarification re: whether “stop-rent” applies to identified unit or whole building



-
- b. Rebecca to seek guidance from NYS OTDA & connect with Chris/Sharon to draft tenant support document re: rights within Spiegel Law to be included in DSS correspondence. Further discussion needed re: guidance to civil court personnel.
 - c. (At least) Rochester rental registration information to be emailed out.
 - d. Sonja to discuss parameters of formal data sharing agreements with DSS Legal pertinent to Code offices, Health Department, and/or school districts.