

# Testimonial Commendation

Honoring

## The Newton Fair Housing Committee

*Recognizing their important work in fair access to housing and providing equal opportunity for all*

Whereas, diverse, inclusive communities with access to good jobs, schools, health care, transportation, and housing are crucial to our region and nation's prosperity in the 21st century and

Whereas, persistent racial segregation in housing is the legacy of explicit federal, state, and local policies that defined where black and white Americans could live prior to the Fair Housing Act<sup>1</sup> and

Whereas, discrimination in housing continues to be a critical issue for many people, on the basis not only of skin color but also of religious creed, national origin, sex, age, familial status, disability, ancestry, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression, and

Whereas, housing discrimination has a long-term effect on the wealth, health and education opportunities for these people and their families and

Whereas, in the early 1960s, a committee was organized by a group of Newton citizens to combat housing discrimination based on race, in response to the taking of homes of African-Americans in West Newton for the Massachusetts Turnpike, who were denied alternate housing in Newton because of racial discrimination and

Whereas, efforts to address fair housing had failed in two congressional terms, the dramatic aftermath of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination on April 4, 1968, pushed legislators into taking healing and swift action, and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act into law just a week later, on April 11, 1968, and

Whereas, the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and family status and

Whereas, on January 20 of this year President Biden signed an executive order further extending protections by prohibiting discrimination in housing because of gender identity or sexual orientation and

Whereas, in 2005, the Newton Housing Partnership created the Fair Housing Task Force, in order to investigate and address housing discrimination in Newton, and the task force found disparate treatment within the city and undertook fair housing education and outreach programs for realtors, housing owners and managers, housing agencies, city staff, and the general public and

Whereas, in 2008, Mayor David Cohen formally established the Newton Fair Housing Committee (NFHC), a citizen advisory board, to promote and support the city's efforts to be a diverse and welcoming community with fair housing choices and opportunities for all, free from discrimination, and this agenda has been carried forward actively by the NFHC since its inception and

Whereas, in 2015, Newton entered into a settlement to resolve a complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by the Engine 6 advocacy group, alleging that the city violated fair housing laws by obstructing a proposal to create supportive housing for the chronically homeless and

Whereas, a recent study from Suffolk University Law School and the Boston Foundation as detailed in the report “Qualified Renters Need Not Apply”<sup>2</sup> showed that housing discrimination in the rental market continues to be an issue in Boston-area communities including Newton and

Whereas, Newton receives funds from HUD and is required to create a five-year action plan to affirmatively further fair housing, and the WestMetro HOME Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice for 2021-2025<sup>3</sup> lists several key strategies and actions and

Whereas, the NFHC is already undertaking some of the recommended actions including:

education programs on fair housing for realtors, housing owners and managers, housing agencies, city staff, and the general public;

review of major residential development proposals to determine whether they meet or exceed regulatory fair housing requirements and sharing its findings with the relevant permit granting authority; and

evaluation of the use of the local preference option in affordable housing lotteries to determine its impact on the goal of affirmatively furthering fair housing; and

Whereas, the NFHC’s expertise and focus will be important in addressing other action items from the Analysis of Impediments, including the review of restrictive zoning policies that limit the amount of multifamily and affordable housing as well as compliance with recently-passed state legislation that requires the creation of at least one by-right multifamily zone close to transit and

Whereas, and in summary, we embrace the definition of fair housing put forward in the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (p. 9): *Fair housing exists when people can find safe, suitable housing within their economic means wherever they choose to live, and they do not face discrimination based on their membership in a protected class.*

Now therefore be it known,

That the Honorable City Council representing the entire City of Newton, in celebration of Fair Housing Month, recognizes the important work of the Newton Fair Housing Committee and its critical role in helping Newton become a more diverse, inclusive and just community. We especially support its members, who volunteer their time and expertise to such a worthwhile goal. The NFHC’s work to end housing discrimination and to affirmatively further fair housing embodies our strongly-held American values of fair access and equal opportunity.

Commendation offered on this 5th Day of April, 2021, by Council President Susan Albright, Vice-President Rick Lipof, Councilors Bowman, Crossley, Danberg, Downs, Greenberg, Grossman, Humphrey, Kalis, Kelley, Krintzman, Noel and Ryan, on behalf of the entire City Council

(1) April is Fair Housing Month, Ted Hess-Mahan <https://newton.wickedlocal.com/news/20200417/newton-column-april-is-fair-housing-month>

(2) Qualified Renters Need Not Apply <https://www.tbf.org/-/media/tbf/reports-and-covers/2020/housing-voucher-report-20200701.pdf?la=en>

(3) WestMetro HOME Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice <https://www.newtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=47557>