



TOWN OF NEWTOWN
Fair Rent Commission
MEETING MINUTES

March 21, 2024
Newtown Municipal Center
Shared Meeting room 3
3 Primrose Street

Present: Mary Fields, Steve Sedensky, Brian Lauro

Absent: Alice Fitzsimons, Robert Morey

Also Present: Kim Chiappetta – Economic and Community Dev & Fairfield Hills Coordinator (clerk)

Public Attendance: None

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 pm.

Public Participation:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Steve Sedensky made a motion to accept the meeting minutes from March 7, 2023. Brian Lauro seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

New Business:

Fair Rent Commission Q & A Workshop:

Chair Mary Fields began by thanking Sarah White of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center and Rafie Podolsky of Connecticut Legal Services for attending. Ms. White and Mr. Podolsky gave a presentation of *Fair Rent Commission Basics* and answered procedural questions asked by Commission members. (Refer to Attachment A.)

Adjournment:

Steve made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:48 p.m. Brian seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kimberly Chiappetta, Secretary



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What are Fair Rent Commissions?

- For more than 50 years, Connecticut cities & towns have been permitted to set up Fair Rent Commissions (FRCs)
- An FRC is a municipal board with the power to limit or modify rent increases and other rental charges so as to prevent them from being so “excessive” that they’re “harsh and unconscionable”.
- Most tenants have no practical way to challenge an unfair rent increase unless they live in a town with a fair rent commission.
- An FRC functions as the conscience of the community regarding rental charges and increases. Commissioners are ordinary residents of the town, not experts.



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What else does a Fair Rent Commission do?

- An FRC buttresses housing code enforcement
 - FRC can delay or deny rent increases or reduce rental charges if the landlord fails to maintain the property in compliance with the housing code.
- An FRC can help resolve many landlord-tenant disagreements, often without a hearing



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What are Fair Rent Commissions for?

- FRCs provide *rent stabilization* to tenants who already live in an apartment based on *tenant complaints* about
 - unfair rent increases
 - bad conditions or a reduction in services (e.g. rent is unfair given rats, mold, & broken elevator)
 - landlord retaliation
- Under state law, any tenant can complain unless they live in a seasonal rental
- Tenant complains → informal conciliation → possible investigation → hearing → DECISION



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What can Fair Rent Commissions do?

- FRC decisions are flexible, and can include:
 - no rent increase
 - delayed or staggered rent increase
 - rent reduction
 - lowering or escrowing the rent until repairs are made
 - allowing the rent increase to go forward
 - ordering the landlord to cease retaliatory conduct



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What can Fair Rent Commissions consider?

- The state law lists 13 factors for the FRC to look at if applicable, but not all have to be given equal weight (and the FRC can consider other relevant factors). The main factors are:
 - Size and history of rent increases
 - Landlord's operating costs
 - Tenant's income and availability of alternative housing
 - Condition of the apartment and complex, including whether it's substandard
 - What's included in the rent
 - Comparable rents in the neighborhood and town



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FRC Complaints in Practice

- Tenant files a complaint. Landlord and tenant both get notice and information about the process, last agreed upon rent to be paid in the interim, & examples of prohibited retaliation
- If appropriate, staff arrange for housing code/health code inspection
- Staff may attempt to conciliate the complaint
- FRC may consolidate similar or overlapping complaints in the same complex or against the same landlord for a hearing
- Model suggests hearing scheduled within 30 days, with 10 days notice



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Fair Rent Commission Hearings

- Municipalities have flexibility, but often
 - Commissioners get copies before the hearing of evidence submitted by the parties or collected by the town (like housing inspection reports)
 - A chair runs the hearing and swears in the parties and witnesses
 - Interpretation is provided to anyone with limited English proficiency
 - Town staff or the town attorney are on hand to provide guidance
 - The commissioners asks questions of the parties and witnesses, and then give the parties a chance for examination or cross examination
 - The commissioners deliberate, come to a decision, and deliver an oral decision at the hearing
 - Staff write up the decision after the hearing, get approval from the chair or the commission, and send it to the parties



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Towns with Fair Rent Commissions

MANDATORY (45)

Branford*	Groton	New London*	Stratford*
Bridgeport	Hamden	New Milford*	Torrington*
Bristol*	Hartford	Newington	Trumbull*
Cheshire*	Manchester	Newtown*	Vernon*
Danbury	Mansfield*	Norwalk	Wallingford*
East Hartford*	Meriden*	Norwich*	Waterbury*
East Haven*	Middletown*	Ridgefield*	West Hartford
Enfield	Milford*	Shelton*	West Haven
Fairfield*	Naugatuck*	South Windsor*	Westport*
Farmington	New Britain	Southington*	Wethersfield
Glastonbury	New Haven	Stamford	Windsor
Greenwich*			

NON-MANDATORY (7)

Bloomfield
Clinton
Colchester
Killingworth
Rocky Hill
Simsbury
Westbrook

* = Town newly-required to have a fair rent commission by P.A. 22-30



Fair Rent Commissions by Region

Greater Hartford (17)

Bloomfield
Bristol*
East Hartford*
Enfield
Farmington
Glastonbury
Hartford
Manchester
New Britain
Newington
Rocky Hill
Simsbury
South Windsor*
West Hartford
Wethersfield
Windsor

Greater New Haven (8)

Branford*
Cheshire*
Clinton
East Haven*
Hamden
Milford*
New Haven
West Haven

Greater Bridgeport (5)

Bridgeport
Fairfield*
Shelton*
Stratford*
Trumbull*

Greater Waterbury (3)

Naugatuck*
Southington*
Waterbury*

Lower Fairfield County (8)

Danbury
Greenwich*
New Milford*
Newtown*
Norwalk
Ridgefield*
Stamford
Westport*

Northwestern CT (1)

Torrington*

Central CT (3)

Meriden*
Middletown*
Wallingford*

Southeastern CT (5)

Groton
Killingworth
New London*
Norwich*
Westbrook

Northeastern CT (3)

Colchester
Mansfield*
Vernon*

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