

Huntington Town Board OKs NAACP settlement a day before trial

February 18, 2014 by MACKENZIE ISSLER / mackenzie.issler@newsday.com



The Huntington Town Board approved a settlement last night of a housing-discrimination lawsuit originally brought against the town a decade ago -- a day before today's start of the trial.

Manhattan attorney Christopher Campbell, who represents the local NAACP, said the civil-rights organization's leaders will not sign off on a settlement until the town's planning board approves the same proposal.

"If we don't get that, we are ready to go and Supervisor Petrone will be the first witness called," Campbell said after a special town board meeting Tuesday night. The trial is scheduled to start at noon in U.S. District Court in Central Islip.

Supervisor Frank P. Petrone said the planning board is expected to meet Wednesday.

The settlement calls for the construction of a "limited equity cooperative" with 117 units of affordable housing on Ruland Road, according to a statement handed out after the town board voted on the resolution.

"Limited equity cooperatives are designed to provide affordable home ownership to qualified income-eligible residents," the town's statement says.

The deal passed 4-0, with new board member Tracey Edwards abstaining. She is the NAACP's Long Island regional director and said she was the planning board chairwoman when the litigation began.

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The current incarnation of the lawsuit, filed in 2011 by the Huntington NAACP and the Fair Housing in Huntington Committee, claims a proposed affordable-housing development in Melville discriminates against minorities and families because it is designed around one-bedroom for-sale units instead of multi-bedroom rental homes that would attract families.

"I think it's the perfect definition of settlement," said Councilwoman Susan Berland. "Nobody's 100 percent happy at the end . . . but everybody's happy enough to move on and get this built."

Berland has supported the construction of one-bedroom ownership units on the site.

Under the settlement's terms, the town board has agreed to take the necessary zoning action to allow construction of the proposed development, which will have 72 one-bedroom, 39 two-bedroom and six three-bedroom units.

They are to be affordable to people earning 50 percent to 80 percent of the Nassau/Suffolk median income. For a single person, that ranges from \$37,100 to \$59,300; for a family of four, \$52,950 to \$84,700, according to the town's statement.

The settlement designates the developer as Peter Florey of Levittown. Florey was in contract to buy the property last year, but that expired and was extended after a failed settlement in December.

Purchasers would be selected by lottery from a waiting list and they would pay the equivalent of two months' maintenance as a down-payment. There is no mortgage or other type of financing required.

"That's the key," said Campbell. "It's what makes it accessible."

For the one-bedroom units, the down payment is estimated to be \$1,880 to \$2,600 with monthly maintenance charges of \$940 to \$1,300. The settlement also dictates that the developer would agree to offer preference to honorably discharged or released veterans with wartime service and to physically handicapped people, according to the town's statement.

"We are pleased that we have come to an agreement," said Ulysses Spicer, second vice president of the Huntington NAACP chapter. "It is not so much different that what we set out to accomplish."

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