

Meeting called to order at 6:06 p.m.

Members present: Eric, Pete, Sandeep, Martha, Karin, Evelyn, Warren

Warren moved to approve the minutes; the motion was carried unanimously.

Discussion moved into landlord/tenant relations. Paul Johnson and Mike Levine from Student Legal Services were present to speak about services they provide to students with regards to leases, etc. Pete mentioned that the City would like the Commission to facilitate a discussion of some sort revolving around these issues.

Paul and Mike briefly shared some of the history behind Student Legal Services and their work. Paul mentioned that landlord/tenant issues are the most common cases that come to them, and they typically see more international students than domestic.

These cases can take the form of returns and/or deductions from deposits, overoccupancy issues with landlords accidentally renting over the limit in their letters of compliance, and roommate conflicts. The Center for Creative Justice formerly ran a mediation program that grievances were commonly settled by, but when it was discontinued issues would have to go through the formal small claims procedures. The small claims process is expensive and unwieldy when compared to the ease and speed of a mediative resolution.

Karin asked if the program was discontinued due to funding issues; Mike said he had never received a definitive answer on that, and that mediations were difficult to schedule.

Paul mentioned that one of the major issues were landlords refusing to repair issues with their rental units. The current process is difficult for the tenants to notify landlords about problems that affect health and safety; he advanced the possibility of tenants contacting the City Rental Housing Inspection Office to compel landlords to fix issues. Weather causes a great amount of health and safety problems.

Mike discussed the concept of joint and several liability, and the issues that typically crop up regarding joint leases. Individual leases are commonly seen in the newer apartment complexes, but are typically offset by higher rent costs. Paul stated that it is paramount that students read and understand their leases before signing them; if they don't understand what they're signing, he said they can come to Student Legal for assistance.

Warren asked if it was possible for Student Legal to put together a best practices lease and compel landlords to use it. Mike responded that this would not be likely as the Bar Association provides a general form that most landlords already use, and American law favors property owners over renters. Paul mentioned the idea of getting local landlords together to make an agreement on general principles that all leases will follow; this will be difficult because of various

out-of-state companies that own properties in Ames, as well as other companies who must use leases provided to them by their parent organizations.

Eric summarized the general consensus of the room as focusing on three prongs of attack: an informational seminar held by Student Legal Services on landlord and tenant responsibilities at the fall residency fair; composition of an aspirational code of conduct through a collaborative effort between student representatives and landlords; and facilitation of a mediation process for disputes.

Discussion moved to the selection of the commission chair for the next year. Sandeep volunteered for the role; his name was moved for consideration by Eric and the motion was carried unanimously with one abstention.

Discussion moved to Commissioner Comments. Karin gave a heads-up that Summerfest is Saturday, June 1st, and encouraged all in town to attend.

Pete moved to adjourn at 7:47 p.m.