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Nassau reaches settlement on fair housing lawsuit

By: David Winzelberg © March 15, 2019

A 14-year-old fair-housing lawsuit against Nassau County has been settled.

The county has agreed to pay \$5.4 million to nonprofit housing developer MHANY Management and set aside more money to help build mixed-income rental housing in neighborhoods with “high-performing” schools.

The lawsuit, first filed by MHANY and New York Communities for Change in May 2005, claimed that the county was discriminating against minorities by not promoting housing opportunities for people with low and moderate incomes.

As part of the settlement, which was approved by the county legislature on Monday, Nassau will set aside a quarter of the county’s housing grants from the HOME Investment Partnerships program, totaling about \$450,000 per year for at least three years, to be made available to for-profit and not-for-profit developers seeking to build mixed-income rental housing in high opportunity areas, such as those with ample access to transportation and high performing schools, according to a county statement.

The county will also pay \$120,000 to New York Communities for Change for educational programs. In addition, Nassau’s Office of Community Development will conduct a study and draft “a development and outreach plan examining how, where, and by whom mixed-income housing can be developed within the county.” The plan will include a model zoning ordinance, which will guide local governments within the county to create land-use regulations.

“This settlement supports my Administration’s on-going efforts to develop and promote mixed-income housing opportunities for all of our residents,” County Executive Laura Curran said in the statement. “We are committed to working alongside our non-profit and community advocate partners in this regard.”

Mary Crosson, chair of the Long Island Chapter of New York Communities for Change, called the settlement “a tremendous moment for people of color” in Nassau.

“Long Island is remarkably segregated, and this is an important first step towards integrating Nassau County and reimagining what fair and integrated communities should look like,” Crosson said in the statement. “We are happy to celebrate this settlement, though this is but a first step toward solving many years of housing policies that created and continued the entrenched segregation on Long Island.”

Ismene Speliotis, executive director of MHANY, said her firm is “eager to work in Nassau County to create beautiful, sustainable and truly affordable housing” for individuals and families with low and moderate incomes.

“Segregation has no place in our country, and we hope it no longer has a place in Nassau County,” Speliotis said in the statement. “MHANY looks forward to our housing development work as a big step towards ending any discriminatory policies and practices that exclude people of color.”

The county was represented by County Attorney Jared Kasschau, and outside counsel Scott Kreppin of Quatela Chimeri. MHANY Management and New York Communities for Change were represented by Stanley Brown and Chava Brandriss of Hogan Lovells US, Frederick Brewington of the Law Office of Frederick K. Brewington and Thomas Silverstein of the Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law.

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