

Court rules Garden City violated Fair Housing Act

In a long-awaited and historic decision, a federal judge ruled Friday that Garden City violated the federal Fair Housing Act, the constitution, and other civil rights statutes by enacting a discriminatory zoning ordinance in 2004 for the purpose of keeping minority households out of the village. The Court found that the Village's action illegally discriminated on the basis of race and national origin against minorities in Nassau County and perpetuated deep-seated segregation, which has allowed Garden City to remain an overwhelmingly white village surrounded by predominantly minority neighboring towns, officials said. The plaintiffs in the case, which was filed in 2005 and brought to trial this past summer, are the New York Communities for Change, a not-for-profit membership organization devoted to improving the quality of life for members of low income communities in New York, and MHANY Management Co., a not-for-profit community-based developer of affordable housing, according to officials.

In 2004, Garden City was considering a zoning proposal that would have made affordable housing possible on a Nassau County-owned site that was for sale in the Village. However, after opposition at public meetings and other actions demonstrating racially tinged objections to affordable housing, the Village rejected the proposal in favor of low-density zoning that favored high-cost single-family homes and townhouses.

The district court found that "discrimination played a determinative role" in Garden City's decision to reject the originally proposed zoning in favor of the low-density zoning, and that minorities in Nassau County "bore the brunt of the negative impacts" of that decision. The judge ordered them to submit a remedial plan to the court, which will serve as a roadmap for Garden City to take affirmative steps to remedy the lingering effects of such discrimination and will prohibit future discrimination, according to officials.

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