

Judge Rules Garden City Broke Fair Housing Act

By Timothy Bolger

A judge ruled that Garden City village officials violated the federal Fair Housing Act by approving a zoning ordinance that nixed a planned affordable housing complex, effectively discriminating against would-be minority residents.



U.S. District Judge Arthur Spatt, who issued the ruling Friday, ordered attorneys for both sides to submit written suggestions on how to remedy the lingering effects of the civil rights violations stemming from the village's decision in 2004—and ensure it doesn't happen again.

“What it really means is Garden City can no longer put up artificial barriers to prevent individuals from having access to affordable housing within its boundaries,” said Fred Brewington, a Hempstead-based attorney who tried the case for the plaintiffs at Central Islip federal court over the summer, eight years after the suit was filed.

Brewington is one of the attorneys representing the Mutual Housing Association of New York, not-for-profit community-based developer of affordable housing, and the Long Island chapter of New York Communities for Change, a nonprofit advocacy group.

The ruling further illustrates housing discrimination on Long Island—ranked one of the nation's most segregated suburbs—that made Garden City, one of the country's first planned communities, predominantly white and surrounded by mostly minority communities.

“Discrimination played a determinative role,” Spatt wrote of Garden City's rejecting a zoning proposal that would have made affordable housing possible on a Nassau County-owned site. The village instead passed low-density zoning that favored high-cost single-family homes and townhouses.

“It is outrageous that in 2013, it took a lawsuit to expose Garden City's blatant and illegal policies of housing discrimination,” said Diane Goins, chair of the Long Island Chapter of New York Communities for Change.

Garden City village officials did not return a call seeking comment.