

Approved - April 13, 2011

Durham Rental Housing Commission

March 2, 2011

3:30 pm – Town Council Chambers

Members Present: Sam Flanders, Paul Burton, Kitty Marple, Brett Gagnon, Anne Lawing, Jay Gooze, Richard Peyser

Members Not Present: Mark Henderson

Others Present: Diana Carroll, Robin Mower, Rene Kelley, Steve McCusker, Todd Selig

I. Call the meeting to order

Chair Sam Flanders called the March 2, 2011 meeting of the Durham Rental Housing Commission to order.

II. Reports from Town Representatives

Police Report by Deputy Police Chief Rene Kelley

Deputy Chief Kelley reported that the year has been relatively quiet, with the number of arrests down by close to a 100. He said the number of voice complaints were half the number that were logged last year. Deputy Chief Kelley said overall from the police perspective, it has been a successful year in addressing specific areas of concern. He reported that officers have been far more proactive and that is reflected in the number of responses to rental housing properties. He said responses are different from complaints when someone calls in a complaint. Deputy Chief Kelley said there was a 20% increase in response to rental properties (self-initiated responses by the police). He noted another change has been that the property managers who have security services are now far more apt to phone and report an issue as opposed to years past when they would handle things themselves. Deputy Chief Kelley said the winter was a rough winter but there were a lot less reports of major concern.

Chair Flanders asked if the new ordinances have played a part in the numbers being down. Deputy Chief Kelley responded that the police department has not issued a summons for a noise violation before 11 pm. He said the officers have been far more aggressive in contacting properties at an earlier hour to give them a courtesy warning about the noise violation regulations. He said it is difficult to say what impact the revised ordinance has had.

Richard Peyser asked how frequently police needed to return to a property after giving a warning earlier in the evening. Deputy Chief Kelley said it was seldom that they needed to return.

Chair Flanders asked if the level of cooperation has changed. Deputy Chief Kelley said generally people are cooperative.

Annmarie Harris asked about an abandoned car at 99 Madbury Road that she reported months ago, but believed was still on the property. Deputy Chief Kelley said this was most likely reported to Tom Johnson, but he would check on it.

Robin Mower asked if there had been many calls about roaming groups and asked if it is worth phoning and reporting this to the police. Deputy Chief Kelley said the officers could respond within 5 minutes to the central sector and encouraged residents to phone and report such incidences.

Jay Gooze said over the winter it has been quiet, but people have the feeling that they are just waiting for what will happen in the spring. He said he feels it is important to stay proactive and congratulated the Police Department on doing a good job. Deputy Chief Kelley said the warm weather is coming and when spring arrives, things could change a little.

Paul Berton asked Anne Lawing if there has been any discussion of the University emailing staff that communicates with the student masses to discuss appropriate behavior and respecting boundaries. Anne Lawing said she has plans for that.

Fire and ambulance report by Deputy Fire Chief Steve McCusker

Deputy Chief McCusker said he is happy to report that the Fire Department has not had as many issues including a decline in overcrowding of off campus residences then we have seen in the past. He said they continue to see some of same medical calls that they have had in the past. Chair Flanders asked how much of a decrease they have seen from prior years. Deputy Chief McCusker said it is difficult to quantify that because the overall numbers of calls have increased because they have had more medically related calls than in the past.

Annmarie Harris asked if it is possible to have the Police and Fire department report to the Commission and Town Council the number of calls made to each age group. She said they are looking to compile data regarding the resident population needing assistance. Deputy Chief McCusker said emergency medical and emergency fire calls are not tabulated by age groupings because that becomes part of the medical record and that is confidential. Ms. Harris asked if the age information could be separated from the rest of the information. Deputy Chief McCusker said it might be possible. Ms. Harris asked if whether the person is a resident of the community could be extracted as well. Deputy Chief McCusker said that would be possible but it needs to be kept in mind that this information could skew the information being reported if a student is identified as out of state because of their identification address. Robin Mower said this information would be helpful in ascertaining what the town is spending on fire/police services for the different populations. She said she feels this is important information to start tracking. Jay Gooze asked if the information is available on a computerized database. Deputy Chief

McCusker said it is on a database but he does not know how accessible it is to extract the information being requesting. Ms. Harris suggested it might be best to discuss this issue with the town administrator. She said the town shares the cost of services with the university so this would be useful information.

Town Administrator Todd Selig reported on town issues:

Mr. Selig reported that Tom Johnson is on vacation so unable to report for the Code Enforcement Office. Mr. Selig reported that the part-time code enforcement staff member worked the first few weeks of the new semester, but has no information on what he has encountered.

Mr. Selig said the general trend observed is that complaints are down. He reminded the members that the Town had mailed out a letter to realtors and property owners in the fall, which will be done again in April. The members discussed if a letter in the spring needs to be sent to residents. Kitty Marple said the amount of turnover in residences between fall and spring is minimal. Paul Berton said he feels a follow-up letter would be helpful before the warm weather. Jay Gooze said he favors a follow-up letter to property owners who can advise any new residents before the warm weather begins. Annmarie Harris noted this is the time of year that renters are seeking new housing and feels it would be helpful to send a letter to realtors.

Chair Flanders asked Mr. Selig to explain a proposed concept of “Town Approved” rentals.

Mr. Selig said the “Town Approved” rentals are a concept for a voluntary inspection program. He explained that the Code enforcement officer would inspect and approve a property for a fee. Mr. Selig noted that if the property passed the inspection, it would be placed on a “Town Approved” list. He said the Town envisions working with the University to suggest to students a “Town Approved” property. Jay Gooze asked Paul Berton what his thoughts were on the idea. Mr. Berton said he thinks it would be a good idea. Mr. Gooze said he has observed a couple of properties being converted from rentals to owner occupied homes.

Robin Mower suggested collecting information on incidents and whether the person was a UNH student or a guest of a UNH student. Deputy Chief Kelley said acquiring more detailed demographic information would place a significant burden on police reporting. A suggestion was made to edit intake forms to include demographic information. A comment was made that any personally identifiable information should be excluded for medical incidents, but that general demographic information could be collected.

Paul Berton displayed a sample sign “A Family Lives Here – Please Respect our property and your Town”. He said this type of sign was part of a Plymouth campaign that was very effective at heightening awareness. He said in Plymouth the costs of the signs were covered by the Town and the landlords. Mr. Berton volunteered to follow up on this and to pay for some trial signs. Richard Peyser said he felt permanent signs demarcating neighborhoods would be a better idea.

Jay Gooze said he was in favor of the signs and would like to see this move ahead quickly. Diana Carroll suggested trying the signage out on an interim basis in one neighborhood.

Robin Mower asked if any further payments have been made by the landlord at 14 Valentine Raod. Mr. Selig responded that the Town received only the one payment.

Kitty Marple reported that Madbury Road has been very quiet. She said the property next door to her is no longer a student house. Ms. Marple did report that she has heard there have been issues with a property on Foss Farm Road.

Jay Gooze reported that 57 Madbury Road has been much quieter.

Annmarie Harris suggested that Young Drive be redeveloped as workforce housing.

III. Discussion of November 4 DLA letter regarding Disorderly House Ordinance

Jay Gooze said he would be open to suggestions from the DLA that would have the same affect that the DHO was designed to have. Chair Flanders said he feels the proposal from the DLA must address the issue of an absentee landlord who has no interest in fixing problems with their property. He said the Town needs a way to force compliance with these landlords. Kitty Marple said Durham needs to be perceived a place where unresponsive landlords are not welcome. Richard Peyser said he feels a problem with the DHO is the definition of a domicile. He said residents not causing problems could be penalized for their neighbors. Ann Lawing suggested that the new proposal be written with “tighter” language. Paul Berton said he would bring the matter back to the DLA and work on coming up with another suggestion to address the issues that were being addressed with the DHO.

Jay Gooze suggested having a designation of a Commercial Property. He said a property that is rented to others would be classified as a commercial property and be subject to the same rules and inspections as other commercial properties (this would include single-family homes being rented).

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting of the Durham Rental Housing Commission will be April 13, 2011 at 4 pm. The May meeting of the Durham Rental Housing Commission will be held on May 11 at 4pm if required.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Lucius, Secretary to the Durham Rental Housing Commission