



Beaverton landlords explore ways to avoid discrimination

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Brad Schmidt, The Oregonian

BEAVERTON -- When test results released this spring suggested discriminatory rental practices in Beaverton were most prevalent against blacks, city officials promised to use that information to determine what types of fair-housing training should be provided and to address discrimination issues more effectively.

The first version of formal training, offered this week to landlords, focused broadly on how to avoid discrimination of all types. Organizers say it is more educational to focus on the practices that prevent discrimination rather than the discrimination classification itself.

"I'm not saying that the racial stuff was not an issue" overall, said Andrea Lindberg, the city's coordinator for the event. "The context of this training was looking at practices that prevent discrimination."

In April, the **Fair Housing Council of Oregon** released unscientific results showing that **blacks faced discrimination in Beaverton** at rates greater than other groups who attempted to rent or lease properties advertised in newspapers or on the classifieds website Craigslist.

Testers visited 47 rental properties to compare treatment of five "protected classes" -- familial status, disability, national origin, sexual orientation and race. An applicant representing one group would visit a property to fill out an application, tour a unit and meet with the leasing agent. Later, an applicant who was not a member of a "protected class" would do the same. Each applicant was alike in background, income and rental history. (**Read the audit.**)

Seven out of nine visits testing race -- 78 percent -- were positive for discrimination. Race testing relates only to African Americans, while Latino testing, for instance, is tracked through national origin results.

None of the categories except race found discrimination rates above 50 percent.

"Obviously, the race results were very surprising to us," said Moley Good, executive director of Oregon's housing council, who added that he has been pleased with the city's response to the findings.

The reported discrimination showed that black applicants received less information, were told about different housing options and were not offered the same financial deals as whites. Those same types of discrimination

also occurred in the other groups, although not as frequently.

At one of two training sessions for landlords Tuesday, housing representatives stressed the importance of treating potential applicants the same regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, familial status, disability, age or source of income, among other things. They said it's OK to treat applicants differently based on rental references, criminal backgrounds and credit histories.

Diane Hess, education director for Oregon's housing council, told about 20 people during an afternoon session to evaluate applicants with the same factors, avoid favoritism and return phone calls in the order received.

"Consistency, consistency, consistency," she repeated.

Her presentation featured 34 slides on a wide range of topics, from **fair housing laws** to requests from tenants, to maintaining records. One slide mentioned but did not specifically focus on race.

Hess said the overview explained practices that landlords should and should not do, which apply to all protected classes. "We were not there to talk just about race," she said.

Some who attended the session said they came to learn about the survey results and expected them to be a bigger part of the presentation.

"I was a little bit more disappointed they didn't talk more about that," said Sharon High, a property manager for about 190 units in Beaverton.

Others said they didn't know specific results of the survey before or after the training.

"Oh my goodness," said Jake Rankin, a head maintenance employee for two local apartment complexes, when told of the findings by a reporter. "I wasn't aware of those."

Even so, Rankin and others characterized the training as informative, useful and hoped more landlords would attend future forums.

Donna Manning came to find out information about carbon monoxide detectors. She said officials adequately covered discrimination issues.

"I think those were pointed out very clearly as to what exactly is expected," she said.

Manuel Morales, a relatively new on-site residential manager of 22 units, said he learned a lot and is grateful to find out about community resources available to him and others.

"They tried to drill into us consistency number one, consistency number two and consistency number three," he said.

Lindberg, the city's project coordinator, said the Fair Housing Council will conduct another discrimination audit of Beaverton landlords this year, with results expected next spring. Beaverton has 18,500 rental units citywide, and the audit is expected to track 75 landlords.

Lindberg said she is also working with the **Beaverton Human Rights Advisory Commission** and a diversity task force to consider hosting future events or creating informational materials specifically on race. Nothing has been scheduled so far, she said.

To report concerns of housing discrimination, contact the Fair Housing Council at 1-800-424-3247, ext. 2.

Lindberg encouraged citizens and landlords with questions or concerns to contact her at 503-526-2533 or **alindberg@ci.beaverton.or.us**.

"It takes a lot of people," she said, "to make change happen."

-- **Brad Schmidt**

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