

February 24, 2017

Dear Alessandra and Rose,

We appreciate the conversation with you and BBC Research and Consulting about the interest of a deep and broad coalition of community based organizations committed to participating in the development of the San Mateo County Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH). A robust partnership with community organizations is essential to both the public participation process and to the ultimate success of any AFH.

We understand the Assessment of Fair Housing process has deep ties to the communities most impacted by fair housing challenges in the county, and we are prepared to provide the community input and expertise needed to create a useful community survey, inclusive community engagement plan, solid data analysis, and, ultimately, a successful AFH.

We are concerned with the participation process thus far. As a group that is representative of agencies, organizations, and community organizers with knowledge of county residents' housing issues, we reached out to you early and communicated that there was widespread interest in collaborating with you on this AFH (see our October 14, 2016 letter, attached). To date, we have not had meaningful opportunities to do so, however.

Unfortunately, even the first step in the community engagement plan proceeded without essential input from community groups. The Stakeholder Focus Group scheduled for March 6 was a surprise to many and inaccessible to most due to existing commitments to daily operations of our individual community service programs. It is also scheduled at a time and location that makes attendance by community members impossible. We have deep concerns that this first meeting will have a significant impact on the community engagement process moving forward, which would be inappropriate given that it is unlikely to include the voices of those who most need to be engaged in that process. To date, we have not been informed of, nor had the opportunity to give input for, the format and agenda of the meeting. We also have concerns about the survey and updated community engagement plan that we want to address before the process has moved past the point of no return.

Regarding the draft survey that you shared with us on February 9, please consider the following general observations from some of the individuals among our group:

- The substance, length, and format of the survey is not appropriate for this context.
- The survey is not a model that would produce useful data in San Mateo County.
- It is not clear that many community members will actually fill out this survey. There needs to be more accessible ways to collect this information.
- We would be happy to work closely with you on a survey that better reflects the unique challenges faced by protected classes in San Mateo County.
- The survey fails to adequately capture issues of housing insecurity and homelessness. The perspective of the survey is one that reflects the experiences of someone who has a place to live.

We would still like to provide more detailed input regarding the survey and the community engagement plan; however, before doing so, we respectfully request:

- The budget, timetable and additional stakeholder information for the AFH process, as discussed in our call of February 1st. If we have more information regarding the budget limitations and the deadlines for the project, perhaps we could help you prioritize and engage the community more effectively.
- That the March 6th meeting be rescheduled for a time and place that would allow attendance by key community stakeholders. Alternative dates should include evenings and weekends. If rescheduling the meeting is not possible, an agenda for the March 6th Stakeholder Focus Group, and alternative means to provide input for stakeholders unable to attend a mid-day meeting.
- That all future meeting times, locations, and agendas be decided in partnership with us.
- Your proposed process for our group to provide input regarding the substance of future community meetings.
- Clarification on your coordination (if any) regarding the community participation processes (including meetings, public hearings, and public comment periods) of the participating entitlement jurisdictions and public housing authorities.

If the community is approached as a true partner, we feel confident that ours can be a robustly collaborative process similar to the community participation process in New Orleans. The New Orleans AFH, while not perfect, is considered to be the strongest of the AFHs in the first round despite budgetary and time constraints faced by the City of New Orleans and the collaborating housing authority.<sup>1</sup> Their success came from a strong community partnership with weekly conversations with a core group of stakeholders regarding substance of the AFH as well as logistics. This supplemented other steps the City of New Orleans and the collaborating housing authority took to solicit substantive feedback from interested stakeholders.

We reaffirm our interest in being involved with all substantive and logistical aspects of the process; we can help our County create an AFH that works. San Mateo County faces severe fair housing challenges. We all must work together in order to analyze these challenges and to devise goals that will make meaningful progress toward ensuring housing security and access to opportunities for all County residents.

Please respond to us as soon as possible to let us know how you plan to address our concerns, and our specific above requests.

Sincerely yours,

Salimah K. Hankins  
Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto

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<sup>1</sup> We encourage you to review the New Orleans Assessment of Fair Housing, available at: <http://www.nola.gov/community-development/documents/2016-updated-afh-plan-090516/afh-plan-090516-final/>

Sam Tepperman-Gelfant  
Public Advocates

AFT Local 1481  
AFT Local 3267  
Bay Area Legal Aid  
El Comité de Vecinos  
Faith in Action  
Housing Leadership Council  
Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County  
Migrante-Northern San Mateo County  
National Housing Law Project  
Project Sentinel  
San Mateo County Union Community Alliance  
Urban Habitat  
Youth United for Community Action

Attachment: Letter to Rose Cade, Re: Community Participation in the 2017 Assessment of Fair Housing (October 14, 2016)