

Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Verona Township Rent Control Board on Tuesday, December 8, 2020 beginning at 6:12 p.m. via Zoom webinar.

Call to Order:

The notice requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act have been satisfied with respect to this meeting of the Rent Control Board which is being held via Zoom video conferencing due to restrictions on indoor public gatherings resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the time and date were included in the public meeting notice. This information, along with the public internet link and telephone call-in information was posted in the Municipal Building, and sent the official newspapers of the Township, the Verona-Cedar Grove Times at least 48 hours preceding the start time of this meeting. The agenda and public handouts for this meeting can be viewed online at <https://www.veronanj.org/rentcontrol>. A public comment period will be held in the order it is listed on the meeting agenda and instructions on how to comment will be provided at the appropriate time.

Roll Call:

Willola Ashley, Sean Byrnes, Patrick Hanley, Robert Narucki, Gerard Tamburino, Rent Control Board Attorney Alex Graziano, Esq., and Board Secretary Jennifer Kiernan are also present.

Chairman Patrick Hanley leads the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve the October 7, 2020 minutes is made by Ms. Ashley; seconded by Mr. Byrnes.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Ashley, Byrnes, Tamburino, Hanley

NAYS:

New Business:

Chairman Hanley defers to Rent Control Board Attorney Alexander Graziano, Esq., to address item F-1 on tonight's agenda. Mr. Graziano reports that Pine Street Square, aka Verona Fieldstone, LLC has submitted a request for a vacancy increase hearing pursuant to Chapter 112-3B-1(d) of the Code of the Township of Verona. The hearing this evening is for 810 Bloomfield Avenue, Apt A-2. Present on behalf of Pine Street Square is Adrienne LePore, counsel for Pine Street Square and Brittany Sansone, Property Manager for Pine Street Square. Mr. Graziano states the Board has been provided with documents sent to the Rent Control Board Secretary from Ms. Sansone, which include an October 13, 2020 email from Ms. Sansone stating that Ms. Sinisi skipped without written notice sometime in August but was in contact with Ms. Sansone via text messaging. Copies of the text messages showing where Ms. Sansone inquires about the vacancy letter of non-coercion were submitted to the Board Secretary by Ms. Sansone. Ms. Sansone never submitted the vacancy letter, hence the request for this hearing. Prior to this hearing, Ms. LePore submitted to the Board Secretary a copy of the hearing notification letter to Ms. Sinisi via email dated December 2, 2020.

Mr. Graziano asks Ms. LePore to state the facts of the case. Ms. LePore states that her client seeks a vacancy increase pursuant to Chapter 112-3(B). The tenant of unit A-2, Megan Sinisi, was a tenant since 2015. She renewed her lease in 2018 for a one-year term. In 2019, she was offered a new lease term concluding on 8/1/2020. Ms. LePore states that Ms. Sansone placed a phone call to Ms. Sinisi in July 2020 as the new lease had not been executed by Ms. Sinisi. Ms. Sansone then received a text message from Ms. Sinisi where Ms. Sinisi gave notice that she was leaving. Ms. Sinisi left the apartment owing 1 month of her rent. Ms. LePore states a letter was sent to Ms. Sinisi via email but never received a response.

Mr. Graziano swears in Brittney Sansone. Upon questioning by Mr. Graziano, Ms. Sansone testifies she has been employed with Verona Fieldstone, LLC since August 2019 and has been Property Manager since June 2020. Ms. Sansone testifies that files of leases in regard to each tenancy are kept and confirms that the last full lease agreement signed by Ms. Sinisi was in June 2018. Ms. Sansone further testifies to the documents she had presented to the Board when requesting this hearing.

Ms. LePore states that this vacancy increase for apartment A2 is comparable to apartment G2 in 800 Bloomfield Avenue, as required in Chapter 112-3(B) of the Code of the Township of Verona. Ms. LePore submits what is marked as Exhibit A - the 2015 lease agreement between Landlord 800 Bloomfield Avenue Realty Corp., Marlboro New Jersey and tenant Maegan (sic) Sinisi; Exhibit B - Renewal Addendum dates 02/01/2017 for a renewal lease term of 02/01/2018 through 01/31/2019; Exhibit C - a letter to Ms. Sinisi from Verona Fieldstone, LLC notifying the tenant of the annual CPI increase and a Notice to Quit and Offer to Enter into a new lease; Exhibit D - text messages between Ms. Sinisi and Ms.

Sansone from July 14, 2020 through September 23, 2020; and Exhibit E, a Security Deposit statement from Oak Tree Capital, Mahwah, New Jersey addressed to Ms. Sinisi listing a balance due of \$205.00.

Mr. Tamburino makes a motion to approve the request of Pine Street Square and grant the vacancy increase for 800 Bloomfield Avenue, apartment A-2; seconded by Mr. Byrnes. Roll Call Vote:

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Ashley, Byrnes, Tamburino, Hanley

NAYS:

The request is granted by a unanimous vote. Ms. LePore and Ms. Sansone leave the meeting.

Mr. Graziano then states to the Board that he has been advised by Ms. Kiernan, the Rent Control Board Secretary of a property owner/landlord that has not been in compliance with the Township's Rent Control ordinance for non-submission of rent rolls for prior years, since 2016. The property is identified as 18 Montrose Avenue. Ms. Kiernan states the property owner is an elected official of the Township Council of Verona. Mr. Graziano opines that the Board should not proceed with this discussion as to if the Rent Control ordinance applies as it is a conflict of interest as the Board members and Attorney are appointed by the Township Council. He advises the Board to refer the determination of the applicability of this property to Verona's ordinance. After Board discussion, it is unanimously agreed that the Board Secretary shall contact municipalities within Essex County that have functioning Rent Boards to refer this matter.

Mr. Tamburino motions to approve receipt of 2017, 2018, 2019 Rent Roll Submissions from Landlords, which were requested simply to complete files of rent controlled dwellings, with the exception of 18 Montrose Avenue, as well as the CPI-W for 2021 at 1.7 per cent; seconded by Ms. Ashley.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Ashley, Byrnes, Tamburino, Hanley

NAYS

Public Comment:

Kathleen Laterza, 810 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona, New Jersey
John McCloud, 810 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona, New Jersey

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn is made by Ms. Ashley; seconded by Mr. Byrnes at 7:25 p.m.

The next meeting will be held on February 16, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Kiernan

Jennifer Kiernan, RMC

Rent Control Board Secretary

APPROVED: February 16, 2021