

Insight

Western New York's Source for Fair Housing News

“The Rent Is Too High!” Welcome to the Neighborhood

By Daniel Corbitt, Esq.

Buffalo, like many areas of the country, is experiencing an affordable housing crisis. Rents are skyrocketing. New housing development in the city, which is often heavily subsidized by taxpayers, is predominately market-rate and luxury apartments.



Many of these new units rent for more than \$2,000 per month. The city is becoming increasingly separate and unequal with areas of affluence and concentrated poverty clearly demarcated along stark socioeconomic lines. Compounding the problem, construction of new affordable housing has not kept pace with demand as thousands of affordable units in recent years have been demolished or abandoned and never replaced.

Meanwhile, Buffalo remains one of the poorest cities in the country. Poverty levels are severe and growing, with Buffalo recently ranking as the nation's fourth poorest city. According to U.S. Census data from 2015, 33 percent of Buffalo residents live in poverty, which has increased from 26.9 percent in 2005.

In the midst of the affordable housing crisis, the Trump administration has declared war on the very agencies and programs that are tasked with combatting the problem. The Trump budget proposal would cut funding by more than \$6 billion in 2018 alone to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency responsible for national policy and programs that address America's housing needs, strengthen inclusive communities, and enforce fair housing laws. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonpartisan research organization, predicted that the proposed cuts would result in more than 250,000 households losing their housing assistance, putting them at risk of homelessness or

By Kibrett Facey

As tragedy and crisis is continuously blazoned across media platforms, it becomes easier to enter a dangerous trance of desensitization. We begin to view things such as poverty and death as mere concepts while ignoring and disregarding the very individuals who experience them. It seems to become especially easy when the individual does not look like you. For some, humanity is often thrown away when there is a lack of similarities between two different human beings. As the world continues to transform and while stability is continuously disrupted, it is important that Buffalo continues to uphold the values that make it the City of Good Neighbors—especially when there is an influx of new neighbors moving in.

In April, the Buffalo News reported that Buffalo Public Schools administrators were traveling to the island of Puerto Rico in hopes of seeking out Spanish-speaking teachers to assist in mitigating the current language barrier between educators and students. Spanish-speaking students from Puerto Rico are entering the city of Buffalo at a rate that has created a high demand for bilingual teachers. It has been difficult to find candidates to fill these roles as there has been a great demand for bilingual teachers not just in Buffalo but all across the country. Just in Buffalo, 19 percent of the student body identifies as Hispanic while only 4 percent of the teachers are Hispanic.

There is an average of 230 people that come to the mainland from Puerto Rico each day, and nearly 100,000 have already fled the island with hopes of creating a better life. The island is ten years into a great depression, and while the country is a commonwealth of the United States, news of this economic crisis has been poorly recognized on the mainland. Many do not know that this great exodus of Puerto Ricans does not come unwarranted.

On the island, bare necessities cost a pretty penny, and water and electricity bills are triple the cost you would find on your own bill. Sales taxes also far exceed those in the nation while the rate of poverty surpasses the continental US's rate — Puerto Rico is currently experiencing 45 percent while the continental US is experiencing 15 percent. There have also been severe educational cuts as nearly 200 schools have been closed. With this being said, it is no surprise that many Puerto Ricans — both young and old — have found a haven in our transforming city.

It is important that the City of Good Neighbors welcomes this rapid influx of diversity with arms wide open. Many of

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From the Director:

Annual Dinner Recap

By DeAnna Eason



HOME was indeed a place for everyone on Thursday, April 21, 2017. In celebration of our 54th anniversary, friends from far and near gathered in the Grand Ballroom of the Buffalo-Niagara Convention Center and enjoyed a wonderful program of music, awards, fair housing, and fun. Talented young musicians from the Muhammad School of Music started the evening off with the symphonic sounds of the violin during the cocktail hour as guests were given the opportunity to meet and mingle with friends old and new. HOME members were briefly assembled in a separate room for the annual meeting and the election of HOME's officers for 2017-2018 before re-joining the festivities.

Nominated for election to Office were: Nancy Blaschak as Chair of the Board, Leslie Vishwanath as Senior Vice Chair, Philippe Deterville as Vice Chair, Andrea Mays as Treasurer, and Howard Hitzel as Secretary. Nominated for election to the Board of Directors (two-year terms) were: Nancy Blaschak, Charles Cobb, Philippe Deterville, Andrea Mays, and Leslie Vishwanath. Remaining on the Board are: Janet Barnes, Marcus Brown, Diana Cooke, Kathleen Haggerty, Todd Vaarwerk, Bradford Watts, Charles Colston, and Howard Hitzel.

The evening commenced with outgoing Board Chair Diana Cooke and Co-Chair of the Annual Dinner Committee Philippe Deterville welcoming the attendees and encouraging all to partake in our basket raffle and silent auction. Executive Director DeAnna Eason introduced the staff and acknowledged distin-

guished guests. Deterville who emceed the evening, returned to recognize outstanding contributors to the cause of fair housing beginning with the Joanne Champion Granger Scholarship which was awarded to Ms. Sarina Divan of Williamsville East High School. Also honored were honorable mentions: Ms. Genavieve Koyn of Grand Island High School, and Ms. Amrita Singh of Lewiston-Porter High School. Newly elected board chair Nancy M. Blaschak, former CEO of the American Red Cross was the recipient of HOME's highest honor, the James A. Crawford Award. The Williams-Brown Award for Professional Service was presented to HOME Business Manager, Miata Wright, for her dedication to advancing the cause of fair housing. Mrs. Lorraine Collins, Assistant Commissioner/Director of the Fair and Equitable Housing Office, New York State Homes & Community Renewal read a proclamation from Governor Andrew M. Cuomo recognizing April as fair housing month. Our keynote address was given by Buffalo News 2016 Outstanding Citizen, Detective Sergeant Cedric Holloway, a 32-year veteran of the Buffalo Police Department. Detective Holloway, founder of the Omega Mentoring Program, gave a heartfelt speech about the importance of advocacy and outreach to the youth of Buffalo.



A special thanks to all HOME members who continue to support the necessary work that we do. Together we will continue to make a difference! If you are not already a member of HOME, consider joining us by visiting www.homeny.org/get-involved/donate. ♦

Meet HOME's Board of Directors: Member Spotlight

By Miata Wright



Mr. Todd Vaarwerk is the Director of Advocacy and Public Policy at Western New York Independent Living, Inc. As he enters his second term as a HOME board member, the

Kenmore native continues to advocate for full independence, inclusion, and equality for individuals living with disabilities. Living in a town that borders the city of

Buffalo, he sees the value of the cultural diversity that the area has to offer and is proud to live in the "City of Good Neighbors." Outside of work, Mr. Vaarwerk is a science-fiction fan and is also involved in helping to plan gamer conventions for fans. He also enjoys spending time at home with his friends and family.

Tell us about your journey to becoming a Director at Western New York Independent Living.

It's an interesting story. When I was a student at the University of Buffalo, I was involved in (and eventually led for a

while) the disabled student union known as "The Independents". While there, I frequently interacted with students about independent living issues. I didn't get involved with Western New York Independent Living (WNYIL) until I worked with the current Executive Director on some student projects for the Department of Architecture. Even though we didn't initially get along, he must've seen some potential in me because he offered me a temporary job working with the center's

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HOME's Reading Corner

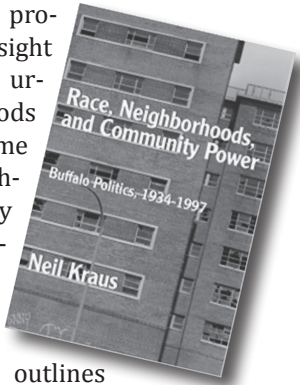
By Christopher Allaire

HOME's Reading Corner is intended to give our supporters a summary of the significant books, articles, and academic studies on housing in Western New York and the city of Buffalo. This section will hopefully help contextualize the current struggle for fair housing in our region and illustrate the long history of community involvement in this critical Civil Rights issue.

Neil's Kraus' *Race, Neighborhoods, and Community Power: Buffalo Politics, 1934-1997* is one of the most widely cited and referenced studies of the history of segregation in the city of Buffalo. Written nearly 20 years ago, the monograph still provides important insight into how Buffalo's urban neighborhoods and districts became the sixth most highly segregated city by the late twentieth century. In telling the story of segregation in Buffalo, Kraus outlines the historical demographic transformation of Buffalo's population, details how local politics led to the concentration of poverty in certain neighborhoods, and illustrates the importance of grassroots community activism in the fight for fair housing. At the heart of Kraus' book is the contention that local politics, as directed and shaped by the desires of the citizens of Western New York, led to the development of segregation in the city of Buffalo in the first half of the twentieth century and sustained it throughout the latter half. This book is perfect for those who are interested in learning how public housing policy and community activism has shaped the urban landscape of Buffalo, New York.

Dr. Williams' *Strangers in the Land of Paradise: The Creation of an African American Community, Buffalo, New York 1900-1940* analyzes the evolution of Buffalo's African American community from its relatively small beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century through its significant growth during the first Great Migration. The monograph details how the influx of African Americans migrants in the first four decades of the twentieth century mixed with and transformed black institu-

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Meet the New Staff



ZULEYKA MALAVE-SERRANO is our bilingual Receptionist. She joined the HOME team in March 2017. She recently accomplished her goal of furthering her education by obtaining her GED and is looking forward to continuing her educational journey. Zuleyka is a Florida native who came to New York in 2013 to start a new life. Her interests and hobbies include cooking & DIY home crafts. Being at HOME has shown her the importance of knowing your rights and the variety of services that are provided to assist individuals in Erie County. Zuleyka is hoping to assist in expanding HOME's audience to non-English speaking individuals so that they also know their rights and know that there is someone

willing to help them.

"Knowing that I helped someone, even if it's just one person, understand that they have a voice and have the right to fair housing I am happy with that. It just takes one person to make a difference."

TAMBRA CHEMAN has a Bachelor's degree in media communications & marketing with experience in public relations. For the last 11 years, she has been a director in non-profits, development, fundraising, and events. In 2016, she moved back to her home town of Buffalo after living in Charleston, West Virginia for 10 years where she started her non-profit career. In her spare time, she is an animal rescuer and advocate but also enjoys Zumba any time she can teach or take a class. She is passionate about her community, its' people, and is excited to be a part of the HOME staff as their Development Officer.

"I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. Buffalo is changing and it's so exciting to see all the good things happening! Buffalo is my home. It's where my family lives and it's where I belong."



STEPHEN DALTON was recently hired to be the Housing Placement Specialist here at HOME. Stephen is a 25 year old Amherst native that comes to us after having just finished his Bachelor's degree in Political Science at The College at Brockport. While at The College at Brockport, he was also a 4 year member of the Lacrosse team there.



He has said that being a student athlete has helped shape him into the person that he is today. It has taught him how to better his time management skills. He is enjoying his time at HOME and likes to make a positive difference in people's lives. As Housing Placement Specialist, Stephen will be primarily involved with the Buffalo Rapid Rehousing Program (BRAP). He will be working with clients that are at a high risk of becoming homeless or are already homeless.

"Working at HOME has really opened my eyes to how hard affordable housing is to find. The fact that I am helping people get out of the shelters and back into a place they can call home is really what makes me show up to work every day. People are counting on me, and I use this as motivation every day."

CHRISTOPHER ALLAIRE has a Bachelor's degree from Ithaca College in History and African Diaspora Studies and a Master's degree from the University at Buffalo in History. Chris' Master's thesis broadly addressed local urban housing policy and focused on the primary importance of grassroots community organizations in the fight to end segregation in the city of Buffalo throughout the twentieth century. Before coming to HOME, Chris worked in the Education and International Exchanges Department at the International Institute of Buffalo.

"I am thrilled to be working with HOME to address the critical civil rights issue of fair housing during this important transitional moment for the city of Buffalo." ◇



“The Rent Is Too High!”

forcing them to live in “lower-rent districts that are likelier to be poor, segregated, and isolated from quality schools and other sources of opportunity.”

Dr. Ben Carson, as HUD Secretary, is ostensibly the nation’s point man for ensuring fair and affordable housing for all. However, statements made by Dr. Carson illustrate a profound ignorance and even hostility toward the people he serves and the challenges they face. During a recent tour of an affordable housing development in Ohio, Dr. Carson stated that housing for the poor should not be too “cozy.” During another interview, Dr. Carson averred, “I

think poverty to a large extent is also a state of mind.” These statements only perpetuate the ignorant and false belief that the poor are just too lazy to better their situation.

My experience at HOME has clearly demonstrated that laziness has nothing to do with needing assistance. People who receive housing assistance are predominately unable to work or unable to find work that pays a living wage. They are senior citizens, people with disabilities, and the working poor. Most have incomes that do not exceed 30 percent of Buffalo’s median income, which was estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau to be \$31,918 for 2015. Many people simply need a helping hand after being faced with a major upheaval like the loss of a job, a major illness, or some other calamity. Of course, having no actual experience in housing matters, Dr. Carson would not understand these realities.

While events on the national stage have posed challenges to fair housing, the City of Buffalo has an opportunity to affirm its commitment to fair and inclusive development. There is a strong push in the city to pass inclusionary zoning legislation to increase the city’s supply affordable housing in future construction. Although inclusionary zoning programs can vary greatly in their structure, they generally require or encourage developers to set aside a certain percentage of housing units in new or rehabilitated projects for low- and moderate-income residents. The integration of affordable units into market-rate projects creates opportunities for households with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to live in the same neighborhoods and have access to the same community services and amenities. Therefore, inclusionary zoning has a vital role to play in the long-term strategy to increase the city’s affordable housing and strengthen its mixed-income neighborhoods. While members of the Buffalo Common Council have voiced their support for the proposal, some in the development industry have expressed staunch opposition. Now is the time to make inclusionary zoning a reality in Buffalo. HOME and its partners in the community will continue to fight for fair and affordable housing, and to ensure all people have an equal opportunity to live in the communities and housing of their choice. ♦

Meet HOME’s Board of Directors: Member Spotlight

device evaluation program. A year later, I transitioned into a position doing the kind of work I do now, and I’ve been advocating for the rights of people with disabilities for 23 years now.

How did you become involved with HOME?

As an advocate for WNYIL, I’ve had the opportunity to collaborate with HOME many times — most memorably, the community collaboration to fight exclusionary zoning for human service agencies. I was pleased to work with the HOME staff to increase their knowledge of disability issues. I was very honored to be asked to be on the board of directors in 2015.

What is your vision for HOME and fair housing in our region?

I believe affordable and accessible housing to be a critical component of the revitalization of our community. It turns out to be the number one barrier for successful community integration for people with disabilities. HOME’s commitment and drive towards the ability of all citizens to be able to choose where they want to live from all available options and to demand fair treatment for all citizens from mortgagees, landlords, and housing providers is a critical component of a strong, safe, and accepting community. My vision would be to continue to support that mission and to raise our community’s understanding of both the need for fair housing within our community and its social and financial benefits.

What is your vision for Buffalo?

Our community’s expansion must include everyone. While economic opportunity can be the engine that drives community success, we must never forget that we should still strive to be “the City of Good Neighbors.” I want to continue to be proud of the city that accepts everyone for their talents, supports and encourages those who need it, and makes decisions based on what is best for the entire community, not just the people that drive the economic engine. Being someone that lives with a disability, I support the full independence, inclusion, and equality of people with disabilities. We have a diverse population of people whose talents are often overlooked due to concern over the mere perception of a disability. Our whole community is lessened when we don’t look at all the positive resources we have for change. ♦

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Receptionist

INSIGHT CONTRIBUTORS

DeAnna Eason • Daniel Corbitt, Esq.

Kibrett Facey, Editor

Christopher Allaire • Miata Wright

Updates from HOME

AmazonSmile Program

Do you love online shopping on Amazon? If so, don't forget to shop on AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com), and identify HOME as your selected charitable choice. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to HOME! As of November of 2016, Amazon has shared over \$37 million dollars to participating organizations.

Hamburg Office Hours

As you know, we host free office hours for landlords and tenants in Hamburg on the first Wednesday of every month. Our summer hours in Hamburg are from 2:30-4:00 p.m. Bring your questions, concerns, and desire to learn to the Hamburg Community Development Department (6122 South Park Ave) Check our calendar (<http://www.homeny.org/events/>) for updates! ♦

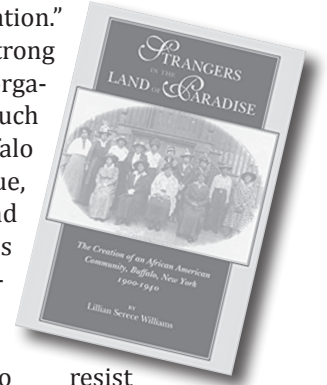
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HOME's Reading Corner

tions and social life in the city of Buffalo. One of the central themes of the book is how the transformation and growth of this population changed neighborhood demographic and race relation in the city. For example, Williams writes that black migration "made more apparent the racism in northern backyards.... For as the black population expanded, the white population increased its tactics of discrimination and segregation."

However, strong community organizations such as the Buffalo Urban League, the NAACP, and local churches became focal points of grassroots

activism to resist segregation in both public and private housing. In this way, Williams' monograph highlights how activism in the Buffalo's black community addressed residential segregation in its infancy and continued to challenge housing discrimination through public demonstrations, educational outreach, and political lobbying. Dr. Williams' book is ideal for those looking to understand the history of Buffalo's African American community, including the roots of significant and long lasting cultural and social institutions. ♦



The Vice of the Buffalo Renaissance

By Kibrett Facey

The thunderous transformation and growth of Buffalo is a promising, bright light for those who feel their city has been left in the dark for far too long. Millennials and investors are rushing back home to enjoy their own little pieces of this Buffalo renaissance, but there is a segment of the population who is finding it quite hard to thrive during this revival. These are the residents who seek quality affordable housing in a city that lacks a realistic amount of such. In the midst of local bursts of urban revitalization, there is an absence of a policy needed to protect those with low incomes. Further ignorance of this issue and lack of movement towards a solution will continue to bolster Buffalo as one of the most racially and economically segregated cities in the United States.

In HOME's last winter edition of Insight, there was a case made for inclusionary zoning and the benefits it would bring to the city. Although it will not heal all of Buffalo's ills, Sam Magavern of the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG) has noted that it certainly would begin to address four of the city's major housing market challenges: affordability, job access, inclusiveness, and quality. Inclusionary zoning would require developers to allocate 10 to 30 percent of apartments in multi-unit, market-rate buildings as affordable units for those with low incomes. There has been an estimated 500 market-rate units produced in Buffalo since 2010 which would easily translate to 50 to 150 affordable units. Developers could also build one additional market-rate unit for each low-income unit created. Community activists have been fighting for this policy to little avail. It helps in combatting segregation — both racial and economic — while also providing affordable housing.

While building, it is important to be more intentional about the structure and geographic location of affordable housing units. Inclusionary zoning is rich with diversity as well as social and financial mobility. If we lose sight of creating inclusion and instead build more housing projects solely inhabited by those of low socioeconomic statuses, we will create more areas of concentrated poverty and draw a vivid line of division.

The *Buffalo News* recently reported that the city of Buffalo fears scaring away development with overregulation and strict percentages, but the mayor and his administration still verbalize their support for inclusionary policy. They want to attract more middle and upper income people to the city without displacement and inflation. The City has seen the creation of "mixed-income neighborhoods" in the form of structures with affordable units placed next to more high-end apartments, and this may just be one step into the right direction. It is one way of handling Buffalo's problem, but it also leaves room for looking at how effective inclusionary zoning's proposed mixed-income buildings can be.

There have been many calls to action regarding inclusionary zoning, but now is the time for some movement. The city of Buffalo has always been a city full of unique talent, good neighborly behavior, and steadfast loyalty, and it is important that we do not allow transformation to triumph tradition. Inclusionary zoning is a necessary tool in ensuring that nobody gets left behind in Buffalo's renaissance and that racial and economic segregation will no longer prevail. ♦

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Welcome To The Neighborhood

our new neighbors had no option but to leave their home in order to seek an area of greater opportunity. Leaving what is familiar to you can be terrifying, and it is our job as the City of Good Neighbors to make the transition as peaceful and welcoming as possible. It is especially important that we keep our eyes peeled for instances of discrimination. Many of our new neighbors are often Spanish-speaking and people of color which are two characteristics that remain susceptible to housing discrimination. It is my hope that the City of Good Neighbors remains true to its name. ♦

HOME's Mission

Housing Opportunities Made Equal is a civil rights organization whose mission is to promote the value of diversity and to ensure all people an equal opportunity to live in the housing and communities of their choice – through education, advocacy, the enforcement of fair housing laws and the creation of housing opportunities.

Housing Opportunities Made Equal, Inc. would like to give special thanks to . . .

M&T Bank • Town of Hamburg • Belmont Management Company, Inc. • People, Inc. • Delta Development
• Evans Bank • Glendale Realty Service Group • Oxford Consulting • Rich Products Corporation • Belmont Housing Resources of WNY • Buffalo Teachers Federation • Clover Management • Hodgson Russ, LLP • Jewish Federation Apartments • Buffalo Niagara Association of REALTORS, Inc. • Norstar Development USA, L.P. • Rental Assistance Corporation • Cazenovia Recovery Systems • Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled

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Housing Opportunities Made Equal

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Membership is our strength – Join today!

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POWER TO THE PEOPLE

By Kibrett Facey

A major part of HOME's mission is the empowerment of the people of Western New York through educate about fair housing law especially as it relates to their rights and responsibilities as landlords and tenants. In 2016, HOME conducted over 150 presentations for over 2000 participants. During these educational presentations, both landlords and tenants were able to get a better understanding of the laws that affect them every day while building a sturdy foundation of proper fair housing practices.

FAIR HOUSING AND TENANTS' RIGHTS WORKSHOPS

Each month, HOME goes out into the Western New York community to hold fair housing and tenants' rights workshops for various non-profit organizations, government agencies, community groups, schools, and human service agencies. These are interactive workshops that are perfect for anyone interested in fair housing. We thoroughly cover fair housing

law as well as information about HOME's programs and how we assist victims of discrimination. We also cover federal, state, and local protected classes. Another topic that is covered in great length is how to detect and address covert housing discrimination. While the classes do tend to focus on fair housing law, there is also a great deal of time spent on the rights and responsibilities of a tenant-- including the best practices for withholding rent, deducting & repairing, and retrieving security deposits. Thanks to our various contracts, we are able to offer a limited number of these courses **free of charge.**

LANDLORD CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP

At HOME's location on 1542 Main Street, you can bet that there will be a group of landlords and housing providers packed into our conference room for our landlord certification workshop each month. These workshops are typically two hours long. Similar to our fair housing and tenants'

rights workshops, the landlord workshop also extensively covers fair housing law and protected classes. We also discuss the impact of housing discrimination especially as it relates to the current geographic landscape of the city of Buffalo. In an effort to combat the impact, we discuss how to best avoid discriminatory practices as well as the best practices in the application and screening process. Participants are guided through questions you can and cannot ask prospective tenants and illegal lease clauses. Also provided is an in-depth explanation of reasonable accommodations and modifications for people with disabilities, laws and local ordinances that landlords should be knowledgeable of, landlord rights and responsibilities, and evictions and small claims court. An open session for questions always follows. If you are interested in attending a landlord course, you can register by visiting www.homeny.org/landlordtraining. ♦