

BROOKFIELD COMMON COUNCIL

Alderman calls for censure of fellow council member

Concerned about discrimination, Fair Housing Act

By Hunter Turpin
hturpin@conley.net.com
262-513-2681

only is his behavior morally reprehensible, but it exposes the city to significant legal liability.”

BROOKFIELD — Alderman Mike Hallquist has called for the censure, or a formal expression of disapproval, of fellow Alderman Kris Seals, saying that Seals made multiple remarks in favor of income-based discrimination at recent meetings discussing a workforce housing proposal.

Beginning in August, the city began discussing a workforce housing proposal called the Flats at Bishop’s Woods. The 203-unit building would have reduced rents geared toward workers making between \$43,000 and \$86,000.

Seals, who opposed the project, said: “If you want to live in Brookfield, like all of us who do live in Brookfield, you put your nose to the grindstone and live in Wauwatosa or West Allis and save that money until you can afford to live in Brookfield,” during a Nov. 15 Common Council meeting.

During a Common Council meeting on Tuesday, when the council approved the developer’s proposal, Seals said: “What we’re trying to do is step down to a West Allis or a Wauwatosa. No, we’re Brookfield. We don’t step down to allow the people who can’t afford to live in Brookfield to come in, because then we become West Allis, then we become Wauwatosa. That’s not what Brookfield is. I’ve been here 60 years, this is not Brookfield.”

On Thursday, Hallquist formally submitted a notification to the mayor and city clerk that he will introduce a resolution calling for the censure of Seals to be considered by the Common Council, according to a statement from Hallquist.

“Quite frankly it’s sad that this needs to be said in 2023,” Hallquist said. “Brookfield should be eliminating economic income barriers to housing and diversifying its supply to include more workforce and affordable housing.”

Seals, whose term expires in April 2026, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

“Alderman Seals’ discriminatory comments and suggestions have no place in Brookfield,” Hallquist said. “Despite receiving specific and repeated warnings from in advance of and during meetings by city staff to not discriminate and violate the Fair Housing Act, Alderman Seals willfully and repeatedly ignored that advice. ...Not

City attorney summarizes Fair Housing Act

Ahead of the Nov. 15 meeting, City Attorney Jenna Merten sent an email to council members, summarizing the Fair Housing Act. The email says that the Fair Housing Act under federal law prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, religion or family status. Wisconsin’s law is broader, prohibiting discrimination based on ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation or lawful source of income.

“Some examples of land use and zoning laws or practices that may violate the FHA include ... Blocking group homes for people with disabilities or multifamily or affordable housing in response to neighbors’ fears or prejudices about persons with disabilities or racial and ethnic minorities,” Merten’s email says. “Even if no personal bias exists on the part of municipal officials, municipal zoning practices or decisions that reflect acquiescence to community bias or fears about members of protected classes may be intentionally discriminatory.”

During public comment on the Bishop’s Woods project, community members who support the project have said it could be a good housing option for disabled people and opponents have shared concerns about changing the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the area, but have not explicitly called out a protected group in public meetings.

“For many other reasons than just the size and shape of the building, many of us oppose it for the stress on our community and also for safety reasons,” a resident said at the November meeting. “This size of a project and the intent for changing the makeup of our area is totally unacceptable.”

“The project basically will fundamentally change the demographics and the socioeconomics of Brookfield,” another resident said in Tuesday’s meeting.

Other council members and Mayor Steve Ponto did not respond to requests for comment.

The Common Council will meet again on Tuesday, Feb. 7.