

Commission on Human Relations Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 3, 2025

Attendance: virtual meeting via Zoom.

Commissioners:

Teaira Collins, Chair
Genevieve Rosselot, 1st Vice Chair
Rabbi James Gibson, 2nd Vice Chair
Rev. Liddy Barlow
Alberto Benzaquen, Secretary
Luz Blandon
Namita Dwarakanath
Kyle Webster
Mary Jayne McCullough

Staff:

Rachel Shepherd, Director
Christopher Sault, Deputy Director
Rita Turpin Porterfield, Senior Investigator
Jeffrey Cameron, Senior Investigator
Lauren Law, Senior Investigator
David Ellwood, Senior Investigator
Kevin Carroll, Administrative Assistant
Courtney Smith, Fiscal and Contracts Coordinator

Guests: Pre-registered through Zoom

Genevieve Volpe

Kathy Ramos

August Copeland, NeighborWorks

Melissa Evans, Neighborhood Legal Services

WPXI TV 11

I. CALL TO ORDER - Chair Teaira Collins Called the meeting to Order at 3:33 p.m.

II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES –

1. Corrections: None
2. Motion to adopt minutes, including any corrections noted above, made by Commissioner Rosselot
3. Seconded by Commissioner Gibson.
4. Unanimous voice vote in favor

III. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

IV. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORT

A. *Committee Reports*

- i. ***Finance Committee*** – None
- ii. ***Personnel Committee*** – Commissioner Barlow: Director review is still pending, met with Director for an update, but no news to bring.
- iii. ***Community Relations Committee*** – Commissioner Dwarakanath reported they had a heavy, but encouraging meeting. With the erosion of federal protections across the board, we need to recommit to local ones and be vocal in announcing that these local protections exist and we intend to enforce them.

B. *Director's Report* –

a. Personnel and Administration:

- a. Director will be on the Gender Equity Commission, which CHR has a dedicated seat on and they're trying to revive.
- b. HUD certification received, waiting on info about federal contracts

b. Cases, Investigation, and Enforcement:

- a. As of 1/28/25: 51 open investigations, 32 pending intakes, 18 post-cause cases (3 in court, 12 pending mandatory conciliation) and 4 cases on the public hearing track
- b. 9 determinations for Compliance Review this month
- c. Public Hearing set to take place March 4th-6th

c. Education, Outreach, Meetings, and New Connections:

- a. Bridges to Mountains meeting on homelessness protections and collaboration; director will join a staff meeting to provide information about difficulties her constituents face finding housing
- b. Connected to Philly and Cincy commissions. Philly's process is closest to our own, curious to see how they work. Cincinnati's commission is looking for best practices from us.
- c. On 2/11, staff will take part in a disability immersion program with the city's ADA coordinator Michelle Walker. We will meet at 1pm on the portico if Commissioners would like to take part. Part of it will include teaching us ASL basics.
- d. Medical Marijuana training as part of a settlement was a success and will help us shape our guidance based on the questions asked by Respondent attendee (the main thing was clarifying that it's only in Pittsburgh, not all of Allegheny County).

- e. Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation training was rescheduled but translated Power Point already sent to them.
- f. Renting to Immigrants rescheduled due to concerns about new administration making the process more complex and not having the answers for landlords.
- g. Outreach planning meeting with staff tomorrow.
- d. Special Projects
 - a. Our solicitor is helping us start to formulate updates to the City Code and the Rules and Regulations.
 - b. Emilia, our intern, has been doing Know Your Rights trainings and outreach to Pitt groups including Habitat for Humanity, graduate students, but also other universities in Oakland.

V. OLD BUSINESS –

- I. Director Shepherd included the slides from Outwith Studios' presentation last month in the packet for this month.
- II. We still need the formal report and should start planning a public meeting for outreach and to share the results.

VI. NEW BUSINESS – None

- a. City Council revamped the Home Rule Charter, including adding some protected classes that had been omitted, but Commission staff were not consulted or asked to speak.
- b. Commissioner Gibson has been in contact with Monica Ruiz at Casa San Jose several times a week and she reports everyone is terrified and they're closing shops in response to raids
 - i. We put out a press release. It's also translated into Spanish.
- c. Commissioner Barlow reported on the next meeting of the Hate & Action Committee on 2/11; it is still in formation but Barlow is on the steering committee and will loop Director Shepherd in
- d. Commissioner McCullough: we need to do something more, but what? Perhaps instead of asking Latinos to come to us, we should go to them and prep toolkits. Civil rights are being trampled, some kind of Commission engagement
 - i. Know Your Rights presentation is available in English, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese
 - ii. Commissioner Rosselot: what can we do? Does the staff need support?
Director: More outreach help, especially to immigrants.
 - iii. We can put together a care package of resources for immigrants and refugees
 - iv. Commissioner Gibson: Do we need Arabic and Chinese also?
 - v. Commissioner McCullough: Global Wordsmiths can do pro bono translation for things like this; she mentioned that languages that seem in demand are Haitian Creole, Dari, Pashto

VII. ADJOURNMENT – Commissioner Rosselot moved to adjourned, which was seconded by Commissioner Dwarakanath. Unanimously adjourned at 4:05 p.m.



CITY OF PITTSBURGH
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS
RACHEL SHEPHERD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Monthly Commission Meeting Agenda

February 3, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. MEETING MINUTES
 - a. 1/6/2025
3. PUBLIC COMMENTS
4. COMMITTEES
 - a. FINANCE
 - b. PERSONNEL
 - c. COMMUNITY RELATIONS
5. DIRECTOR'S REPORT
6. OLD BUSINESS
 - a. LGBTQIA+ Housing Research Presentation Slides
7. NEW BUSINESS
8. ADJOURNMENT

Commission on Human Relations Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 6, 2025

Attendance: virtual meeting via Zoom.

Commissioners:

Teaira Collins

Genevieve Rosselot

Rev. Liddy Barlow

Kyle Webster

Mary Jayne McCullough

Namita Dwarakanath

Staff:

Rachel Shepherd, Director

Christopher Sault, Deputy Director

Rita Turpin Porterfield, Senior Investigator

Jeffrey Cameron, Senior Investigator

Lauren Law, Senior Investigator

David Ellwood, Senior Investigator

Kevin Carroll, Administrative Assistant

Courtney Smith, Fiscal and Contracts Coordinator

Guests: Pre-registered through Zoom

June McCartin & Esti Shapiro from Outwith Studio

- I. CALL TO ORDER - Chair Collins Called the meeting to Order at approximately 3:35 pm.
- II. ADOPTION OF MINUTES –
 1. Corrections:
 2. Motion to adopt minutes, including any corrections noted above, made by Commissioner Rosselot
 3. Seconded by Commissioner [NAME]
 4. Unanimous voice vote in favor
- III. PUBLIC COMMENT: None, but Outwith Studio will report back later
- IV. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORT
 - A. *Committee Reports*
 1. *Finance Committee report* by Director Shepherd
 - a. Budget was finalized as is without our ask for \$11k for an outreach position conversion

2. *Personnel Committee report* by Rev. Liddy Barlow
 - a. We've had no reason to meet as we are fully staff, the only outstanding item is Rachel's review because Rev. Barlow hasn't tackled it
3. *Community Relations Committee report* by Commissioner Dwarakanath
 - a. Didn't meet due to a holiday, but we're moving forward with the Greyhound case

B. Director's Report –

1. Personnel/Finance notes:
 - a. Just Mediation Pittsburgh contract signed and got them materials so they can start distributing to tenants and landlords in eviction mediation process; have an acting executive director, we expect to see an uptick in cases when that begins
 - b. Resolution passed for strategic planning, same contract but different entity, money is there, so we can continue soon
 - a. Rev Barlow asked what the timeline is timeline for planning
 - b. Director Shepherd replied that it will add an additional year, some more trainings, consulting, etc and should start shortly
 - c. Rev. Barlow noted that strategic planning has been kicking around for a long time through many iterations of the Commission
 - d. Director Shepherd replied that we argued for the competitive process waiver because we want to hold onto existing data from staff and Commissioners who are no longer here and get to it before more leave
 - c. We have new volunteer mediators, probably from The Conflict Lab training as many get a sense of all the different processes they could learn about from meeting us there; this will help especially with mandatory conciliations and the general load and the fact of conflicted staff mediators
2. Investigation: a lot of intakes cleaned up, have been able to avoid most public hearings despite so many on the public hearing track; Rev. Barlow requested that the Public Hearing Section be kept abreast of potential hearing dates to keep the days open; Director Shepherd noted that one of the first commission-initiated complaints in a while and the largest ever case settlement will be headed to the Compliance Review Section today
3. Outreach has been quiet due to the holidays
 - a. Allegheny County HRC vote was sent back to committee; they wanted a director and two investigators and currently have no designated staff and the county is in financial distress
 - b. Director connected with Darius of the Mayor's office about our commissioner needs; there are 6 potential commissioners currently being interviewed
 - a. Commissioner Webster asked what kind of subject matter areas we need to fill currently, he is unaware of which are already filled; the Director will fill in commissioners after she meets with Darius and finds out which might soon be filled, but definitely more housing people, youth, LGBTQ, police (for a long time had a retired officer on the commission which brought unique perspective)

- c. Press conference for International Human Rights Day in December, Chair Collins spoke; we plan to meet with the Human Rights City Alliance to make more plans for the year
- d. Fair Housing for Landlords training happened in December presented by Megan Hammond and Inspector Porterfield. Chair Collins found the training very useful, said that you never know when you or someone you know will need the information
- e. Additional trainings will occur Western PA Employment Lawyers Association and with Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corp soon with Commissioner Benzaquen presenting in Spanish and with slides translated into Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese for the staff there to reference. Commissioner McCullough noted she is a native level Spanish speaker if she could ever assist in something like that in the future.
- 4. Special Projects: June and Esti are here to report on the LGBTQIA+ housing research

V. OLD BUSINESS – LGBTQIA+ Housing Research presentation by June McCartin and Esti Shapiro. The video recording of this presentation is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iug-iKr4eXA&list=PL2L3ZTwe78kERKiAp5KnFGG1uZZZAQLKd>

- I. What is the research about? Fact finding mission to investigate what LGBTQIA+ housing discrimination looks like
- II. Sexual orientation protected since 1990 and gender identity/expression since 2014 in the City, preceding national protections
- III. Survey results comments:
 - A. Many seek refuge in the City due to discrimination outside of it, so not all of it happened in the City
 - B. A group dealing with fairly frequent housing insecurity, though the overrepresentation of white respondents suggests that discrimination is underestimated in the survey results; a large amount of crashing with friends, bartering, etc, to keep themselves housed
 - C. Qualitative findings: maintenance neglect was a common form of discrimination from respondents; concerns about landlords being able to out someone due to documents that don't accord with how they exist in the world, having to provide those; some people mentioned being asked to remove pride flags; harassment by neighbors was the most common type experienced which complicates legal responsibility for stopping it and not being able to effectively address it; for those seeking emergency shelters, many tried to avoid religiously affiliated shelter; these informal networks are common across time and space, but are borne out by these results also
 - D. Analysis: large intersection between disability-related discrimination in this community also; nonnormative families created problems for some with landlords (sometimes but not always overlapping with "familial status" as a legal concept), "functional family" law covers

more of these types of families but isn't necessarily represented in fair housing laws;

1. "related by...affinity" vs. zoning definition of a family as up to 3 "unrelated" persons
2. Most didn't see remedying discrimination as a high priority and some experienced dismissive reactions from legal service providers
3. Persistent theme of money being the primary problem in housing choice, hard to make money, make enough, find stable employment; dynamics within the community of higher income cis white gay men vs lower income, more marginalized and steering toward high income areas that many cannot afford, regardless
4. Potential Actions shared by respondents:
 - a. Connect with these communities more effectively, a good landlord list exists informally, a method of informal discrimination complaints without involving themselves in the whole process that they can't really engage in,
5. Questions and discussion
 - a. Rev. Barlow - Eye opening information, so much good information and a decent number of participants all things considered
 - b. Director Shepherd - Real estate transaction discrimination is very uncommon to hear complaints from in general, lending and appraisal is something we would like to be more involved in; so cool to find the results of this research so long in the making

VI. NEW BUSINESS - None

VII. ADJOURNMENT –

- a. Motion made by Commissioner Rosselot
- b. Seconded by Commissioner Dwarakanath
- c. Unanimous vote in favor at approximately 4:50 p.m.



CITY OF PITTSBURGH
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS
RACHEL SHEPHERD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

February 3, 2025

PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATION

- I accepted a seat on the Gender Equity Commission on behalf of the PghCHR and am awaiting confirmation by City Council.
- We received our five-year certification from HUD, which was long overdue. This secures our ability to continue to do business with HUD.
- We are awaiting further information on our federal contracts and grants. HUD had no updates during our check-in this week, and we next meet with the EEOC on 2/4.

CASES AND ENFORCEMENT

- As of 1/28/2025 there are:
 - 51 open investigations;
 - 32 pending intakes;
 - 18 post-cause cases (3 in court, 12 pending mandatory conciliation); and
 - 4 cases on the public hearing track.
- Compliance Review will see 9 determinations this month.

MEETINGS AND NEW CONNECTIONS

- On January 16th Chris and I met with Calla Kainaroi, the Executive Director of Bridges to Mountains, on homelessness protections and collaboration. She will have us join a staff meeting to present on the Commission as well as provide data on the rejections unhoused people they work with are receiving from landlords.
- On January 23rd we were contacted by Marla Fuller of the Office of Human Relations in Cincinnati, Ohio regarding our work and best practices.
- I am awaiting a response from Ron Idoko of the University of Pittsburgh Racial Equity Consciousness Institute to discuss collaboration.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

- On January 17th Rita and I completed an employment training with one of our respondents. This was our first opportunity to present on the medical marijuana patient protections and there were a lot of good questions.
- The training for the Pittsburgh Hispanic Development Corporation staff will be rescheduled.
- The Renting to Immigrants program for landlords is temporarily paused.

- On Tuesday, February 11th the staff will participate in a disability immersion training with the City's ADA Coordinator, Michelle Walker. If you would like to participate in this, please meet us on the portico of the City-County Building at 1pm.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

- The staff are restarting regular team outreach meetings to coordinate our efforts better. We will be integrating suggestions from the Commissioner during our Community Relations Committee meetings.
- We began working with our general solicitor to get some City Code and Rules and Regulations updates done. This is a process in which I would very much recommend Commissioner involvement. Please contact me for more details.
- Our college intern, Emilia, has been working on spreading the word about the Commission within the channels of the University of Pittsburgh. She has done Know Your Rights presentations for two graduate level classes and Habitat for Humanity Pitt. There are plans for presentations to the Oakland Community Ambassadors at Pitt, CMU Health Services, Pitt Social Work doctoral students, University of Pittsburgh Faculty Union, and Community Care + Resistance.



Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations
January 6, 2025

Introduction

What is LGBTQIA+ Housing Rights Research?

An initiative by CHR to:

- a) Understand the nature of housing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within the City of Pittsburgh
- b) Educate members of the LGBTQIA+ community on how to recognize/address housing discrimination and the role of CHR specifically

[Outwith Studio](#), an LGBTQ-led urban planning and research firm specializing in housing issues, assisted with the research.

Legal notes

- **City law** includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected classes.
- **Bostock v. Clayton County** (2020 U.S. Supreme Court decision) interpreted “sex” discrimination in employment to include sexual orientation and gender identity, opening the door for wider protections.
- **Executive Order 13988**: a January 2021 Executive Order from the Biden Administration that instructs federal agencies (including HUD) to address discrimination because of gender identity/expression and sexual orientation consistent with the Bostock decision.
- This research was conducted with reference to current local anti-discrimination law but took a broader look at discrimination.

Terminology

- Language is important
- Terms evolve over time
- The “LGBTQIA+ community” is not a monolith
- Move forward with best intent
- Working to be reasonably nuanced while being practical in communication
- Granting each other grace

Key Terms

Non-legal descriptions (see Pgh City Code § 651.04 for local legal definitions)

- **Sexual orientation:** descriptions/categories of identity based on one's attraction to others
- **Gender/sex identity:** descriptions/categories of identity related to one's experience (personally and socially) of their body and experiences as a man/woman/other
- **Gender expression:** the ways in which people act as a man/woman/other in relation to time-and-place-specific expectations
- **SOGIE:** shorthand for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression
- **LGBTQIA+:** shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, and others

Research and Engagement

Interviews

- PGH Residents/Survey respondents
- Social Services providers
- LGBTQIA+-friendly Senior Housing developer

Mobile Zine Activity

- Exhibit on Fair Housing and LGBTQIA+ history/geography in Pittsburgh
- Zine-making activity about individual housing stories and the meaning of queer home
- Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh – East Liberty (one week in August)
- QMNTY Center (~one month August–September)



Survey

Small online survey to get a general understanding of housing experiences and housing discrimination

2 → Housing History*

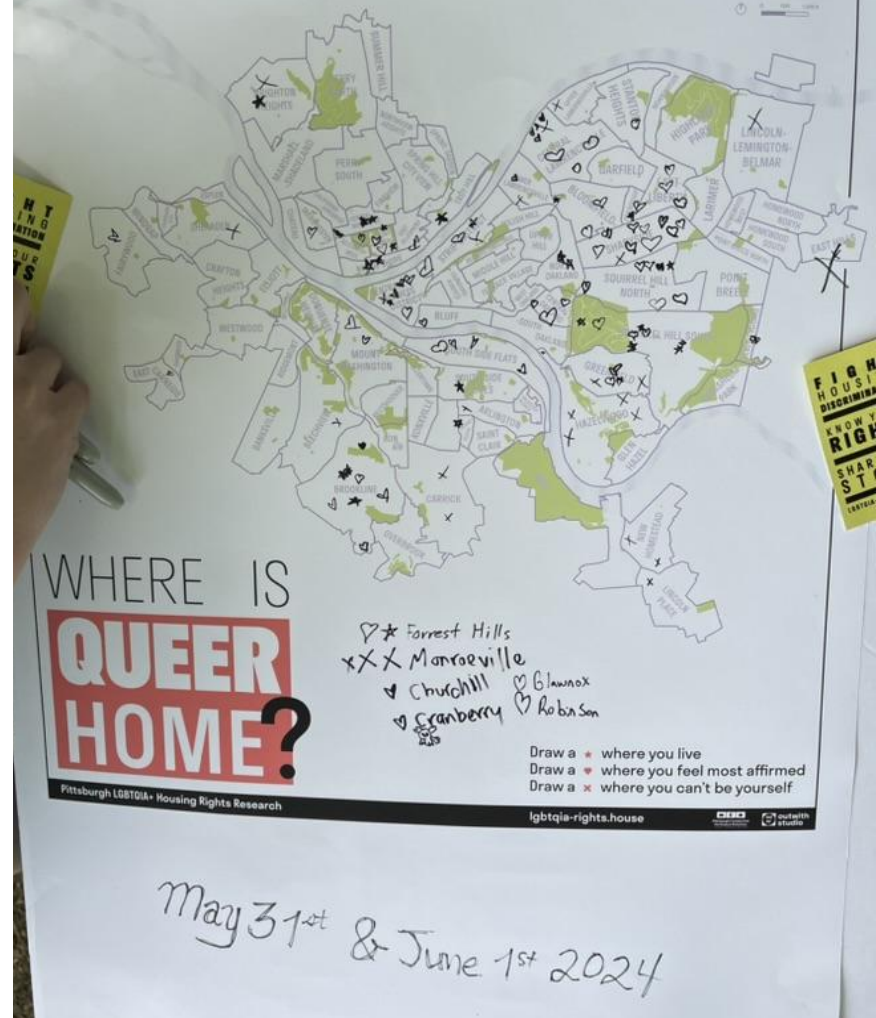
Select all the statements that are true for you.

Choose as many as you like

- ☐ A I have **owned** a home, **tried to buy** a home, or looked at homes for sale with the intent to buy for myself or me and my partner.
- ☐ B I **tried to buy** a home **but could not** find suitable housing I could afford.
- ☐ C I have **rented** a home with my (legal or chosen) name on the lease.
- ☐ D I have **sublet** a home (rented it from the person whose name is on the lease).
- ☐ E I have **tried to rent** a home **but could not** find suitable housing that I could afford.

Tabling

- Get the word out about the initiative
- Collect general input on LGBTQIA+ experiences of housing and discrimination
- Pride 2024 (Friday and Saturday)
- City in the Streets — Knoxville



Survey Results

Survey setup

- Online survey given through the “Typeform” platform and linked at www.lgbtqia-rights.house
- Participants were recruited at public events, through news stories, over social media, and through online advertising at LGBTQIA-focused websites/apps
- Viewed 1,690 times, begun 156 times, and submitted by 67 respondents

Respondent Demographics (non-SOGIE)

- 67 respondents
- 84% current residents of Pittsburgh, 16% former residents
- Not racially/ethnically representative, likely underestimating experiences of discrimination
 - 91% of respondents self-identified as White (83% chose White alone)
 - 7% Black, 6% Asian, 3% Latin
- 96% born in the US, 24% first or second generation American
- 100% native English speakers, 12% speak another language at home
- 48% have a disability
 - 66% those have a disability primarily related to mental health
 - 13% of those have a service animal

Respondent Demographics (SOGIE)

- Fairly diverse by sexuality/sexual orientation and by gender identity/sex
- 43% said their gender identity differed from gender assigned at birth
- 51% said their gender expression differed from what was expected of AGAB

Which phrase or phrases best describe your sexuality or sexual orientation?	Respondent %
Lesbian	25%
Gay	24%
Bisexual	22%
Queer	42%
Pansexual	19%
Fluid	1%
Straight	6%
Asexual	6%
Prefer not to answer	3%
Other	1%

Which phrase or phrases best describe your gender identity and/or sex?	Respondent %
Cis woman	28%
Cis man	25%
Trans woman (or other transfeminine identity)	9%
Trans man (or other transmasculine identity)	7%
Trans	19%
Nonbinary	31%
Genderfluid	6%
Intersex	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%
Other	9%

Caveats

- **Not every respondent answered every question**
 - Based on early answers, respondents were given more in-depth subject-specific questions
- Data shown below is for respondents for whom **some or all of discrimination was in the City of Pittsburgh**
 - If some discrimination happened in the City, that respondents whole history of discrimination is included below
- Survey was not scientific and had a relatively small respondent count
 - Quantitative insights, especially drill-down insights, are less reliable

Housing History

- **Currently:** 34% own, 57% rent, 8% live with family/friends, 2% in a shelter
- 45% own, tried to buy, or have looked for a home to buy
- 82% have formally rented or sublet a home
- 16% have needed emergency housing
- 4% have been evicted
- 13% have been kicked out by family
- 9% have been kicked out by non-family

Ownership Market Discrimination

- **Explicit** discrimination is typically either in the **listing/search process** or is **harassment**
- **Suspected** discrimination is more widespread and **varied**
- 53% of those facing ownership discrimination thought SOGIE was main reason for discrimination
 - Race, sex, color, protective and cultural hair textures/styles and head coverings, DV survivor status, marital status, age, source of income, and homelessness also given as reasons

Type of discrimination	Yes, explicitly	Yes, suspected
Seller refused to sell	0%	8%
Seller refused to negotiate	0%	15%
Seller set special terms	0%	8%
Denied viewing	8%	17%
Encountered discriminatory listing	8%	8%
Discouraged by a broker/agent	15%	23%
Steering by a broker/agent	0%	31%
Refused homeowners insurance	0%	0%
Given different homeowners insurance terms	0%	23%
Homeowners insurance claim denied	0%	8%
Mortgage denied	0%	31%
Given different mortgage terms	0%	23%
Refused info/opportunity to apply for a mortgage	0%	15%
Discriminatory property appraisal	0%	8%
Discriminatory property tax assessment	0%	8%
Harassment by HOA/Condo official or employee	8%	8%
Harassment by neighbor subject to same HOA/Condo	8%	23%
Harassment by neighbor *not* subject to same HOA/Condo	23%	23%
Unequal maintenance, terms, or treatment by HOA/Condo	8%	15%
Blockbusted	0%	23%
Retaliation	0%	8%

Rental Market Discrimination

- Forms of discrimination are varied
- **Harassment** is the most common type of **explicit** discrimination,
- **Suspected** discrimination is commonly refused/delayed **maintenance** and the home **search/lease-up process**
- 73% of those facing renter discrimination thought SOGIE was main reason for discrimination
 - Race, sex, disability, DV survivor status, religion, family structure, age, source of income, criminal history, and homelessness also given as reasons

Type of discrimination	Yes, explicitly	Yes, suspected
Landlord, manager, or sublessor refused to rent	7%	26%
Landlord, manager, or sublessor refused to negotiate	11%	15%
Landlord, manager, or sublessor set special terms	4%	26%
Denied viewing	0%	19%
Encountered discriminatory listing	4%	22%
Discouraged by a landlord, broker/agent, or current tenant	15%	26%
Steering	0%	11%
Refused, delayed, or failed to complete maintenance	4%	33%
Denied access or privileges	11%	4%
Discriminatory eviction	15%	4%
Refused entry	11%	7%
Harassment by landlord/manager/staff	22%	11%
Harassment by tenant in same building/development	19%	15%
Harassment by neighbor *not* in same building/development	22%	30%
Retaliation	11%	15%

Housing insecurity and emergency housing

- 18% of all respondents had dealt with housing insecurity through informal means
 - 92% of that group had crashed with friends, family, or acquaintances
 - 33% have slept in a car
 - 25% have slept outside
 - 42% have traded sexual favors for a place to stay
 - 33% have traded other goods or services for a place to stay
- 6% of all respondents sought space in an emergency shelter
 - 75% of that group had their SOGIE discussed negatively by staff
 - 50% were refused space in the shelter
 - 50% were made to stay in facilities that didn't align with their gender identity
 - 50% were harassed by other residents
 - Shelter staff intervened for half of that group
- Not enough respondents on transitional housing to share results ethically

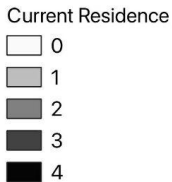
Addressing discrimination

- A majority of respondents facing discrimination could not address it in all cases
- Of the Fair Housing related agencies and nonprofits we asked about, only HUD and Neighborhood Legal Services were known by a majority of respondents
- 23%–38% of respondents had heard of other orgs (public civil rights agencies or nonprofits)

How was discrimination addressed?	Respondent %
Addressed discrimination and stayed in my home	47%
Discrimination sometimes but not always addressed	36%
Left living situation	19%
Discrimination didn't stop but couldn't leave	8%

Residence and Discrimination by Neighborhood

Current

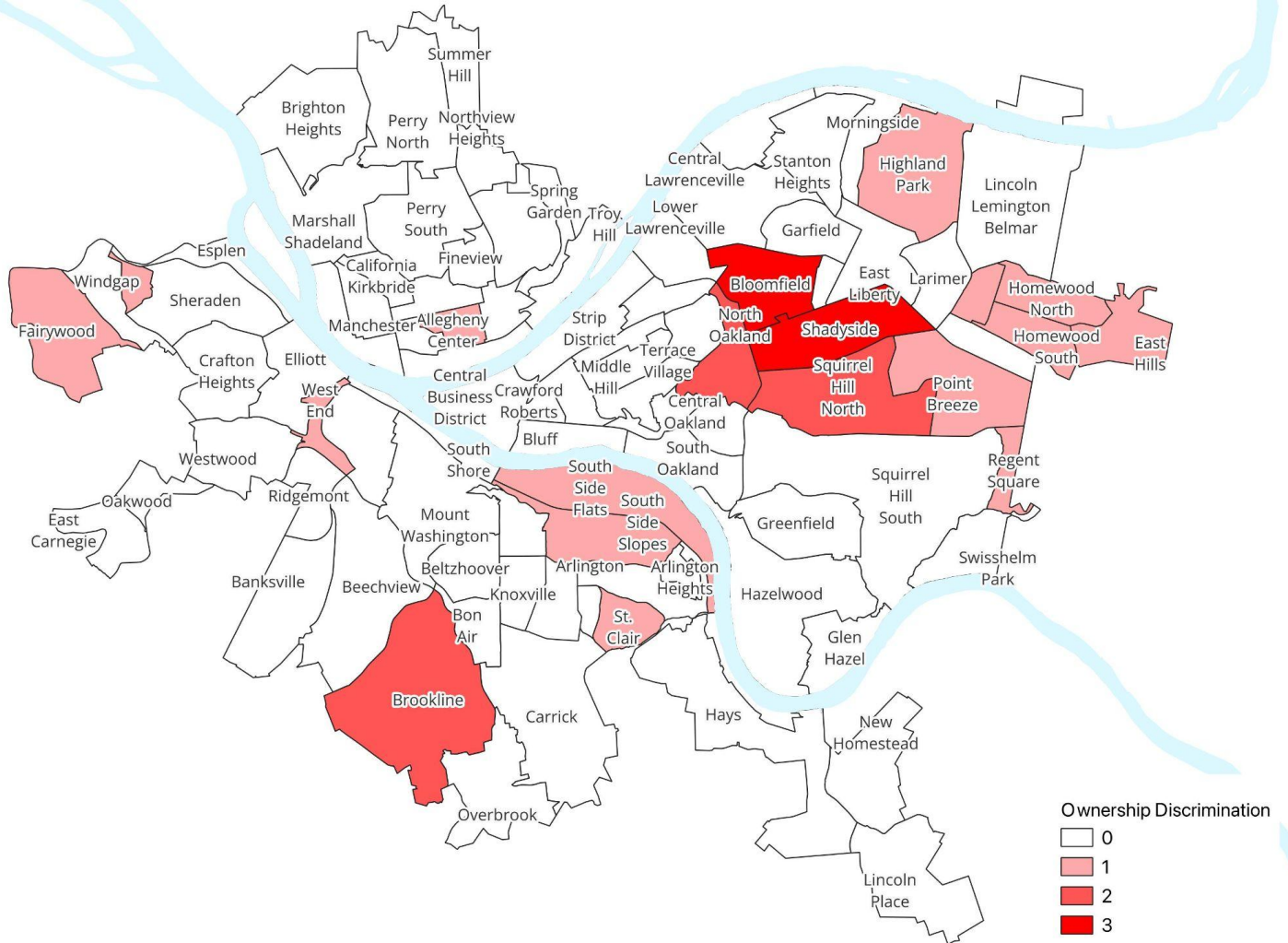


Respondent Past Home Neighborhood within PGH



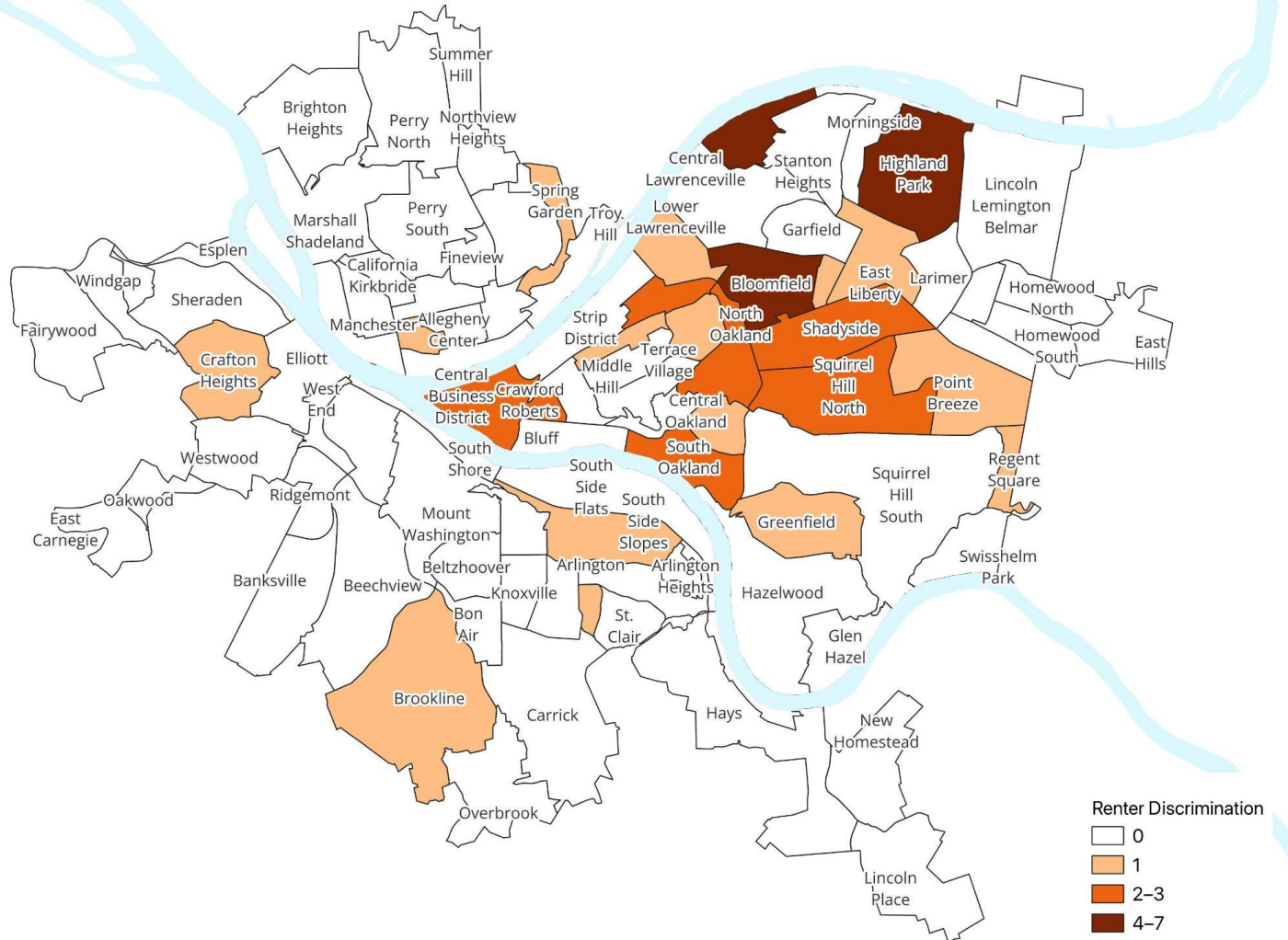
Ownership Discrimination within PGH

Discrimination hotspots roughly track with where LGBTQIA+ people report living. The number of respondents who answered this question is small, so readers should be wary of making strong insights, especially at the margins.



Renter Discrimination within PGH

Discrimination hotspots roughly track with where LGBTQIA+ people report living. The number of respondents who answered this question is small, so readers should be wary of making strong insights, especially at the margins.



Qualitative Findings

Notable forms of rental/ownership discrimination

- Withholding maintenance and official actions
- Privacy concerns with landlords
 - When to disclose information, being outed in legal documents/ID
- Harassment by landlords, property managers, such as:
 - Slurs
 - Intentional misgendering
 - Sexual assault
 - Spurious accusations
- Disparate treatment about decoration
- Withholding security deposits
- Steering to higher-income areas
- Vibe shift upon meeting in-person, including refusal to rent or an end to communication

Neighbor Harassment

- Likely the most common experience
- Whose responsibility?
 - If neighbor is in the same building/development/facility
 - Landlord
 - Condo association or similar if applicable
 - Shelter staff
 - Limited relief otherwise

Emergency Shelter and Informal Care Networks

- Challenges seeking emergency housing/shelter
 - Some shelters are actively avoided by the community
- Informal networks of care
 - “Crashing”
 - Using a relative’s housing stability to provide emergency housing/pay
 - Other forms of care work tied to housing

Key Intersections

Disability:

- Issues with landlords and service animals
- Landlords/property managers using disability status as manipulation tool (threats of retaliation, etc.)

Race:

- Some respondents of color foregrounded racial discrimination in their experience
- Neighborhoods “not for us anymore” after gentrification process
- Overt harassment from neighbors and real estate brokers
 - Blockbusting-like statements
- Disparate treatment by same mortgage lender

Queer family structures

- “Familial status” in Fair Housing law essentially equates to presence of children under age 18
- Within LGBTQIA+ communities, “family” could mean family of origin or queer “chosen family”
- Questions for non-normative families about whether and how to disclose to housing providers/agents
- Some people had experiences of explicit discrimination around non-normative family structures, including discrimination against families with children under 18 in non-normative family structures
- How could “familial status” be defined locally to cover presence of children and also “functional family” structure? (Looking to other parts of the law and feminist legal scholarship.)

Family and local law

- Local law thinks about family differently in different places
- Title 6 Art. V §651.04(cc) “Familial status” is essentially presence of children
- Title 6 Art. V §651.04(xx) “Family or household members” allows for persons “related by...affinity,” which could leave the door open for non-normative family structures
- Zoning Art. IX §96.01(76) “Family” includes up to 3 unrelated persons

Seeking support/remedy

- Pursuing remedy not seen as top priority
 - Finding safe and stable housing often takes first priority
- Issues with nonprofit legal service providers not taking cases or being dismissive

Pittsburgh as informal sanctuary

- Lots of stories of people coming to Pittsburgh for relief from discrimination or a hostile environment
- Several stories of feeling dejected by discrimination experiences in Pittsburgh

Role of economics/class

- Many noted that money is the primary factor in their housing difficulties
- Some noted that it's harder to make money as queer person, and places with queer-friendly reputations tend to be more expensive
- Implied or explicit understanding that for some members of the LGBTQIA+ community, discrimination is less of a factor due to wealth as a function of race and/or gender identity expression
- Questions of "assimilation"

Neighborhoods

- No specific “gayborhood”
- Some neighborhoods broadly thought of as friendlier to LGBTQIA+ community than others
 - “Friendliness” of those places limited by race and class

Potential Actions

Potential actions to address issues

1. Strengthen relationships with existing orgs working with LGBTQIA+ communities
2. Iterate on communication pathways to LGBTQIA+ communities
3. Maintain and distribute a list of baseline decent landlords
4. Create a method to report and track suspected discrimination without initiating investigation
5. Continue to educate landlords (including public and affordable housing landlords), agents/brokers, housing finance professionals
6. Support informal care/housing networks (with funding and resources)
7. Increase pairs-testing capacity

*Implementing agencies could/would vary.



Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations
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