



## **O'Keeffe concerned about Fair Housing Act statement**

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LEAGUE CITY — Like all other municipalities in the state, League City is in the process of filling out a Fair Housing Activity Statement that answers a series of questions about fair housing opportunities in the city.

The city receives about \$250,000 a year in grant money to be used on housing or infrastructure projects that meet an urgent need, are used for individuals classified as lower to moderate income or are used for areas considered blighted, Tony Allender, the city's director of planning and research, said

The statement is a new and expanded form and, Allender said, city staff took it as an opportunity to show off League City's "own brand of what we consider to be affordable, available and accessible housing."

But at a workshop last week, at least one city council member had reservations about the answers on the form.

Looking at the statement, Councilman Dennis O'Keeffe said it seemed as if more was included in the answers than was necessary.

"I'm trying to minimize the impact of inviting additional protected-use housing in League City," O'Keeffe said. "The more we advertise, the more we get."

He pointed to the first couple of questions on the form that asked how the city would promote and advertise fair housing activities such as Fair Housing Month. In the statement, staff listed placing posters in public buildings, using Channel 16 and social media.

The statement also said that to broaden outreach the city would provide information to private and nonprofit organizations, the information office of local school districts and use the city's quarterly newsletter, City Matters.

"Are you trying to pad to grantee that you get the money?" asked Councilman Andy Mann.

Allender said the city simply was answering as it had in previous years.

Allender said the city is able to meet the fair housing standards by having and promoting a diverse set of housing options that meet the city's codes and comprehensive plan. By meeting the needs of certain groups that already had a vested interest in the city — seniors, veterans and young families — the city could meet the requirements of the Fair Housing Act and avoid being overrun with large apartment complexes, Allender said.

"I welcome protected classes like senior citizens or handicapped or veterans, but no municipality can afford to carry everyone," O'Keeffe said. He said he was just trying to protect the character of the community.

"I don't want this compliancy, because of language in this Fair Housing Activity Statement, to lead toward League City becoming a refugee sanctuary," O'Keeffe said.

O'Keeffe said he believed the answers on the form were inviting more protected-use or low-income housing to the city.

Allender said what the city was doing was inviting nothing other than what the market will allow "as long as they meet the quality criteria that we've established."

O'Keeffe replied: "When you are talking about protected use, that doesn't mean \$300,000 homes."

Joe Compian with Gulf Coast Interfaith said many people just don't understand what fair housing is about. At its simplest, fair housing is about fair treatment and equal access to housing regardless of race, disability, sex or family status, he said.

"I believe there is a need to make people aware of fair housing," Compian said. He sees firsthand how people in Galveston County still deal with discrimination and need the information and protections the Fair Housing Act provide, Compian said.

"Fair housing laws permit us to become a better country," he said.

OKeeffe said he could not support the city's fair housing statement as it was originally written.

"I think everyone wants to reach out and help those that are less fortunate — it's just human nature, and I'm one of them," OKeeffe said. "But I'm very cautious about inviting everyone to League City that cannot afford to pay their own way."

Other council members said the document was fine.

Joanna Dawson said she would rely on the city staff's judgment, and Phyllis Sanborn said what staff presented was a perfectly good response. Mick Phalen said the statement was nothing different from what the city had done in the past.

"We need to be do everything we can to make all protected groups welcome to League City," said Mike Lee.

The council will vote on the statement at Tuesday's council meeting.

OKeeffe said he's had some time to work with staff during the past week to trim back their answers on the form.

He said some of his concerns have been addressed by doing things like cutting out the language that said the city would provide fair housing information to school districts. Also, the document is more in line with the city's comprehensive plan that encourages a more diverse housing stock than just large multiunit housing projects, he said.

"My first response to viewing this fair housing activity statement was that it was inclined to position League City for becoming a refuge sanctuary," OKeeffe said. "Those concerns have been addressed."

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At A Glance

WHAT: City council meeting

WHEN: 6 p.m. Tuesday

WHERE: Council chambers, 200 W. Walker St., in League City

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**Section:** News

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