

STATEMENT TO SKOKIE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, OCTOBER 9, 1967  
BY HERMAN S. BLOCH, CHAIRMAN, SHRC

As you consider the ordinances under discussion, I would like to review with you briefly the events leading to these proposals, and the reasons which impelled a large majority of the HRC to recommend their adoption. In doing so, I shall attempt to explain why we believe these ordinances should be enacted, why they should be enacted now, and what effect their enactment will have on our community.

Nearly two years ago, in November of 1965, this Board authorized the Commission to attempt to implement the Village's policy of equal housing opportunity expressed in the resolution which you adopted in July of the same year. You authorized a one-year trial of voluntary plan of education and persuasion directed to the residents of the village and to brokers operating here, to determine whether such a voluntary program might bring about a meaningful degree of open housing.

We recognized then, and we still believe, that in the absence of comprehensive Federal or state-wide legislation prohibiting discrimination in housing, the degree of success of any local program must depend on two factors: the degree of enlightenment and acceptance of such a program by the residents of the community, and compliance, in good faith, by real estate brokers. During our trial year, we carried out a community-wide program designed to educate our residents as to the necessity for and advantages of a policy of open housing, and did our utmost to persuade the approximately two dozen real estate brokers who had agreed to cooperate with us to do so in good faith.

At the end of the trial year, as I reported to this Board in May, it was the conclusion of a majority of the Commission that our educational program had had a significant impact on community attitudes, as evidenced by a steady increase in the percentage of open listings. On the other hand, it was our conclusion, from the approximately two dozen complaints received during this period, that the brokers had been less than whole-hearted in their cooperation, and that in the absence of genuine participation by every broker operating in Skokie, there was little prospect of attaining a meaningful degree of equality in housing opportunity here.

We therefore pointed out to this Board in May that the Village needed licensure of all real estate brokers doing business in Skokie; that it needed a legislation which would prevent panic-peddling, a practice to which we believed the Village might be susceptible; and that legal prohibition of discriminatory practices by real estate brokers was necessary to attain equal housing opportunity. We indicated that we would request such prohibition on a local level if the state legislature failed to provide it on a state-wide basis; and as we all know, the state legislature did fail to enact such legislation.

The first of these requests is embodied in the amendment to Chapter 16 Article IV Section 16-3 of the Code of Ordinances, which you are

considering. The second and third are incorporated in the proposed anti-discrimination ordinance. We believe that control of the activities of real estate brokers through these ordinances, coupled with a continuing and intensified program of community education, will bring us close to the equal housing opportunity which is Skokie policy.

The ordinance you are considering was recommended for your adoption by a 10-1 vote of the Commission on Sept. 27, and was agreed upon after months of consideration of various legislative alternatives by a sub-committee of the Commission headed by Jim Tucky. We have had four public meetings on this ordinance during the last three months, and have reviewed 17 position papers submitted by various interested organizations and individuals, and an equal number of oral statements. We have provided ample opportunity for everyone to be heard who wished to be heard. For what the information is worth, 23 of the views expressed were favorable to the proposed ordinance, 11 opposed.

We believe that the proposed ordinance preserves the legal rights of all concerned; provides ample opportunity for voluntary compliance, mediation and conciliation; and affords legal recourse against the abuse of its authority by the enforcing agency.

We ask you to enact these ordinances because their enactment is the right thing to do -- right morally, right for the orderly growth of Skokie, right as a step toward peaceful progress for the entire metropolitan area.

If you ask why these ordinances are necessary now, I must ask in return, "Is it ever too early to do the right thing? Is it better to act calmly, deliberately, after ample study, discussion and preparation, or to act hastily, under the pressure of coercion and disorder? Is it wiser to anticipate the future problems and needs of our community, and to act intine to resolve them, or to wait until they are upon us and events have happened which cannot be undone?" I think the answers are obvious.

Finally, I would like to discuss what will happen -- and will not happen -- if these ordinances are passed. There will no rapid and large-scale racial change in Skokie or in its sister suburbs which are likewise considering similar ordinances. We know that there are not large numbers of Negro families eager and able to buy homes in the Northern suburbs. We do anticipate a slow but steady trickle of Negroes into Skokie and neighboring areas, and we expect them to be the same type of law-abiding, desirable citizens as the 15 families now living here. We know from the experience of the last six years that we can sustain such an immigration of Negroes without panic or disorder and with no drop in property values. We know that the Negroes who settle here do not necessarily wish to live next to other Negroes, that it is possible to have a pattern of dispersed settlement, and that the pattern of a growing solidly black area which has been traditional in our segregated cities need not be followed. If I may paraphrase what Mrs. Jean Doney said when she addressed the Commission, "What is most likely to happen if these ordinances are adopted is -- practically nothing."

Gentlemen, I need not point out to you that our country is today facing a crisis in race relations as serious as any crisis in the nation's history. This problem is either going to be resolved by the application of constructive reason, or by the forces of irrational hate and destruction. I believe that the passage of these ordinances may well prove a turning-point in the direction of rationality -- that such an action would send a message that would not be lost on the entire metropolitan area, and perhaps beyond; here is a suburban community which is voluntarily making an effort to achieve equal opportunity for all, not under the pressure of marches and demonstrations, but because it is right. And gentlemen, I think it is entirely fitting that this message should come from Skokie, the Village of Vision.