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Flint

Settlement reached after elderly woman denied handicapped parking space at Shiawassee County apartment complex

Published: Mar. 11, 2022, 12:30 p.m.



A judge's gavel.

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CORUNNA, MI—An elderly woman with a mobility impairment who filed a federal lawsuit against the parent company of Cavalier Green Apartments in 2020 after management denied her a handicap accessible parking space unless she paid for it herself has agreed to a settlement.

The woman, who was 66 at the time the lawsuit was filed and who MLive-The Flint Journal is not identifying, settled her case in U.S. District Court in Detroit, according to a Thursday, March 10, news release sent by the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid-Michigan.

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The woman settled the case in mid-2021 for approximately \$18,750, according to her Troy-based attorney, Daniel A. Gwinn. That total includes money that will go toward various costs and attorney fees, as well.

The announcement was made this week by the Fair Housing Center because all terms of the agreement have been fulfilled, officials said.

“We formally added Shiawassee County to our service area in 2021,” FHC Director of Investigations Jessica Ortiz Farley said in a statement. “And we hope stories like this will help get the word out to residents of Corunna, Durand, Laingsburg, Owosso, Perry, and the rest of the county that they can turn to the Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan if they suspect they’ve been discriminated against in the rental, sale, or financing of housing.”

In a phone call Thursday with MLive-The Flint Journal, Gwinn noted that despite the settlement, Woda Cooper Companies—which owns and operates more than 350 properties around the Midwest including Cavalier Green—denied liability.

An email to Woda Cooper Companies was not immediately returned.

Attempts to reach Penny LaLonde, the property manager at Cavalier Green who is also named in the lawsuit, were unsuccessful.

According to the complaint, the woman has an impairment that makes walking difficult and painful. She asked management at Cavalier Green, 106 S. Shiawassee St., for a reserved handicapped space near the entrance to her apartment.

While the 18-unit building has many elderly residents, Gwinn said in the complaint, there were only four parking spaces that were covered and designated handicapped for the 40 units in Cavalier Green.

The owners of the building, once advised that the woman should be provided a space under the Fair Housing Act, “offered specious objections and attempted to place additional requirements on (her) not required by law,” according to the lawsuit.

Management at Cavalier Green refused to provide the woman, who lives off about \$800 in social security a month, with a space unless she paid for the pole and sign needed to mark the space as reserved.

The woman also made claims of harassing type of behavior by management.

During a back-and-forth that lasted months, the woman was threatened with eviction more than once after management mistakenly believed she had missed rent, according to the lawsuit. This was during the summer months of 2020, when a moratorium on evictions was in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On more than one occasion, the lawsuit states, a large rock was placed in the parking space used most frequently by the woman.

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