

Patchogue To Settle Landlord Lawsuit

Sources say village has agreed to pay \$525,000 stemming from 1996 litigation
By Frank S. Costanza, *The Long Island Advance*

The long-standing battle between the Village of Patchogue and local landlords appear to have come to an end, as the village has signed-off on a \$525,000 settlement agreement with more than one dozen coalition members, sources said.

The agreement, which still needs to be reviewed by Patchogue attorneys and then forwarded to lawyers for the Coalition of Landlords, Homeowners & Merchants for approval, would end almost 4 ½ years of litigation against the village.

"I signed on behalf of the village and it was subject to an attorney's review," said Patchogue Mayor Edward A. Ihne, after the initial settlement was filed two weeks ago. Village residents will ultimately flip the \$525,000 bill of the agreement.

The original \$100-million lawsuit was filed against Patchogue in late 1996, after several landlords alleged that they were being unfairly targeted by the village's housing inspectors. The lawsuit also alleged that the village was punishing the landlords because they primarily rent to social service recipients and minorities.

Patchogue officials have repeatedly denied the accusations, claiming that the village's inspectors were simply enforcing housing codes; including health and safety violations ranging from missing smoke detectors to faulty wiring.

Village attorneys and coalition landlords declined to discuss specific details about the pending agreement because of the sensitive nature of the litigation.

"It's still in the process of being worked on, so it's probably, right now, a little premature to say anything is definite," said Ernest Maler Jr., a special council for the village. "At this point, the village is showing a good-faith effort if it can indeed be settled."

Former Patchogue Mayor Stephen E. Keegan, who was named individually in the lawsuit, as were Trustee David Kennedy and Stephen Fuoco, and other officials, has refused to sign the agreement.

"I certainly had no intention or desire to see the attorney settle it," Keegan said. Basically, as I understand it the amount of the settlement money is paying off the legal fees on the other side. I don't want any part of that."

The settlement, however, can still move forward without the former mayor's approval.

According to a draft copy of the settlement obtained by *The Advance*, the agreement states that "the Plaintiffs and Defendants do not admit any liability, wrongdoing or violation of any law, statute, regulation or policy, and it is expressively understood that this ... is being entered into solely for the purpose of avoiding further costs of litigation and amicably resolving all matters in controversy..."

"I think we're in the home stretch," said Paul Palmieri, who was named as one of the plaintiffs in the original lawsuit. "I haven't seen the final agreement, but it sounds OK."