

Commitment to social justice leads Bovilsky to Norwalk Housing Authority

By Robert Koch



Photo: Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Adam Bovilsky, Norwalks Human Relations Director for the last 10 years, outside his office, Wednesday, May 23, 2018, will take over as executive director of the Norwalk Housing Authority in Norwalk, Conn. The transition comes as the housing authority moves into the second phase of the Washington Village Transformation Plan and amid changes in housing policy from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Trump administration.

NORWALK — Adam Bovilsky traces his road to the Norwalk Housing Authority to his childhood.

“I got into this work from my background growing up in a liberal Jewish family where social justice was something that was hammered into us,” Bovilsky said. “I worked first at a college for nonprofits, including the Jewish Community Relations Council up in Boston that focused on social justice and working to end the cycle of poverty.”

On June 19, Bovilsky will start his new job as executive director of the Norwalk Housing Authority after having served 11 years as Norwalk’s director of human relations and fair rent.

On Wednesday afternoon, Bovilsky sat down with Hearst Connecticut Media in his office at City Hall and spoke about his new job. He thanked the housing authority’s board of commissioners for expressing confidence in him and credited Curtis Law, who retired as housing authority executive director after more than 40 years service, with creating learning centers and scholarships programs and improving housing for residents.

The leadership transition comes as the housing authority and developer Trinity Financial move into the second phase of rebuilding Washington Village under the federal government’s Choice Neighborhoods Program. The project is transforming Washington Village, as well as the neighborhood around it, he said.

Bovilsky said he hopes to enhance and build strategic partnerships between the housing authority and social-service organizations such as Family & Children’s Agency, Open Door Shelter, Person-to-Person and Norwalk Senior Center, but won’t undertake anything until first speaking with authority residents, staff and board members.

“I have some ideas from the outside as to what needs to be changed, or what we might want to consider changing,” Bovilsky said. But “there’s some really good staff over there already and I think the first thing I need to do is sit down and really listen to them — staff at all levels, from management down to folks that serve on the front lines dealing with the tenants directly.”

The housing authority employs nearly 100 people and serves about a thousand public-housing tenants and another thousand subsidized tenants, he said.

Not everything will be new to Bovilsky.

As the city's human relations director for more than a decade, Bovilsky said he has collaborated with the housing authority, such as mediating with its tenants or between Section 8 landlords and their tenants. He also has helped with long-term planning.

“We've worked on the housing authority's annual plan and five-year plan,” Bovilsky said. “And my experience has been that there's been some really excellent, diligent folks working over there at the housing authority and I'm looking forward to working with them.”

Bovilsky graduated from Yale University with a bachelor's degree in religious studies in 1997 and Boston College Law School cum laude in 2004, according to his resume.

In 2002 and 2006, he served as a volunteer and legal intern for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law of the Boston Bar Association. His work included analyzing an employment discrimination case brought by several former officers and the Massachusetts Association of Minority Law Enforcement Officers, and developing a strategy to reduce gun violence.

From April 2005 to May 2007, Bovilsky was president of the Somerville (Mass.) Coalition for Middle East Peace. He is a founding board member of New Day Center of Norwalk, which assesses the needs of the day labor and new immigrant community, according to his resume.

He is co-chairman of Opening Doors of Fairfield County, which has implemented a plan and receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to end homelessness.

June 15 will be Bovilsky's last day as the city's human relations director. Looking back, he expressed pride in having developed the Americans With Disabilities Act Compliance and Transition Plan aimed at making public buildings accessible to disabled persons.

"That includes physical access as well as effective communication," Bovilsky said. "We now have most of our conference rooms with assisted-listening devices."

He counted the development of a new affirmative action program as another accomplishment during his tenure as head of the office.

"One of the things social justice means to me is trying to change systems to make things more fair," Bovilsky said.