

**SEATTLE RENTERS' COMMISSION
MINUTES**

Thursday June 28, 2018

6:00 – 8:00 PM

Seattle City Hall, Rm L280 Boards & Commissions

Approved August 6, 2018

Commissioners Present: Beverly Aarons, Sherry Collier, Calvin Jones
Daniela Lopez, Jessica Westgren

Commissioners Absent: Clifford Cawthon, David Mooney, ChrisTiana Obey Sumner
Michael Padilla Ocampo, Laurie Rocello Torres

Commission Staff: Maureen Sheehan, Department of Neighborhoods

Guests: Ms. Monica Beach, Office of Civil Rights (OCR)
Ms. Joy Hunt, Human Services Department (HSD)
Mr. Geoff Tallent, Seattle Department of Constructions & Inspections (SDCI)

Seattle Renter's Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript, and represent key points and the basis of discussion.

Welcome & Announcements

- Ms. Sherry Collier called the meeting to order.
- Ms. Maureen Sheehan announced that there are five Commission seat that are open and she is working to fill. Ms. Laurie Goth was forwarded to the Clerk's Office as the mayoral appointee. Ms. Mercedes Tate and Mr. Devon Silvernail are the two Commission appointees. Two City Council appointed seats and a Get Engaged seats are still open.
- Ms. Sheehan reminded the Commissioners if anyone reaches out to you, to let her know so she can be aware of what is going in to protect the integrity of the Commission.
- The MHA special meeting scheduled for June 25 has been cancelled. The next meeting is scheduled for July 16th at 10:30 am, where Commissioners will have an opportunity to share their statement on MHA.
- Zillow provided a briefing on housing supply to the Housing Supply workgroup. The Housing Supply group will be providing their report after the public comments. An email will be going out to the Commissioners the links and data from the Zillow group.
- Ms. Sheehan mentioned that Councilmember Kshama Sawant shared that the Rental Housing Association of Washington (RHWA) will have an education event later this month and is looking for people to protest at it. Ms. Sheehan will provide more information about the context to the Commissioners.

Minutes Approval (00:04:48)

Without a quorum, the minutes approval from the June 4, 2018 meeting was postponed to the next meeting.

Briefing: Work Plan Presentations to City Council (00:06:32)

- Ms. Collier shared that she and Ms. Laurie Rocello Torres presented to the four City Council members (Harrell, Juarez, O'Brien, and Sawant).
- The Councilmembers asked how the Commission manages its time during the meetings and public interaction. They would like to know what the Commission thinks about where to divert and spend its resources. They also noted that it is important that the Commission consult with the Legal Department to understand the legality of the proposals and recommendations.
- Ms. Collier and Ms. Torres shared their thoughts and reflections about the Commission's work over the past year, its work plans, and workgroups. The Council members were impressed with their robust work plan.
- Ms. Jessica Westgren asked if there is anything the Commission can do to have Mr. Calvin Jones be appointed to the vacant slot. Ms. Sheehan suggested Commissioners could contact Councilmember Sawant's office.

Briefing: Tenant Protections and Racial Equity (00:10:43)

Ms. Monica Beach, Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

Ms. Joy Hunt, Human Services Department (HSD).

Mr. Geoff Tallent, Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI)

- Ms. Collier introduced the presenters to discuss tenant protections and racial equity.
- Mr. Tallent mentioned that he presented to the Commission six months ago about Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) and what it does in terms of tenant services. SDCI provides direct and indirect services as well as support to different City Departments. The City works across departments to ensure education, outreach and tenant services, landlord support are coordinated.
- He reviewed the regulatory functions of SDCI and Seattle Office of Civil Rights (SOCR), and resource functions of the Office of Housing (OH), Human Services Department (HSD), and City Light and Seattle Public Utilities provide to tenants and renters.

Office of Civil Rights

- The OCR is composed of Race & Social Justice, Administrative, Policy and Enforcement teams and does enforcement of discrimination laws in housing and tenant protections as well as employment and civil rights laws.
- OCR also provides training to individuals, organizations, businesses, etc, sponsoring events and technical assistance to businesses to make sure that they comply and have knowledge on existing laws. If OCR cannot help individuals, they provide accurate referrals and partnership with different City departments.
- OCR performs two types of enforcement: responsive enforcement where OCR responds to someone's complaints and strategic enforcement where a proactive approach and strategies are used to address discrimination in housing.
- Fair housing encompasses all housing transactions, covers every type of dwelling and applies to anyone connected to a housing transaction. Fair housing is important because it prohibits individual acts of discrimination, breaks down neighborhood segregation and it eliminates institutional acts of discrimination. OCR has a partnership with SDCI regarding fair housing and offers landlord and tenant training on fair housing. It is a three-hour training that focuses on rental regulation, fair housing as well as understanding illegal discrimination, tenant rights under the law, implicit bias complaints and training for best practices.
- Mr. Jones asked about the legal basis for fair housing and Ms. Beach noted that Federal Fair Housing Act was implemented and passed in 1968. There is a federal, state and local basis and the local levels are the most protective in the state of WA.
- A question was asked if OCR keeps track of all landlord history of violations to certain classes and Ms. Beach commented that OCR keeps track of all cases that were filed in their department and if there

are multiple violations, they are classified under Chapter 40 rule where escalation of damages is addressed.

- A question was asked about mechanisms to protect tenants from retaliation. Ms. Beach noted that there are retaliation protections under the law through the Fair Chance Housing Ordinance and OCR investigates the case.

Human Services Department

- HSD provides all kinds of grants for tenant services and funds three agencies to provide tenant services.
- City Council asked HSD to add more funding to the grants and directed to look at the grant process and evaluate its effectiveness. A workgroup was launched to set a new strategic direction for funding and oversee RFP development. The workgroup came with two tracks of community engagement: current providers and community members. To reach current providers, a community meeting was scheduled as well as a series of seven focus groups with sixty-eight participants. The feedback from providers and focus groups will be used to develop the RFP. A racial equity toolkit was used to identify communities most impacted by eviction and rent burdened. The main critic of the grant process was the long wait for services and the hours.
- Topics they heard from the focus groups include: difficulty accessing services in moments of crisis, difficulty of finding affordable units, fear of retaliation, etc.
- A question was asked about the Central Area Design Review Guidelines and how they address displacement or historical and cultural relevance. Mr. Tallent noted that he will take the question back to the Office of Planning and Community Development for clarification.
- Ms. Aarons asked what percentage of the focus groups are African American and/or black-led organizations. She asked how the focus groups addresses the disparities among African-American if they are not represented in these focus groups. Ms. Hunt welcomed suggestions of organizations they can contact for the next session.
- Ms. Hunt asked for feedback from the Commission to identify items that are missing to further develop the future of these grants.
- A question was asked about where the funding for tenant services originates from and Mr. Tallent noted that it is allocated by the City Council through the City general fund and it is by City Council's discretion.
- Ms. Sheehan noted that if the Commission would like to make a recommendation to the City Council about funding this type of program during the next budget cycle, to move forward with the recommendations. She suggested the Rent Protections workgroup look this and begin a conversation with OCR and HSD to gather the facts and identify what the ask will be.
- Mr. Jones commented about the different outreach programs from different City departments and was asking if there are any efforts to unify the messaging and Mr. Tallent noted that there will be more information to come regarding tenant services and acknowledged that there are several portals available in the City's main page, but there is an effort to consolidate these portals in the future.

Public Comments (01:27:20)

- Ms. Collier opened the discussion for public comments and there were no public comments.

Work Group Report Out (01:27:30)

- The **Housing Supply** group reported that they met with the Zillow Group who presented data and trends on housing in the City of Seattle and how it compares to other cities. Ms. Lopez commented that that there are disparities between the actual data and the people that are impacted, and the resources do not correlate with one another. She noted that the Commission should issue a statement or an opinion to the City Council or to the Mayor to address the lack of communication about the data disparities. Mr. Jones commented there was not data on how policies the City has taken to address

affordability, disparities, resource allocation, etc. impact housing. He added that he would like to follow up with the City to get better data.

- The **Rental Protection Laws** group reported that they will start drafting legislation ideas to present to the Commission to get feedback about renter protections. Mr. Jones commented that he would like to invite and begin a conversation with Mr. Edmund Witter of the Housing Justice Project. Mr. Witter has defended evicted tenants and has ideas on the eviction process and what is not working.
- The **Rent Stabilization/Rent Control** group reported that they came up with the following policy suggestions. These include the following: a) rent succession; b) a landlord is required to provide 12 months' notice for rent increase over a certain amount; c) a landlord must publicly disclose rental rates of all occupied and unoccupied units; d) a landlord must provide an anti-discrimination certification and they have to go through a required racial bias/sexual orientation discrimination training in the City of Seattle to be able to lease, and if a landlord receives three or more complaints that have been investigated and confirmed to be true in a twelve-month period, they would lose the right to rent in the City of Seattle, and e) if a tenant became medically disabled or incapacitated, they could apply for a 90 day rent deferment and required to be enrolled in payment plan to pay back the rent. Ms. Westgren commented that any lease that is longer than a year needs to be notarized. A landlord or a tenant can break the lease if it is not notarized.
- The **Outreach** group reported about a panel on women's homelessness that was put on by the Seattle Women's Commission. Mr. Jones commented that he would like to see that type of effective messaging for the future for the Commission to look at. He also noted that he would like to set up another meeting with the presenters to discuss reaching out to the tenants and what services that are available and effective for them.
- Ms. Sheehan mentioned that if any of the work groups would like to request briefings to send her a summary request.

Commissioner Opportunity to Share (01:48:41)

- Mr. Jones shared about the head tax issue and was hoping that this Commission had a chance to weigh on the topic and was disappointed that the Commission did not have an opportunity to provide a statement about the issue. He commented about continue to be aware of the hot topics.
- Ms. Westgren shared that the Wallingford Community Council meeting turned down a proposal to save one board seat for a renter. They argued that if they save space for a renter, they must save space for everyone and it will end up being so inclusive and are discriminating against people. She noted that she will be pairing with Bellewether Housing in early August to do an informative panel on the difficulties of building affordable housing.
- Ms. Collier shared about the 23rd Union Africatown Land Trust is developing a property to activate midtown plaza this summer. The 23rd and Union Midtown Plaza will be demolished and rebuilt as affordable housing. The Liberty Bank Building is being built to keep the cultural and historical relevance of blacks in the Central District area. The building will be six stories and completed this summer.
- Ms. Aarons commented about contacting HCAACD (Historical Central Arts and Cultural District). She is involved in a group learning how to create cultural and artistic space in the City of Seattle and how to work with developers to create and save cultural space in the city. She also shared an idea on making eviction records on a statute of limitations.
- Ms. Sheehan commented that if the Commissioners would like to get briefings from City departments to let her know and she will request for information and presentations.

Adjourn

No further business being before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.