



SEATTLE RENTERS' COMMISSION MINUTES

October 4, 2023

6:15-7:45 PM

Webex, online

Seattle Public Library, Capitol Hill Branch

Purpose: The Seattle Renters' Commission was established to represent the interest of renters located in Seattle, to advise and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on public policy matters of importance to renters citywide.

Commissioners in attendance: Dan Godfrey, Kim McGillivray, Kate Rubin, Julissa Sanchez, Atif Osmani

Commissioners not in attendance: Char Smith, Sendia Registin

Public attendance: Julia Payne, Tae Yamasaki, Saunatina Sanchez

Staff: Zach Frimmel

(Transcriber's Note: Seattle Renters' Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript and represent key points and the basis of discussion. The recording of the minutes is available upon request.)

Opening Acknowledgments:

- Dan opened the meeting with a respectful acknowledgment of the Duwamish people, including the Muckleshoot, Snoqualmie, and the Talayla, as well as all Coast Salish people. Dan recognized the indigenous people as the original stewards of the land. Acknowledgment of the role of enslaved people in building the United States and gratitude to their descendants.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:

- All commissioners voted in favor, and the minutes were approved. Welcoming Tae Yamasaki as a potential member

Public Comment

No public comments were shared.

Introductions:

- Tae Yamasaki and Tavo Moline introduced themselves.
- Tavo Moline, a 23-year-old who recently moved to Seattle, shared his background in politics and government and his desire to advocate for others. He expressed excitement about joining the Commission and addressing renters' problems. He also emphasized the importance of practical

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, 600 4th Ave, 4th Floor; PO Box 94649 Seattle, WA 98124-4649
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solutions and bringing voices to the right spaces and expressed readiness to learn and adapt to the new environment.

Membership and Public Participation:

- Zach differentiated between public members and Commission applicants.
- Some applicants, including Tavo and Julie, submitted their applications.
- More interviews were planned. Public members and observers were welcomed.
- Tae expressed a preference for observing during this meeting and potentially asking questions later based on their experience.

Key Points from the Meeting:

- Kate suggests splitting the letter into two parts, one addressing the Commission's seriousness and the other dealing with policy and budget issues.
- Commissioners discuss the need to reduce the time for approving someone after the shipping council and mention a budget request for two positions.
- There's a proposal for an interdepartmental workgroup related to tenant issues, focusing on budget actions and potential fund allocation.
- Kate suggests involving tenant organizers in the workgroup, and there's a discussion about whether it should be housed in the Office of Housing.
- Kim mentions the need for proper justification when requesting additional resources and emphasizes the importance of enforceable laws.
- Commissioners discuss the allocation of funds and how it could be used for research, tenant outreach, and focus groups.
- Kate suggests specifying the purpose and justifications for the allocated funds in the letter.
- Commissioners discuss the involvement of the Renters Commission in the workgroup and suggest getting participants from previously applied individuals.
- The conversation touches on the need to address gaps in tenant rights enforcement and to make the city government more efficient.
- There's a proposal to request funds for both the interdepartmental workgroup and tenant research separately to make the letter more specific.
- Commissioners mention the need to include a timeline and a detailed report with budget allocation in the letter.
- The conversation highlights the importance of sharp, focused letters and the need for a follow-up meeting.
- Commissioners consider involving the Renters Commission and discuss the roles of different city offices and central staff in the process.
- Kate mentions the city's previous focus on employment laws and Labor Standards as a model for addressing tenant rights.



- Atif raises questions about the need for gathering more data on tenant demographics and the existing evidence of high demand for improved tenant rights enforcement.
- The discussion involves various aspects related to renters' rights and issues in a city.
- Commissioners want to frame the need for renters' rights relative to what other cities are doing successfully.
- Commissioners discuss the need for surveys or studies to understand the concerns of renters in the city.
- There's a focus on engaging renters and getting their input on issues.
- Commissioners talk about allocating funds for outreach, including cultural competency training and translation services.
- The group is considering sending two letters to the City Council, one related to budget priorities and the other about improving accessibility for renters.
- The budget letters need to be completed soon and submitted to the City Council.
- There's a need to report an issue with the renters' commission's Twitter account to gain control over it.
- Commissioners discuss the importance of setting up the renters' commission for success in addressing renters' concerns.

Demand for Funding:

- Atif raised the question about the goal of the letter being to prove the demand for funding. They discussed the evidence of demand, such as tenant complaints, data, and surveys.

Request for Additional Funding:

- Commissioners discussed the need for additional funding to support the efforts of the Renters Commission. They identified two main areas where additional funds are needed:
 - \$10,000 for Outreach and Engagement: The commission intends to allocate \$10,000 for ongoing community outreach, especially for engaging renters without barriers. This may include activities like surveys, focus groups, and community meetings. The goal is to gather input and feedback from a diverse range of renters.
 - \$30,000 for Cultural Competency Training: Some of the participants discussed the importance of cultural competency training for outreach efforts. The idea is to allocate \$30,000 to ensure that commission members and staff are well-equipped to engage with a diverse community and understand different cultural perspectives.

Office of Renters Rights and Standards:

- The meeting also involved discussions about the proposed "Office of Renters Rights and Standards." There was a debate on whether the proposed name should be "Office of Renter Housing Rights" or "Office of Renters Rights and Standards." Commissioners acknowledged that this new office would be a valuable resource for renters.

Comparisons to Other Cities:



- Kim discussed the need to compare Seattle's tenant rights and regulations with those in other cities like Vancouver, New York, and Chicago. This comparison could help frame the need for the proposed changes.

Lack of Recent Surveys:

- Atif mentioned that the city hadn't conducted a tenant survey or study since before the pandemic and before the current mayor took office. This raised concerns about the need for updated information.

Suggested Actions:

- The group discussed various actions, including hiring a consultant to study the demographics of the renting population, conducting a new tenant survey, and ensuring accessibility for low to middle-income tenants.

Enabling Tenant Voices:

- There was a consensus on the importance of ensuring tenant voices were heard, and there were suggestions for funding tenant visitation sessions and improving accessibility.

Community Outreach:

- The idea of reaching out to tenants at places like low-income clinics and grocery stores for feedback was discussed.

Funding Requests:

- It was proposed to request \$10,000 for tenant engagement and \$10,000 for cultural competency training and outreach.

Letters to Council:

- Commissioners planned to send two letters to the City Council, one detailing budget priorities and funding requests and another explaining the role of the Office of Renter Rights and its impact.

Timeline for Submitting Budget Letters:

- Commissioners discussed the timeline for submitting the budget letters to the City Council. It was suggested that the letters should be submitted by Friday 13 to allow for submission to the Council by the following Monday to allow council members ample time to consider the requests and potentially make budget amendments. It was also mentioned that clarity and simplicity in the budget requests are essential for effective communication.

Budget Priorities:

- The group discussed the importance of being clear and concise in their budget requests and how these requests align with the needs of the renters in Seattle.