

**SEATTLE RENTERS' COMMISSION  
MINUTES**

Monday, July 6, 2020

6:00 – 7:00 PM

Skype Meeting

Approved September 14, 2020

**Commissioners Present:** Dinah Braccio, Calvin Jones, Marci Taitt-Lamar, Daniela Lopez, Mac McGregor, Regina Owens, ChrisTiana Obey Sumner, Jessica Westgren

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**Commissioners Absent:** Laurie Goff (E)

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**Commission Staff:** Shaquan Smith, Department of Neighborhoods

**Guests:** Mr. James Nelson, author “*Stealing Home*”

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

**Welcome & Housekeeping**

- Ms. Jessica Westgren opened the meeting.
- Ms. Westgren commented that there are no public comments due to the current meeting set-up. She informed the Commission to submit any comments to her via email.
- There was a motion to approve the June 8, 2020 minutes and it was seconded. The Commission voted and the motion was approved.

**Leasing Software and Price Fixing**

- Ms. Westgren introduced Mr. James Nelson. She met Mr. Nelson at Council member Ms. Teresa Mosqueda’s office. Mr. Nelson was researching Artificial Intelligence (AI) leasing software that the landlords have been utilizing to manipulate the housing market.
- Mr. Nelson provided a brief background of himself. He was a banking and finance professional for 40 years with a degree in Economics at BYU. He is currently a commercial banker that does work on financing large multi-family housing projects. Mr. Nelson wrote a book entitled “*Stealing Home*”. The book is all about how property managers all over the country are using AI to raise rent prices beyond the market rate for most Americans. This system of housing is bringing stable, middle-class America to financial vulnerability.
- Mr. Nelson described his extensive studies and research, analyzing and collecting various information and data and concluded that the AI system that property managers and landlords use can collectively control and manipulate the housing rental rates and prices.

- He also noted property managers and landlords were able to share private information about their tenants and can use algorithms that assist them in the decision-making process on who and how much to charge the renters on their property.
- He did a study and research on how this system is being utilized in the housing market in large metropolitan areas like King County.
- The Commissioners asked about how to escalate this information so it can be monitored and reviewed by decision-makers.
- Mr. Nelson suggested that the public should reach out and put pressure on their legislators and the State Attorney General about this information. He noted that he is currently working on proposing three bills to the state legislators to address this issue. He is currently having a conversation with the legislators about these bills and he would like to have the bills advance to the final editing phase.
- He reiterated that this system requires oversight to prevent property managers and landlords from manipulating the prices and taking advantage of uninformed renters.
- He recommended reading his book to be more informed and share the information and explain about this AI system and technology.
- Mr. Nelson commented shared his website address at [www.jamesmartinnelson.com](http://www.jamesmartinnelson.com) for more information about his research.

#### **Commissioner Opportunity to Share (0:58:14)**

- Ms. Obey Sumner asked the Commission if they know of any available resources or processes to find an ADA accessible housing unit. She noted that it has been a challenge going through this process.
- Ms. Westgren asked the Commission to let her know about agenda items that they would like to discuss for the August meeting. Mr. Smith added that Commission can begin discussing non-COVID related issues.

#### **Adjourn**

- No further business being held before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.