



Land Use & Environment Committee

Update on Rental Housing Process

Agenda Date: 12/16/2021
Agenda Item Number: 6.A
File Number:21-1195

Type: discussion **Version:** 1 **Status:** Filed

Title

Update on Rental Housing Process

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Discussion only. No action requested.

City Manager Recommendation:

Hold a discussion on the rental housing public engagement process and direct staff to proceed with public engagement, along with provide any guidance

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive an update and discuss peer city research, initial stakeholder outreach, and a framework for public engagement on potential rental housing code solutions.

Staff Contact:

Christa Lenssen, Housing Program Specialist, 360.570.3762

Presenter(s):

Christa Lenssen, Housing Program Specialist
Jason Robertson, J. Robertson & Co.

Background and Analysis:

One of six strategies for meeting Olympia's housing needs identified in the Housing Action Plan is to Make it Easier for Households to Access Housing and Stay Housed. One proposed action related to this strategy is *2.a. Identify and implement appropriate tenant protections that improve household stability.*

Staff has completed research on various peer city approaches to rental housing policies, applicable State statutes, and recent changes to the State Residential Landlord-Tenant Act. (Staff presented the Committee a summary of recent changes to the Act in May 2021.) The City has also contracted consultant Jason Robertson to plan and implement public engagement to identify potential solutions and unintended consequences to code options.

In September and October 2021, staff along with consultant Jason Robertson completed:

- Several one-on-one stakeholder interviews with tenant advocates, nonprofit housing providers, property management companies, small landlords, and other third party governmental or nonprofit service providers who interact with both landlords and tenants.
- Interviews with several peer cities who have implemented various renter protections. These initial interviews provided an opportunity to test potential policy proposals, learn about current challenges in the rental housing market, gather any new policy options or ideas, and learn from the experiences of other cities.

Lessons learned have been compiled into an attached briefing for Council's review. Many stakeholder conversations included discussion of the need for more affordable housing, due to rising rents. The City is pursuing actions to increase affordable housing stock, which is outside the scope of this work, but has been referenced in the briefing and will be referenced in public engagement.

At the meeting, staff and consultant Jason Robertson will present lessons learned from peer cities who have implemented various renter protections, initial feedback from one-on-one stakeholder conversations, and proposed next steps for public engagement to narrow policy options. Staff and Mr. Robertson will present a proposed focus group structure (see attached) and seek additional input from Council for public engagement.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Potential changes to Olympia Municipal Code's Rental Housing Code (OMC 5.82) are a topic of significant interest to renters and rental housing owners/operators within the city and around Thurston County. Any work on this topic will draw a great deal of local and regional attention and public engagement. Both the statewide and City of Olympia's eviction moratoriums have recently expired, creating renewed interest in stabilizing rental housing.

City of Tumwater staff have recently been directed to review and evaluate potential rental housing codes for consideration by Tumwater City Council. Many rental housing owners may operate in both Olympia and Tumwater, so there will be significant community interest as well as potential opportunities for collaboration and alignment of code language. Staff from both City of Olympia and Tumwater have been in contact and will update each other on progress.

Options:

1. Following the discussion, direct staff to proceed with public engagement, along with provide any guidance.
2. Following the discussion, request staff return to the committee with additional information before proceeding with public engagement.
3. Continue the discussion at another time.

Financial Impact:

\$50,000 was previously budgeted and the City contracted Consultant Jason Robertson to support focus groups and other public engagement.

Attachments:

Rental Housing Solutions Brief

Type: discussion **Version:** 1 **Status:** Filed

Proposed Rental Housing Solutions Focus Group Structure
Summary of Recent Statewide Landlord-Tenant Law Updates