



Land Use & Environment Committee

Vulnerable Renter Protections Discussion

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Title

Vulnerable Renter Protections Discussion

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Discuss potential vulnerable rental regulations and provide staff with feedback and direction.

Report

Issue:

Whether to discuss vulnerable renter regulations that would provide renters with more advance notice for rent increases and additional notice for no cause evictions.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

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Background and Analysis:

Rental vacancy rates are at a historic low and rental rates continue to increase, putting ever greater pressure on vulnerable renters. According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2016 **Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis (HMA)**, "Rental market rental housing market conditions in the HMA currently are slightly tight, with an overall vacancy rate of 5.0 percent, down from 7.0 percent in April 2010. The apartment market is tight, with an apartment vacancy rate of 2.6 percent in September 2016 (Dupre+Scott Apartment Advisors). During the forecast period, demand is expected for 1,750 new rental units. The 610 units currently under construction will satisfy some of the forecast demand." There is no reason to believe that this situation has lessened over the past two years.

According to the Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH), the City of Olympia is now a majority renter community. People who rent are often our most vulnerable citizens and rent often consumes a

disproportionate amount of their household income. The AFH reports that 57 percent of survey respondents were paying more than 30 percent of their income for rent and are characterized as “rent burdened”.

While direct rent control is not allowed in the State of Washington per RCW 35.21.830, there are several steps that local governments can take to address to support vulnerable renters. These include:

1. Requiring additional time between notice and the effective date for rent increases
2. Requiring additional time between notice and eviction date for no cause rental evictions
3. Enacting rental licensing and inspection programs
4. Enacting source of income protections and enforcement

The State of Washington requires that landlords provide tenants 30 days notice for a rent increase and 20 days notice for no cause evictions when living without a lease or on a month to month basis. The City of Vancouver, Washington adopted regulations that increase that time to 45 days for rent increases and 60 days for no cause evictions. The City of Seattle requires a 30 day notice for any increase in rent less than 10 percent and 60 notice for any increase greater than 10 percent.

In the 2017/2018 legislative session, the State of Washington adopted **HB2578** that prohibits rental discrimination based on the source of income - including social security, veterans benefits or housing vouchers. This legislation also included a mitigation fund that is intended to further encourage landlords to rent to voucher holders.

Tenant claims of discrimination are a civil matter under the HB 2578. Complaints about Unfair Housing Practices are dealt with by the Washington State Human Rights Commission.

The City of Seattle has a Rental Registration and Inspection program. The purpose of the Rental Registration and Inspection Program is to ensure that all rental housing in the City of Seattle is safe and meets basic housing maintenance requirements. Beginning in 2014, all owners of residential housing in Seattle, with certain limited exceptions, must register their properties with the City. A registration is good for five years. No tenant can be evicted from a property if the property is not registered with the City. With a few exceptions, all properties must be inspected at least once every ten years. These inspections can be conducted by City-approved inspectors or by City housing/zoning inspectors.

Neighborhood/Community Interests:

Rental units are located throughout our community and this issue affects all neighborhoods. It is in the interest of all community members that rental units be well managed, maintained and be operated in a way to limit the impacts of changes in rates and to provide sufficient notice to no cause evictions.

Options:

1. Discuss potential vulnerable rental regulations and provide staff with feedback and direction.
2. Discuss potential vulnerable rental regulations and do not provide staff with feedback and direction.
3. Do not discuss potential vulnerable rental regulations.

Financial Impact:

There are no immediate costs anticipated with adoption of vulnerable rental regulations, however, a rental inspection program and enhanced enforcement of source of income discrimination could have associated costs for the City and property owners depending upon how the program was administered.

Attachments:

Draft Assessment of Fair Housing Report
City of Vancouver Eviction Regulations
City of Vancouver Rent Increase Regulations
State of Washington Source of Income Legislation - HB 2578
Human Rights Commission Brochure
Seattle Rental Licensing and Inspection Program