



City Council

Briefing on Renter Protections

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Title

Briefing on Renter Protections

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Report from staff and discussion of renter protections

City Manager Recommendation:

Discussion only. No action requested.

Report

Issue:

The City Council will receive a briefing from staff on renter protections recently considered at several Olympia City Council committees, renter protections adopted in other cities, and protections that tenant advocates brought to Council.

Sarah Nagy from Columbia Legal Services will attend and be available to respond to questions during the discussion about the Residential Landlord Tenant Act or recent renter protections adopted in other cities.

Staff Contact:

Cary Retlin, Community Planning & Development, Housing Manager, 360.570.3956.

Presenter(s):

Cary Retlin, Community Planning & Development

Background and Analysis:

In May, Tumwater staff approached the cities of Olympia and Lacey, as well as Thurston County proposing a cross-jurisdictional approach to exploring renter protections. Tumwater staff shared a long list of tenant protections that served as the beginning of potential changes that could be considered. That list had been ranked by the Tumwater City Council based on impact and ease of adoption. The Olympia Land Use and Environment Committee reviewed that list in August and made their own rankings with many overlaps.

Olympia's General Government Committee considered options for different models of tenant relocation assistance programs in September. Tacoma has a relocation program that could serve as a model for one in Olympia. Relocation assistance provides cash assistance to tenants receiving no-cause evictions to reduce the burden of moving and paying deposits, last month's rent, and other expenses all at once.

Land Use 'Green List'

In October, the Land Use and Environment Committee reviewed and revised a list of the Tumwater protections and ranked them based on what appears most ready for consideration for adoption. Many of those items have been adopted in other cities. Some of those items include:

- Prohibiting online bidding
- Requiring information on rights be provided to tenants
- Prohibitions of specific retaliation*
- Require extended notification timelines (from 60 to 90)
- Requiring notification of days prior to rent increase (from 60 to 90)
- Requiring that move in costs can be paid over time*
- Source of income discrimination update in Olympia Municipal Code 5.80
- Adoption of state Residential Landlord Tenant Act into Olympia Municipal Code

*These items also appear in the proposed ordinance for Olympia from tenant advocates.

Proposed Ordinance for Olympia from Tenant Advocates

In October Washington Community Action Network and local tenants rallied outside city hall and spoke to Council about renter protections. They also proposed renter protections for Olympia that include:

- Limits to security deposits and other fees
- Requiring that deposits and last month's rent can be paid over specific installments
- Limits pet deposits to 25 percent of rent, allows them to be paid in three installments
- Creates penalties for landlords that do not comply with the new code
- Prohibits specific retaliation against tenants

Renter Protections in Other Cities

Bellingham, Vancouver, Tacoma, Federal Way, Seattle and Burien have all approved various renter protections beyond the state's Residential Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18). Here is an overview of some protections in those jurisdictions:

Burien passed a series of renter housing policies in October

Those policies were enacted in Ordinance 716. They included:

- Just Cause Eviction: creating a list of reasons for eviction with a court order.
- Requirements that landlords distribute specific information including rental criteria, relevant law information, and fair housing information.
- Allows deposits fees and last months' rent to be paid in installments.
- Requires that an owner notify the city of a sale of rental units (five or more below 80 percent of median income).
- Created a housing ombuds to investigate disputes, educate tenants and landlords, and assist

in conflict resolution.

- Burien will also launch an education campaign to educate landlords and tenants and produce materials in multiple languages.
- The Council also approved a rental housing inspection program to be managed by a rental housing program coordinator.

Seattle passed a series of renter protections

Seattle has added many renter protections over the last 20 years. Some protections include:

- Income screening must include all sources of income, including Section 8 or other public assistance.
- Landlords are required to accept a pledge from a subsidy program to pay for a tenant's past due or current housing costs.
- Prohibitions on preferred employer programs that offer incentives or different terms to applicants who work for a specific employer.
- Protections for renters with arrest records, conviction records, or criminal history.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Thurston Regional Planning Council estimates that 53 percent of Olympia households are renters.

Options:

N/A - discussion and direction to staff on next steps

Financial Impact:

None at this time. Community meetings on the topic would require staff time. Program elements of renter protections, like relocation assistance, is not currently budgeted in 2020. Staff will discuss that with Finance Committee.

Attachments:

Tumwater City Council Staff Memo
Proposed Ordinance for Olympia from Tenant Advocates