

Norms, Rules and Procedures

Seattle Renters' Commission

Adopted April 1, 2019

Meeting Norms

These norms will guide the work of the Renters' Commission. They are meant to help Commissioners set a tone and an operating standard for the work of the Commission. It is anticipated that Commission members will hold one another accountable for using these norms.

- **Transparency:** The work of the Commission shall be open to the public. We will strive to have timely and open communication among ourselves, and with our appointing authorities.
- **Oppression Exists:** We recognize that Commission members and the constituents we represent have different degrees of power and privilege (based on race, class, gender, ability, position, education, etc.). We will attempt to be conscious of those differences and work to make sure that all members of the group feel comfortable engaging in discussions and feel their voices are heard equitably.
- **Acknowledge Impact:** If something is said that harms, perpetuates oppression, or is disrespectful, even if you do not think it is harmful, acknowledge the impact it had on the person it harmed/disrespected.
- **Respectful Dialogue:** The Commission is comprised of members with a variety of perspectives and interests. Differences of opinion are to be expected and will be respected by the members. Commission discussions among one another and with staff will be characterized by careful deliberation and civility. One person will speak at a time. We will not interrupt one another.
- **Teamwork:** We will operate as a team. We will assume the best of intent with one another, and support one another (prop each other up). No one knows everything – together we know a lot more. Take care of yourself and each other. We have different levels of knowledge and skills regarding the issues that come before the Commission. We understand that some of us may need more education and background on a topic than others.
- **Be Curious:** We will never be afraid to ask questions. We will work to understand one another's different points of view and perspectives. Questions to better understand each member's interests are encouraged.
- **Be Prepared:** Commission members will prepare for every meeting. We will review materials in advance of meetings in order to be fully engaged in Commission discussions. If members cannot attend a meeting it is our responsibility to be informed about the topics discussed by the next meeting.
- **Engage:** We will exercise our democratic rights – we will speak up. We will be proactive and have ideas.
- **Be Present:** Stay focused on the agenda topics and be action oriented. We will not conduct other work or personal activities on phones and devices during Commission meetings. If a phone call has to be conducted during Commission meetings it will take place outside of the room.
- **Be Aware:** Be open and aware of the room. Be self-aware and self-assess. Make space for all Commission members to participate in discussions.
- **Be Yourself, and Challenge Yourself:** Bring your perspectives and passions into each conversation. If you are not knowledgeable about a topic or differing perspective, learn more about it. If you are quiet, work on your speaking skills. If you take up a lot of conversational space, work on your listening skills.
- **Keep it Simple:** Use plain language. Ask for clarification about jargon and acronyms.

- **Remember Our Purpose:** The commission is being asked to provide the diverse voices of renters to the wide variety of issues facing the city. Acknowledge and work to better understand the broad intersectionality of issues and topics that affect renters.

Operational Ground Rules and Procedures for Commission Meetings

Commission Operations

1. Commission meetings shall be open to the public and the press. Meeting materials and agendas will be posted on the Department of Neighborhoods' (DON) public webpage.
2. Commission agendas will include a range of topics, including, but not limited to:
 - Briefings and background presentations
 - Discussion of proposed policies, programs or projects
 - Discussion of Commission positions, and
 - Discussion of Commission operations, including annual work plan, by-laws, and operating ground rules and procedures.
 - Public comment
 - Commissioner opportunity for comment
3. Each meeting agenda shall include time for public comment. Comments will be time limited and enforced by the Co-Chairs. The public comment period is intended to inform and advise the Commission about issues, problems, and concerns and not intended to be a public dialogue between members of the public and the Commission.
4. Meeting materials will be provided to members in advance of each meeting, whenever possible. Any handouts distributed at meetings, that are not provided in advance, will be provided to members who were not present.
5. Meeting minutes will be prepared and distributed to members in a timely manner. The summaries will briefly describe issues discussed, unresolved issues, areas of agreement, decisions, and any follow-up actions. If members have comments or concerns about the summaries, they should be raised at the next Commission meeting.
6. Meetings will start and end on time.
7. In addition to the creation of standing committees referred to in the by-laws, the Commission may from time to time create temporary, ad-hoc committees for specific, time limited projects. These committees will be created by a majority vote of the Commission, will be open to all members to participate, and will report back to the full Commission

Commissioner Participation in Meetings

8. Members are strongly encouraged to attend each meeting. If a member will not be able to attend in person, they may attend via phone, but they cannot ask someone to participate in meetings, or vote in their place as an alternate, or by proxy. Achieving continuity in discussions from one meeting to the next strengthens Commission deliberations.
9. If a Commission member cannot attend a meeting and wishes to make a statement or ask a question regarding an issue that is on the agenda for that meeting, he or she may communicate with the Co-Chairs who will present the written statement/question to the full Group when the issue is being considered at the meeting.

10. Inquiries from the media or others about the Commission's deliberations will be directed to the Co-Chairs, who will speak on behalf of the whole Commission. Any member may speak to the media or other groups or audiences regarding issues being addressed by the Commission, provided s/he speaks only for her or himself.
11. Members agree to bring issues or concerns about Commission deliberations (e.g. positions taken or concerns about process) to the full Commission before raising them with those outside of the Commission.
12. Requests from Commission members for additional information will be reviewed by the staff liaison, provided by DON, who will work to be responsive to the information requests. However, it may not be possible to meet all information requests. The staff liaison will report back to the Commission in a timely fashion if they conclude that information requests cannot be met

Commission Decision Making

13. The Commission intends to be deliberative and thorough before taking any actions. It will be the standard practice of the Commission to introduce and discuss a topic for possible action at one meeting, but not take action until at least the following meeting (some topics may take multiple meetings to resolve). However, the Co-Chairs, or by vote of the majority of the group, this practice may be modified on occasion and allow an action to be taken at the same meeting where a topic is introduced, if the Commission as a whole feels they have sufficient information and there is a great urgency to meet deadlines of decision makers.
14. All decisions made by the Commission shall be made with a majority vote, assuming that a quorum is present. Decisions may be made on a variety of topics, including but not limited to: election of chair(s), creation of standing committees, creation of special ad-hoc committees, adoption of by-laws, adoption of rules and procedures, adoption of an annual work plan, position statements or recommendations, reports from the Commission, approval of written documents representing Commission opinions, etc.
15. Drafts of all documents created by the Commission for distribution to their appointing authorities or others (i.e. letters, position, statements, reports, or other similar documents) will be identified as coming from that Commission, and every member of the Commission shall have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft before it is finalized. Documents representing the views, recommendations or opinions of the Commission shall require a majority vote of the Commission. On occasion, the Commission may choose to include "minority" or "dissenting" points of view in its descriptions of positions or recommendations.
16. Any action taken by the Commission shall follow the following procedure:
 - The Co-Chairs may request a motion, or an individual member may propose a motion
 - A Commission member will make a motion to propose an action or decision
 - Another Commission member will second the motion
 - If there is not a second, the motion will die
 - The Co-Chairs will re-state the motion
 - The full Commission will consider/discuss the motion
 - If there is a proposed amendment to the motion it can be approved by the maker of the original motion as a friendly amendment, and incorporated into the motion
 - If the amendment is not accepted by the maker of the original motion, there is a vote on the proposed amendment. If the amendment is approved, it becomes part of the original motion. If the amendment is not approved, the original motion can proceed to a vote.
 - The Co-Chairs will call for a vote after full discussion of the motion and any proposed amendments
 - Commission members will vote via a show of hands.
 - The Co-Chairs will announce the results of the vote.
 - The motion and voting results will be described in the meeting minutes

Dispute Resolution Process

Step 1: Personal Responsibility

When you have a conflict/disagreement with another member your first step is to contact them and attempt to reconcile said issue in good faith. If a member approaches you to discuss an issue, members agree to be open to the conversation and work towards a resolution in good faith. Note: If an issue arises between a chair and a member then the DON liaison shall be promptly contacted and parties will proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Co-Chair involvement

If members are unable to resolve the conflict, then the committee member shall approach the co-chairs and ask for guidance. Co-chairs can consult with DON liaison if they deem it necessary.

First, co-chairs will org talk with each party separately in order to understand the complete situation. Thereafter, the co-chairs will have a joint meeting with both parties wherein the issue can be discussed. The co-chairs are there as a neutral third party and will refrain from taking sides. At the end of the meeting, parties will draft a document ("Conflict Resolution Agreement") outlining the issue and how they have decided to resolve the issue. All parties will agree to the contents of the document. Co-chairs will proceed to check in with both parties after one month of drafting the agreement, and after six months. If co-chairs deem it necessary, a follow-up meeting will be held wherein the document can be updated.

Step 3: Mediation

If parties are unable to resolve the issue with the help of the co-chairs, or a agreement cannot be reached, then the DON liaison will be contacted and the issue will be escalated to the City's Dispute Resolution Mediator. Upon entering mediation both parties agree and understand that the DRM's decision is final and binding. The commission will support the DRM's findings and decisions. If DRM is unavailable, the co-chairs and DON liaison will find an alternative dispute resolution resource.

Role of the Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs will perform the following roles:

- Work with the staff liaison to set the topics and time frames for each meeting agenda.
- Communicate with Commission members between meetings, as needed, to better understand issues and search for consensus on solutions, or discuss issues regarding process or schedule.
- Review and comment on materials being presented to the Commission in advance of meetings, as needed.
- Open and facilitate the Commission meetings, managing the flow and timing of the topics on the agenda.
- Make sure that all Commission members have opportunities to participate in discussions. The Co-Chairs may use a "progressive stacking" technique – to call on members who have not already spoken.
- Work with Commission members to establish sub-groups or committees, as needed.
- Represent the Commission in other forums, occasionally making presentations, as directed by the Commission or requested by other groups, about the work of the Commission.

Role of the DON Staff Liaison

- Provide meeting facilities for Commission meetings and subcommittee meetings, as needed.
- Produce meeting minutes in a timely manner
- Maintain Commission records

- Coordinate briefings from other City Commissions, City departments, the Seattle Housing Authority Board of Commissioners, and other community groups, associations, including those representing rental property landlords, to gather information, feedback, and recommendations related to the Commission's work.
- Assist with research on specific topics, time permitting.
- Meet with Co-Chairs to assist in coordinating meeting agendas and materials for meetings