



City of Seattle

Seattle Renters' Commission

Sherry Collier & Laurie Rocello Torres, Co-Chairs

June 5, 2018

Members of the Seattle City Council,

The Seattle Renters' Commission urges City Council to pass Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA).

Seattle renters are facing an affordability and displacement crisis. As the city becomes more expensive, renters are forced to prioritize basic living necessities or leave the city. It is no secret that the cost of housing has increased exponentially within our city and our region. Renters are often paying more than a third of their monthly income on rent. Renters are now accustomed to aggressive rental rate increases. This leads to more turn-over as each lease renewal has renters searching for more affordable options. The waitlists for public assistance, Section 8, and Senior Housing are years long. Our renters do not have years to wait. Many of our most vulnerable renters are becoming homeless and some are choosing to leave the city. As long as this Affordability Crisis continues, we will see an increase in our un-housed population. Over 8,000 of our neighbors are unsheltered. The crisis disproportionately affects people of color, low-income families, immigrants, seniors, disabled people, people living with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ community, and other vulnerable populations. Vibrant, culturally important neighborhoods are being gutted by displacement as residents can no longer afford to live in the communities they have built.

The housing crisis is not just occurring in Seattle. This is a regional issue as well. As Seattle becomes increasingly unaffordable, many people look to other areas such as Tacoma, Bellingham, and Everett. This creates a cycle of displacement and increases traffic and congestion as our displaced residents face longer commutes after moving; and this directly affects the cities and neighborhoods adjacent to Seattle. Seattle is not the only city facing a housing crisis, but we now have the power to take an important step to address this issue head-on.

MHA will create 6,000 affordable units that renters in the city desperately need. These 6,000 affordable units mean families are closer to good schools, workers have the opportunity to live close to work, and low-income households can remain in the city we all love, share, and contribute to. As Seattle grows, we need to take steps like MHA to ensure the growth works for all of us.

MHA makes development in Seattle contribute to affordable housing, but we do not want to see that development only occur in areas like the Central Area, the Chinatown-International District, or Rainier Valley. We need to ensure that affluent neighborhoods see more development under MHA and provide access to transit, city parks, healthy food options, and good education opportunities to more of our residents. We want all neighborhoods to participate so that the traditionally lower income neighborhoods may see some relief from the rapid displacement they are experiencing.

Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, 600 4th Ave, 4th Floor; PO Box 94649 Seattle, WA 98124-4649
Maureen Sheehan, Staff Liaison: (206) 684-0302 or Maureen.Sheehan@seattle.gov
seattle.gov/neighborhoods/seattle-renters-commission



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MHA is not a perfect solution, it is only one tool among many. We still have a long way to go to address Seattle's affordability crisis. We urge the City Council to do even more, including:

- Increase the percentage of affordable units required under MHA;
- Mandate the housing provided be affordable indefinitely as opposed to the current requirement of 55 years;
- Create parity between the naturally affordable housing replaced by new construction under MHA;
- Increase outreach and education regarding renters' rights;
- Prevent price gouging in the market;
- Preserve naturally occurring affordable housing units; and
- Require Displacement Impact Studies to be done as a part of the development process

The Seattle Renters' Commission understands that MHA will be examined yearly to see if it is performing up to expectations and that if it is not, then affordability requirements can be edited. We encourage this analysis to be done with a social-racial equity lens.

This is the first step in a long road to making Seattle affordable for all renters, and as such, we support City Council starting this journey with MHA.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Seattle Renters' Commission