

A panoramic view of the Seattle skyline featuring the Space Needle, various skyscrapers, and Mount Rainier in the background under a clear blue sky. The foreground shows some green trees.

An Introduction to SDCI and Renting in Seattle

Photo by John Skelton

Seattle Renter's Commission
Geoff Tallent | November 6, 2017

Presentation

- Brief Overview of the Big Picture
- SDCI's Rental Programs
- What's Next?



Big Picture City Programs for Renters

A number of City departments are involved with renting in Seattle in a variety of ways.

Alphabet Soup – common acronyms

City Departments

SDCI = Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections
SOCR = Seattle Office for Civil Rights
OH = Office of Housing
HSD = Human Services Department
SPU = Seattle Public Utilities
SCL = Seattle City Light
CSC = Customer Support Center(s)
DON = Department of Neighborhoods
OIRA = Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs
CSB = Customer Service Bureau



SDCI

POTA = Property Owner & Tenant Assistance
RRIO = Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance
HBMC = Housing and Building Maintenance Code
TRAO = Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance
RARO = Rental Agreement Regulation Ordinance
JCEO = Just Cause Eviction Ordinance

City Programs

Regulatory

SDCI

- Housing Conditions
- Landlord-tenant issues
- Move in fees
- RRIO

SOCR

- Discrimination (Fair Housing Laws)
- Fair Chance Housing
- First in Time

Resource

Office of Housing

- Affordable Housing Dev.
- Low cost weatherization

HSD (Grants)

- Tenant Counseling
- Legal Aid
- Outreach

Utilities (City Light & SPU)

- Utility Discounts
- Lightbulbs, Toilets, etc

Support

Customer Service Center

- Public gateway to City
- Referrals

DON

- Citywide outreach
- Community Liaisons

OIRA

- Expertise on working with immigrant and refugee communities
- Ethnic media outreach

SDCI Rental Programs



SDCI Inspections

- Respond to renter and neighbor complaints
- Housing Building Maintenance Code (HBMC)
 - 30 pages of detailed requirements for “habitable” buildings
- Land Use and zoning codes
 - Unpermitted units
 - Units not allowed by the zoning
- Team of about 14 inspectors who also deal with other code issues – permits, tree ordinance, light and glare, junk storage
- Investigated 479 rental housing complaints in 2016



POTA – Property Owner /Tenant Assistance

- Just Cause Eviction Ordinance
- Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance
 - Prohibited Acts by Owners
- Rental Agreement Regulation Ordinance
 - Condo/Co-op Conversion Ordinance
 - Mobile Home Park Ordinance

Just Cause Eviction

- Applies to month to month tenancies in Seattle
- 18 just cause reasons to terminate a tenancy
- Procedural requirements for notice and service of notice

EXAMPLES OF COMMON JUST CAUSE REASONS

- Failure to pay rent after a three day notice
- Habitual failure to pay rent in a timely manner (four or more three day pay or vacate notices in twelve months)
- Failure to comply with a ten day notice
- Habitual failure to comply (three or more ten day notices in twelve months)
- Owner wishes to occupy (ninety day notice)

Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance

- Applies to tenants displaced by demolition, substantial rehab, change of use, removal of use restriction
- Property owner/developer must apply for a tenant relocation license.
- Licensing process takes approximately 6 months from application to termination of tenancy.
- Low-income tenants receive \$3,658.00 in relocation assistance. The City of Seattle pays 50%.
- Rent increases of 10% or more may be investigated for avoidance of TRA0 if tenants believe the increase is intended to displace for development purposes.

Prohibited Acts

- Changing locks
- Shutting off utilities
- Illegal entry (entering without notice and consent unless there is an emergency)
- Retaliation against a tenant asserting their rights
- Preventing a tenant organizing or communicating about building issues with other tenants
- Increasing housing costs without advance written notice. 30 days for increases less than 10% and 60 days for increases 10% or more.
- Notices of increase must provide information about where tenants can find out about their rights.

Rental Agreement Regulation Ordinance

- Property owner must provide a copy of Information for Tenants at beginning and renewal of rental agreement and when updates by the City have been made.

MOVE-IN COSTS

- Fees can only be charged for cleaning and screening and cannot exceed 10% of one month's rent
- Security/damage deposit and fees combined cannot exceed one month's rent
- Pet deposits cannot exceed 25% of one month's rent per pet. Assistance animals are not considered pets.
- Tenants may elect to pay deposit, fees and last month's rent in installment payments depending on the length of tenancy or by mutual agreement with the landlord.
- Property owners must follow procedural requirements in the collection and refund of security/damage deposits.

RRIO – Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance

- Program started in 2014
- Rental properties must be registered with the City
- 30,000 properties containing 150,000 plus units
- Properties are randomly selected for inspection every 5 – 10 years
- Inspections are done by City inspectors or City-qualified private inspectors. About 4,000/yr
- Inspections follow a checklist with key safety and maintenance items
- If problems are found on a multi-unit property, the City can require additional inspections



Outreach

- On track for over 24 outreach events in 2017
 - Landlord workshops
 - Renter workshops
 - Immigrant and refugee community centers
 - Service provider training
- Landlord email newsletter
 - Approx. quarterly to 19,000 email addresses
- Grants to partner organizations
- Ethnic media advertising
- Infographics and web portal (in development)



Renting in Seattle

Council directed SDCI to develop the concept of a 'Landlord/Tenant Resource Center', coordinating across multiple city departments and establishing a new customer focused central resource for all rental related services.

Actions

- Convened a cross-department work group
- Inventoried existing City programs
- Consulted with stakeholders
- Prepared a race and social justice analysis
- Proposal submitted to Council
- Proposal incorporated into the Mayor's 2018 budget



City of Seattle

Edward B. Murray, Mayor

Department of Construction and Inspections

Nathan Torgelson, Director

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Seattle City Council
From: Nathan Torgelson, Director
Date: May 23, 2017
Subject: Tenant Landlord Resource Center Proposal – Response to SLI 144-1-A-1

Summary: This proposal for a Tenant Landlord Resource Center is submitted in response to SLI 144-1-A-1, adopted with the 2017 Budget.

The Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI), together with the Office of Housing (OH), the Department of Neighborhoods (DON), the Human Services Department (HSD), the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA), the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Customer Service Bureau (CSB), propose a tenant landlord resource center concept organized around the following central ideas:

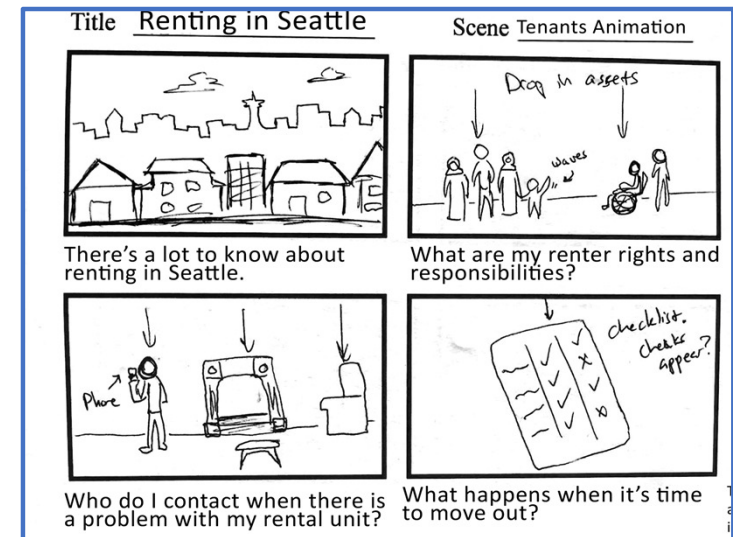
- a single public facing point of entry for both web and phone;
- improved information and materials;
- taking information and services out into the community through sustained outreach and partnerships;
- enhanced coordination between departments; and
- to the extent possible, leverage existing City resources and build on current work.

Proposal

- Renting in Seattle web portal
- Single phone number for information and services
- Sustained, coordinated outreach
- Increased access for marginalized and traditionally underserved communities, particularly communities of color and immigrant and refugees
- Improved informational materials
- Enhanced and continued coordination between departments

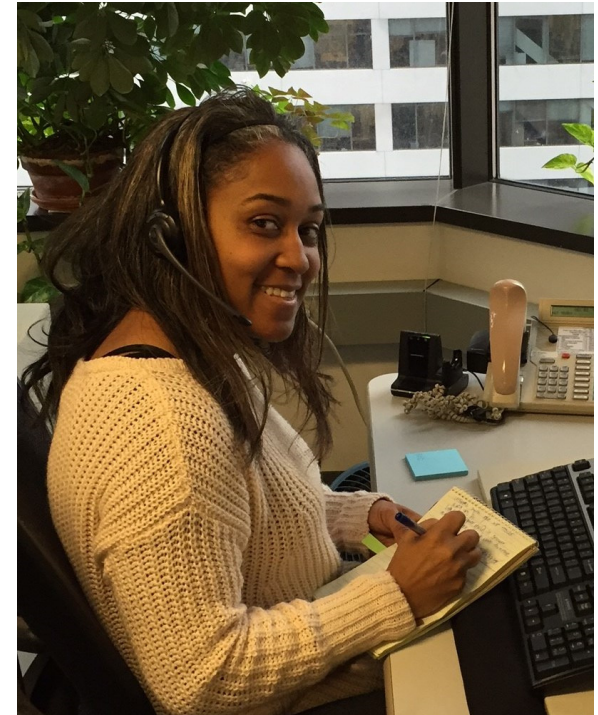
Work in Progress

- Creating “User Story” based materials
 - Moving in
 - Being a Renter
 - Moving Out
- Infographics in development
- Web portal in development
- “PSA” oriented animated videos in development
- Enhanced coordination between multiple departments, joint training and community outreach events



What Next?

- Launch of renters portal (end of 2017)
- Activate single phone number
- Infographics finalized and translated
- Video finalized and narrated in several languages
- Media campaign organized around launch
- “Information for Tenants” converted to a renters handbook
- Sustained outreach plan
- Sustained department coordination



Questions & Resources

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SDCI Renter Programs -
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