

April 2025 Renters Listening Session Report

With the number of renters now exceeding that of homeowners in the city of Seattle, and with renter protections under threat, it is critical to ensure that renters are prioritized across the policies and systems that affect our housing landscape. In recognition of this growing need, the Seattle Renters', Women's and LGBTQ Commissions co-hosted a listening session in April 2025 to hear directly from renters about current challenges they are facing, as well as to understand what policies and resources would best support renters. Approximately 35 renters attended and provided public comment. This report shares key themes that emerged from the public discussion.

Living Conditions & Maintenance Issues

Renters expressed facing substandard living conditions, including inadequate cleanliness at the time of move-in, constant lighting issues, mold, non-functional heating systems, and cockroach infestations. After reporting maintenance issues, tenants frequently had to wait months before these problems were resolved. Renters urged for increased landlord responsiveness and accountability when it comes to providing habitable and safe housing.

Affordability Barriers

Many renters cited affordability as a significant obstacle to finding and maintaining stable housing. The dramatic increase in rental costs year-over-year, excessive income requirements (proof of monthly income that is three times the amount of rent), and requiring upfront payment of a security deposit, first month's rent, and last month's rent prevent renters - especially those that are low-income or marginalized - from accessing housing. Tenants advocated for rent stabilization, equitable income requirements, and more flexible deposit payment structures to mitigate affordability barriers.

Tenant-Landlord Relations

A recurring issue was renters' fear of speaking out due to potential retaliation, especially regarding lease renewals or needed accommodations. Despite legal protections, enforcement is often limited or inaccessible. Furthermore, corporate landlords and out-of-state property owners were described as unresponsive and difficult to reach. This detachment led to neglect and poor renter relations. One attendee recommended creating non-adversarial forums to promote transparent and fair communication and to restore a sense of goodwill between landlords and tenants.

Tenant Protections

Speakers strongly advocated for the maintenance of just-cause eviction rules and the \$10 late fee cap, citing that these policies have provided critical relief during emergencies and prevented individuals from facing homelessness.

Structural Reform

Attendees emphasized that renter experiences reflect broader systemic issues. There were calls for policies that shift the rental housing model from profit-maximization toward community stability, long-term tenancy, and equity. Others highlighted the potential for vacancy taxes to

incentivize property usage, increase housing supply, and generate funding to address the housing crisis.

Public Awareness & Tenant Resources

Several renters expressed appreciation for existing city resources like the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI) complaint system and database. However, they also urged the city to better publicize these tools and integrate them into tenant education and orientation materials.

Consistent and direct engagement with renters is requisite to shaping a city that justly houses all of its residents. This report will be shared with Seattle City Council in an effort to advocate for legislation that sustains existing and beneficial policies, as well as reformative legislation that addresses these key renter challenges.