

# SEATTLE NEEDS RENT CONTROL



Despite being the construction crane capital of the nation four years running, Seattle is reeling under an unprecedented affordable housing and homelessness crisis. Rents in Seattle have soared 69% since 2010, and 155% since 1998. With renters accounting for nearly half of Seattleites, the sky-high rents have meant thousands of working families have been pushed out of their rental homes, in many cases out of the city altogether. Forty six percent of the city's renters are currently rent-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their income in rent. Increasingly, our community members are also being forced into homelessness, with high rents being one of the key reasons.

The for-profit housing market has failed us. Unfortunately, the majority of the city's politicians have shown little courage and seriousness in addressing the crisis. **We need a bold and comprehensive approach: a massive expansion of social housing (publicly-owned affordable housing) funded by taxing Amazon and other big businesses, citywide rent control without corporate loopholes, and a full renters bill of rights.**

## Who is responsible for the statewide ban on Rent Control

In response to grassroots organizing on rent control in the 1970s, the real estate lobby, with the loyalty of both the Democratic and Republican parties, succeeded in passing a statewide ban on rent control in 1981, which banned cities like Seattle from carrying out rent control.

“No city or town of any class may enact, maintain, or enforce ordinances or other provisions which regulate the amount of rent to be charged” - [RCW 32.21.830](#)

The Democratic Party currently has a majority in both the State House and Senate, along with the Governor's mansion. Yet, they did not even propose to lift the ban on rent control this legislative session. There is nothing blocking the state government from lifting that ban today, except that the Democratic establishment is beholden to corporate real estate interests.

## How we can win rent control in Seattle

We cannot wait for the Democratic politicians in Olympia to act. Building a fighting movement to win rent control in Seattle - effective the moment the state ban is repealed - will put immense pressure on the Democrats in Olympia to repeal the ban. They will no longer be able to pass the buck. This will also clarify what our movement means by “rent control.” But we will need to build a serious, fighting movement.

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## Proposed Rent Control policy - free of corporate loopholes - for Seattle

<b>Maximum Rent Increase</b>	Rent may increase no more than inflation (increase in the Consumer Price Index) - on average 2.3% per year over the last decade.
<b>Effective Date</b>	Effective the moment the statewide ban is ended.
<b>Who is Covered</b>	All residential rental homes are covered, regardless of type of home and date of construction (prevents corporate loophole.)
<b>No 'Vacancy Decontrol'</b>	Rental homes will remain rent-controlled in between tenants, even if a tenant vacates of their own volition (prevents corporate loophole.)
<b>One-to-One Replacement</b>	Redevelopment must replace demolished homes at rent-controlled rates.

### Next steps to build a fighting movement to win

Our council office will discuss and get feedback on this rent control policy with renters rights activists, working people, and labor unions this spring to build for a housing summit in July. This summer our movement will introduce this Rent Control Ordinance and the Economic Evictions Assistance Ordinance (which will help renters economically evicted until the rent control ban is overturned) together. We are tired of excuses from Seattle's establishment Democrats!

But winning the economic evictions assistance ordinance, not to mention the rent control ordinance, will require a powerful movement to win against what will inevitably be a vicious pushback from the corporate real estate lobby, aided by many politicians in City Hall. We will need determined, mass actions to change the balance of power in favor of renters to win this.

After our movement wins these policies in Seattle, the goal is to build mass protests for the next session of the legislature in Olympia to make it clear that working people are not willing to accept continued inaction on the severe affordable housing crisis, and demand serious solutions, not lip service.

### Growing Momentum for Rent Control

Under pressure from our growing renters rights movement and our council office, the 2015 Seattle City Council unanimously passed [Resolution 31620](#), demanding Olympia lift the undemocratic ban on rent control. We can also take inspiration from the passage of state rent control in Oregon earlier this year. Colorado renters are now pushing the state legislature to repeal the ban there. If working people in Oregon were able to win rent control, so can we! But we need a rent control law free of loopholes!