

## **Rental Housing Research Stakeholder Group Meeting Minutes**

West Central Community Center, Mason Auditorium

1603 N. Belt Street, Spokane, WA

April 26, 2016, 3:30pm-5:00pm

**Attendees:** Julie Banks, Sarah Tosch, Cathy Gunderson, Cicely Bradley, Alexander Scott, Heleen Dewey, Ron Myers, Mark Webster (for Patty Webster), Ron Toston, Terry Anderson

**Staff:** Suzanne Tresko, Dan Clark, Melissa Wittstruck

**Guests:** 22

### **Stakeholder Introductions**

**Julie Banks, Chair**

### **Ground Rules**

**Suzanne Tresko, Facilitator**

### **Discussion of Survey Options**

Types of Survey Tools Free and Otherwise:

Google Forms (free), Survey Monkey (free or fee), City of Spokane Subscription Survey Tool, Local Professional Research Firms (fee, 5-10k)

**Q.** What about the potential survey contact with neighborhood residents?

**A.** This is an overview of options for short term use survey to use for questions right now, or a larger, statistically significant survey for providing data available in the long range.

**Comment:** Empirical data needed for the report or a statement of the lack of data included in report.

**Comment:** Agreed that there are no numbers available of say evictions, but we do have information from several agencies regarding this community around the issues that have been raised. The data could be useful in the long run.

**Comment:** Feel that it is too late for survey but could conduct one as a follow up. It does seem like it would be needed to gather data to generate solutions.

**Tresko Question:** Do the stakeholders need a survey to prepare a matrix of issues and gaps and report to Community Assembly?

**Q.** What does the CA want to see in the end?

**A.** The graphic of the matrix of issues, policies, programs, and gaps.

**Comment:** Then when the matrix is available, that may reveal areas where there is a need for more data that a survey might uncover.

**Comment:** In the absence of comprehensive data, just outline the scope of what we know and don't know, and go to Community Assembly and ask where they want to go next.

### **Neighborhood Stakeholder Presentation by Sarah Tosch (West Central)**

(A copy of the Neighborhood's presentation is available under Project Materials at:

<https://my.spokanecity.org/neighborhoods/community-assembly/subcommittees/>)

- Intro to Spokane Neighborhood Long Term Rental Stakeholder Group
- Characteristics of a Great Neighborhood
- Neighborhoods Represented
- Top Issues Regarding Rental Housing in Spokane Neighborhoods:
  - 1. Negative Impacts of the Poorly Maintained Rental Properties
  - 2. Absentee Landlords
  - 3. Transiency Within Neighborhoods
  - 4. Lack of Legal Protection/Recourses for Neighbors
- Conclusion

### **Questions and Discussion**

**Comment:** Social capital was very important in the neighborhood I lived in to address crime issues. We also called the landlord and wrote them letters about suing them for not addressing their tenants.

**Q.** If recourse is Code Enforcement complaint, why is there a feeling that there is no resolution?

**A.** Code investigates, sends Notice of Violation (NOV) to owner/occupant. Code can ticket, order abatement in some cases. Voluntary compliance is fairly high. Anonymity is possible up to the point when a civil complaint becomes a criminal nuisance case in Superior Court and the citizen must step forward (rare). Notice of resolution to complainant is not available at this time, but a citizen can always call in and ask. Online submission is currently only available for graffiti.

*Editor's Note: For additional information on the issues faced by code enforcement and other city agencies, please review the previous meeting presentations under Public Safety Committee/Project Materials at: <https://my.spokanecity.org/neighborhoods/community-assembly/subcommittees/>*

**Comment:** Well-done presentation. The concern that I have is the lack of tenant participation in neighborhood councils and that councils are only for homeowners. Have the neighborhood councils taken any steps to encourage tenants and make it easier to vote?

**A.** There are different attendance requirements to vote in each neighborhood, that don't always prevent renters from qualifying to vote. Anyone can attend a meeting and provide comment even if they are not yet voting members. There are many ways to participate.

**Comment:** Landlords deal with the structural conditions of the property, not the social capital in the neighborhood necessarily. They have legal constraints around the number of visits they can make to a property.

**A.** But the landlord can cover property maintenance in the lease.

**Comment:** Generally neighborhood councils are very welcoming to participation.

**Comment:** Thinking of the low income housing presentation I remember the Not in My Back Yard (“NIMBY”) discussion, where neighbors resist development that would provide large affordable housing complexes. What do the neighbors here think?

**A.** West Central Neighborhood Council has plenty of this. It seems hard to get people to engage unless there is an issue. Nextdoor seems helpful.

**Comment:** My neighborhood is very NIMBY. However, the American Planning Association characteristics of a Great Neighborhood point out that diversity of mixed uses and income is better for the fabric of the community. I also saw studies that indicate more support for low income development that improve neighborhoods and property values. Low incomes rarely reduce values.

**Comment:** The voucher program was intended to do this – but there are more applicants than vouchers. And it can be difficult to use the vouchers for houses vs apartments.

**Gallery comment:** In my neighborhood we have rentals where people that move out every year – the tenants say the house is uninsulated and they can’t afford to stay there. Can there be a program to insulate?

**Gallery comment:** I am an experienced landlord, and former neighborhood council chair. Bemiss allows voting now after 3 comments in the online Nextdoor community. All landlords want good tenants – we don’t want to give them the 10 day notice to clean up. Statistically tenants move at least every two years. Avista used to give good rebates to landlords and property owners to insulate, but not so much anymore. It is difficult to invest dollars in low income properties.

**A.** SNAP has a program that income-qualifying landlords can use to insulate.

**Gallery comment:** What did the neighborhoods find in your research? Are poorly maintained properties more of an issue with landlords or tenants?

**A.** The presentations we saw in this group seemed to point mostly to landlords. But the research showed problems on both sides. At the Fair Housing conference I listened to the lawyers give both sides of the issues – businesses and residents.

**Comment:** I also struggle as a landlord when we get complaints on dry lawns from the neighbors that know I am the landlord. The grass is cut, but they can’t afford to water – I can’t demand that in a lease.

### **Meeting Wrap Up**

- Suzanne noted that the Tenant stakeholders will present at the next meeting.
- The stakeholders agreed to meet on May 10, 2016, from 5:30pm to 7:00pm for the Tenant Stakeholder presentation.

**Comment:** Alexander Scott expressed concern that comments made about him outside the meetings were inconsistent with the ground rules of the stakeholder process and were derogatory. He encouraged all the stakeholders to come together in good faith and in the spirit of collaboration to work on these issues and have productive discussions.