

Rental Housing Research Stakeholder Group Meeting Minutes

East Central Community Center, Main Conference Room

500 S. Stone Street, Spokane, WA

May 10, 2016, 5:30pm-7:30pm

Stakeholder Introductions

Heather Trautman, Facilitator

Ground Rules

Heather Trautman, Facilitator

- Reviewed ground rules and meeting agenda.

Tenant Stakeholder Presentation

(A copy of the Neighborhood's presentation is available under Public Safety Committee, Project Materials, Meeting Presentations at:

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

- Issue 1: Spokane tenants are rent burdened. Low Income tenants have few housing options.
- Issue 2: Not enough subsidized low income housing in Spokane.
- Issue 3: Eviction and reasonable fear of eviction by tenants.
- Issue 4: Lack of data collection on rental housing and tenant assistance in Spokane.
- Issue 5: Substandard housing is a health hazard for the tenants and neighbors (Spokane Regional Health District presentation).
- Issue 6: Substandard rental housing is costly for all Spokane residents, including tenants.
- Issue 7: Healthy and stable housing is good for tenants, landlords, and neighborhoods.
- Resource 1: Resources to assist tenants in Spokane are scarce, limited, or nonexistent.
- Resource 2: Landlord Tenant Act regulates rental property in Spokane.
- Resource 3: City of Spokane Code Enforcement, Building Department, SPD, Fire Department, Spokane Regional Health District.
- Gaps in Resources to Address Issues.
- Recommendations.

Questions and Discussion

Comment: Regarding the issue of 20 day no cause evictions addressed in the presentation, 20 day evictions only apply in cases where there is no lease.

Q. What percent of complaints at NW Justice Project are due to dilapidated housing?

A. I'm not speaking as an employee of NW Justice Project, just as myself. There are many calls regarding this issue but they are referred to the CLEAR (Coordinated Legal Education, Advice and Referral) Hotline so we don't track them.

Agencies and nonprofits typically don't track calls or data outside the scope of their work.

Q. When there is an opportunity to build low income housing, neighborhoods often are opposed. Do you have a thought or opinion on the matter?

A. It is for this reason that affordable housing is usually placed in poor neighborhoods without proper access to good schools, shopping, and other amenities.

Noted that the affordable housing committee has created a mayor's taskforce to study issues related to affordability. It will include conversations about the development of vacant properties and examine the affordability of all neighborhoods. It will also examine abandoned properties, foreclosures, nuisance, and vacant properties. The planning department is also looking at ways to overcome barriers to infill such as tiny houses and townhomes. More information on how to get involved in these projects is available on the city's website.

Comment: 20 day notices are as helpful to the tenant as they are to landlords.

Response to comment: The problem with 20 day notices isn't the amount of time, but that the eviction is no cause. Some tenants are fearful that by reporting problems, requesting repairs, or taking any action that might rock the boat, they will be evicted or face other negative consequences. As a result these tenants tend to be silent and live with poor housing conditions.

Comment: Landlords also charge for 20 day notices.

Comment: Great presentation

Q. Is there a way to deal with dilapidation and blight that doesn't include a rental inspection program, or do you consider a rental inspection program the only way to deal with habitability issues?

A. The tenants are open to any solution that would allow a tenant to not be fearful of saying something about poor conditions and would ultimately result in a safe living environment for all tenants. Other cities that have instituted rental inspection programs are now revising their programs because they have found the programs aren't working as well as intended so better options may exist.

Comment: (1) The Landlord Tenant Act is there for both the landlords and tenants. It provides protection for landlords by allowing them to make sure they can collect rent and ensure the property is cared for. But landlords must abide by the lease and can only issue a 20 day notice when the lease is month to month. (2) I have never come across a landlord charging a tenant to issue a notice, but in the event there may be a charge, it is because there is a cost for the landlord to do business.

Comment: There are buildings in downtown Spokane that have nothing in place to protect the tenants. The only action would be to red tag (shut down) the building, which would displace the tenants.

Comment: There is no data on how many leases are month to month, but I have found many poor tenants are month to month.

Q. Are the downtown buildings you mentioned Section 8 (vouchers) or rental assistance.

A. They are rental assistance.

Explained housing programs: Rental assistance is not federally funded. Section 8 housing provides vouchers from HUD. There is also rapid rehousing (such as SNAP or Catholic Charities) which is both locally and federally funded. Certain federal and other programs must comply with Housing Habitability Standards (HHS) or Housing Quality Standards (HQS).

Comment: I was looking for low income housing (market rate) when I moved to Spokane but a lease was not available.

Discussion of Final Report Format

Daniel Clark, Intern, Office of Neighborhood Services

- Reviewed four potential formats to use for a final report to the Community Assembly once the stakeholder group has finished the process of identifying issues, programs/policies/procedures, and gaps.
 - Format 1: List of Recommendations
 - Format 2: List of Recommendations with Pros and Cons
 - Format 3: Preferred Recommendations
 - Format 4: Common Recommendations

Comment: I don't like Format 4 since it divides the groups and it would be better for the group to be unified in its recommendations.

Format 1 would allow all recommendations to be listed. In the bibliography that was passed out at the April 12 meeting, there is a report from a group studying rental housing in Portland that was used a report format similar to Format 1. The report listed and discussed the group's recommendations, followed by an Appendix with research results and other materials. The format of the Portland report may be a good model.

Comment: It may be helpful to pick a format, work on it in each separate stakeholder group and then reconvene to compare.

Comment: Prefer Format 3

Comment: Group has not really agreed on anything so Format 4 might be necessary.

Asked the stakeholders to review the different formats and a decision on which format to use will be made at the next meeting.

Explanation of Data Sources in Landlord Presentation

Alexander Scott, Landlord Stakeholder Group

- In response to questions regarding the landlord budget calculations presented in the landlord stakeholder presentation, Alexander presented the resources he used to arrive at those numbers. The materials are available under Public Safety Committee, Project Materials, Additional Materials at:
<https://my.spokanecity.org/neighborhoods/community-assembly/subcommittees/>

Meeting Wrap Up

- Proposed that at the next meeting, the stakeholders match issues with existing programs, policies, and procedures.
- Asked the stakeholders whether they would like to meet a second time in May or meet the second Tuesday in June.
- The stakeholders agreed to meet on Tuesday, June 14 from 5:30 to 7:00pm, at the West Central Community Center.