

Summary of Renters Commission Staff Liaison meeting with Rental Housing Services - November 16, 2023, Renters Commission Meeting

Background:

The Renters Commission was interested in learning more about Rental Housing's operations and funding. Staff (Kristen Vander Lugt) reached out to Rental Housing Services with the following email:

Hi Lisha,

The Renters Commission would like to advocate for funding for Rental Housing Services to enforce Chapter 105, and as part of that work they would like to learn more about what Rental Housing's needs are and how the department's different operations are funded and staffed. So, they have two requests:

1. *Would staff from Rental Housing be willing to meet with a few commissioners to help the RC learn about what would make sense to advocate for? (Funding a new position, funding additional inspectors, funding a position in another department such as a paralegal, etc.). This would be an informal discussion and would not take place during a public meeting.*
 - *They are also interested in discussing the following:*
 - *Methods that have been successful to motivate landlords to comply with Chapter 105.*
 - *Staff time spent assisting/educating landlords/agents about processes (is there something that staff spends a ton of time explaining, such a record check, that the Renters Commission could assist with creating resources for)*
 - *Any other information that is relevant to help the RC understand the volume of work Rental Housing performs and how it's balanced.*
2. *If possible, can you share the following for the years 2018-2022:*
 - *Number of each type of inspection each year (initial, reinspect, etc.)*
 - *Number of inspectors on staff each year*
 - *Inspection Fee Schedules (if different from the [2022 Fee Schedule](#) from the Rental Housing webpage)*
 - *Approximate staff time spend responding to ELO/Right to Renew complaints and questions.*

Staff from Rental Housing responded and suggested meeting to discuss the questions. Kristen Vander Lugt met with Lisha Turner-Tolbert, the Building and Rental Services Manager on 10/20. Below is a summary of the topics discussed at that meeting:

- **Inspectors/Inspections**
 - There are currently 6 permanent full-time inspectors employed with the city.
 - Rental Housing is currently trying to hire an additional temporary inspector.
 - Inspectors have 6 timeslots each day for inspections
 - One timeslot typically is enough for one single-family house or a 6-unit apartment.
 - The city is expecting ~5,000+ new units over the next ~2 years
 - Rental Housing Services recognizes the volume of inspection work that will create and is planning to scale up staff to accommodate
 - Rental Housing Services plans to request two additional inspectors for the FY2025 budget (bringing the number of inspectors from 6 to 8)
 - Rental Housing Services plans to request two more additional inspectors for the FY2026 budget (bringing the number of inspectors from 6 to 10 over the next two years)
 - Inspectors "pay for themselves" and are not funded from an external source (such as the City's general fund).
 - This means they are funded from revenue that Rental Housing brings in through fees and fines.
 - Rental Housing Services would appreciate the Renters Commissions support in trying to get the additional inspector positions approved

Summary of Renters Commission Staff Liaison meeting with Rental Housing Services - November 16, 2023, Renters Commission Meeting

- **Additional Staff**
 - Rental Housing is willing to create a temporary position that primarily deals with responding to ELO and Right to Renew in the FY2025 budget (June 2024)
 - The position would start as temporary to demonstrate need for a permanent position
 - Rental Housing Services would appreciate the Renters Commissions support in trying to get this position approved
- **Compliance**
 - Longer-term landlords are typically more time consuming/challenging to bring into compliance
 - Posting a site is a very effective way to achieve compliance
 - Writing tickets is also effective but can be time consuming. For example, if an inspector has to go to court for a ticket, then they aren't working in the field inspecting units or responding to complaints
 - No compliance issues with the recent carbon monoxide requirement
- **Misc.**
 - Rental Housing Services staff is willing to meet formally or informally to brainstorm or answer questions about policies/processes