



City of San Antonio

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Title: Briefing on the Proposed Creation of a Renters' Commission [Verónica R. Soto, Director, Neighborhood and Housing Services]

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Attachments:

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
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DEPARTMENT: Neighborhood and Housing Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Verónica R. Soto, FAICP, Neighborhood and Housing Services Department Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City wide

SUBJECT: Briefing on the Proposed Creation of a Renters' Commission

SUMMARY:

Discussion of options for establishing a Renters' Commission

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

A Council Consideration Request (CCR) was sponsored by Councilmember Treviño on June 19, 2019 requesting a discussion of the creation of a Renters' Commission. The proposed Commission would advise the City Council on matters related to rental housing including housing production, accessibility, renter laws/rights, public health and safety, and other matters that impact renters and landlords. The Governance Committee referred the CCR to the Culture & Neighborhood Services Committee (CNSC) on January 15, 2020. Public engagement previously scheduled for March 2020 was delayed due to the pandemic.

Neighborhood & Housing Services Department (NHSD) staff conducted a survey and held focus groups in fall 2020 to gain insight from the community about the perceived scope of work, preferred composition, and desire for a Renters' Commission. Councilmembers were given the opportunity to review the survey prior to its September 14th launch date through SA Speak Up. The survey netted over 3,600 responses from nearly 1,700 current renters, over 350 property owners and operators, and many other community members including homeowners and people experiencing homelessness. Five renters and seven property owners/managers participated in focus groups. Staff presented findings from this outreach to CNSC on November 2, 2020.

Key takeaways from the survey and focus group outreach include:

- Most respondents preferred a commission comprised of both renters and property owners/managers. Diverse backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and rental housing types were strongly preferred.
- Renters felt that the Commission could be a space for education for both renters and landlords, and it could be a forum for mediating issues in the community, especially regarding rising rents.
- Property owners and managers felt that a renters' commission could be redundant given that the City already has a Housing Commission. However, they did agree that the Commission could be a space for education for both parties.
- Property owners and managers who responded to the survey were more than twice as likely than renters to say that they engage with the City frequently.
- Renters who responded to the survey were very likely to report feeling underrepresented and that their issues were unheard at the City. Renters who participated in the focus groups were less likely to report their issues were unheard.
- Renters were more evenly distributed across all income categories than property owners/managers. However, renters were also more likely than property owners/managers to report annual incomes below \$ 60% AMI for a family of three. 17% of reported annual income of less than 30% AMI for a family of three.

ISSUE:

During the November 2 CNSC meeting, Committee members directed staff to prepare recommendations for the establishment of a renters' commission for discussion at the December meeting. Staff have incorporated feedback from community members and councilmembers and considered departmental capacity in crafting these recommendations.

Staff have prepared the following options for Committee consideration:

- 1) Expand the Housing Commission to include a Renter-focused sub-committee

2) Establish a stand-alone Renters' Commission

Option One: Expand the Housing Commission with Renter-focused sub-committee

The Committee could recommend that Council expand the role of the existing Housing Commission rather than establish a new Commission. The Housing Commission is currently a nine-member citizen advisory board. The Commission consists of 5 at-large positions and 4 ex-officio positions for the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA), San Antonio Housing Trust (SAHT), VIA Metropolitan Transit, and the Economic Development Foundation. Three of the current members are renters. The Commission meets monthly and has two sub-committees; one focused on outreach which includes community members and another focused on setting the Commission's agenda.

The Housing Commission's charge is to guide the implementation of San Antonio's Housing Policy Framework (HPF) recommendations and engage the public. At the Commission's January 2020 retreat, Commissioners set the following goals for themselves:

- Oversee the implementation of the Housing Policy Framework recommendations: Develop a Coordinated Housing System to include a High Level Executive; Increase City Investment in Housing; Increase Affordable Housing Production, Rehabilitation, and Preservation; Protect and Promote Neighborhoods through anti-displacement; Ensure Accountability to the Public by creating a collaborative ecosystem of communication between community, City staff, and public officials
- Implement a holistic and comprehensive anti-displacement strategy
- Engage and educate the public on importance of affordable housing and resources available to prevent and mitigate to include mutual education to occur between City and the communities it serves;
- Cultivate partnerships and leverage cross-sector resources in the coordination and delivery of housing;
- Focus on Equity and Advocate for additional funding for affordable housing to expand new affordable housing, anti-displacement, and increased affordable housing with deeper affordability targets of 30/50/60% AMI;
- Define Outcomes and People-Focused metrics to stay on track for short-term and long-term goals while implementing best practices and engaging impacted communities in evaluation of success.

The Commission could establish a sub-committee to work specifically on renters' issues that may require more targeted and frequent meetings. The sub-committee could include additional individuals that represent renters, property owners, and/or property managers added as a sub-committee.

This option would increase renters' participation in the existing commission charged with implementing the City's Housing Policy Framework which seeks to address issues for all renters and homeowners in the City.

Option Two: Establish a stand-alone Renters' Commission

The Committee could consider establishing a stand-alone Renter's Commission that would advise the Housing

Commission, Council, and Mayor. This Commission would include a mix of renters and landlords and would be staffed by NHSD.

Based on input from community members, the charge of this proposed Commission could include and is not limited to:

- Developing education/outreach campaigns and curriculum for both renters and landlords on roles and responsibilities
- Developing training materials and programs targeting new renters and landlords on fair housing, contract terms, and available programs
- Be a forum for discussion and evaluation of programs geared towards renters such as the Risk Mitigation Program/ Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and Right to Counsel (RTC) program. The Commission would make recommendations to Housing Commission and City Council for consideration
- Consider legislative items for City support to stabilize housing for renters
- Provide input and feedback on housing policy item recommendations, dealing specifically with renter/landlord policy issue

Staff is requesting feedback from the Housing Commission on the proposed structure and makeup of the sub-committee or Commission. The feedback will be considered in the final recommendation to the Culture and Neighborhood Services Council Committee prior to proceed to City Council.

ALTERNATIVES:

This item is for briefing and discussion purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this request at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for briefing and discussion purposes only.