



# City of San Antonio

## Agenda Memorandum

**File Number:**20-7117

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**Agenda Item Number:** 2

**Agenda Date:** 1/7/2021

**In Control:** Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee

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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 and Possible Action 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 with 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 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. Each council district and the Mayor would appoint a member. Meetings would be held monthly. Recommendations from this Commission would go to the Housing Commission before going to Council.

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 issues

Community input called for representatives from diverse housing situations and socio-economic backgrounds. This Commission could be as many as 15 members including but not limited to;

- Six Renters. Appointees should have experience in at least one of the following housing situations: using a voucher, renting from a large multi-family property, a small multi-family property, a single-family home, a housing authority property, or a mobile living community.
- Four Property Owners/Managers including;
  - 1 small complex landlord
  - 1 large complex landlord
  - 1 landlord of a mobile living community
  - Owner of single-family rental properties
- Three Housing Service Organization representatives
  - 1 representative from an organization providing emergency rental/relocation assistance
  - 1 representative from an organization on-site supportive housing services
  - 1 representative from legal services organization working to assist residents facing eviction

- Two Housing Advocacy Organizations
  - 1 representative from a local renters' advocacy group such as Texas Housers
  - 1 representative from a trade association for landlords such as the San Antonio Apartment Association

This option would provide a distinct space for the discussion of renters' issues.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

It is also an option for Committee members to choose some combination of the above two options.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

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

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff will present the Committee's recommendation to the Housing Commission for additional input before returning for final recommendation to Council for further consideration.