



Portland Housing Bureau

Mayor Ted Wheeler • Director Shannon Callahan

Rental Services Commission

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Director Shannon Callahan
Portland Housing Bureau
421 SW 6th Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Subject: Rental Services

Director Callahan,

The Rental Services Commission (RSC) has discussed the services provided by the Rental Services Office as well as expanded or new services that could be provided in the future.

It is necessary for any Rental Registration fee to be accompanied by additional services to demonstrate the value being added as a result of a fee. The City's existing rental services provide crucial support across the rental housing relationship, but are not able to meet the substantial need for services among vulnerable populations. As a result the RSC recommends continuing to fund current services and allocating additional funding for an expanded Landlord Training, expanded Culturally-Specific Tenant Assistance, and a Voluntary Mediation program.

The RSC discussed this and other service idea at their February and March meetings. A full breakdown of the RSC's discussions regarding rental services is provided below.

Recommended Services

Following a robust conversation regarding service needs, the RSC identified expanded Landlord Training, expanded Culturally-Specific Tenant Assistance, and a Voluntary Mediation Service as three high need priorities. A summary of additional considerations raised by the RSC is listed below. Not every item of this summary is necessarily supported by every member of the Commission.

Expanded Landlord Training

Logistics

1. The Landlord training should be housed under the Portland Housing Bureau.
2. Training is crucial as a component of education.
3. Mandatory training would be valuable.
 - a. Training should have a periodic mandatory renewal process similar to a food handling license.
 - b. However, mandatory training could be duplicative with professional training and license certification.
 - c. If mandatory, industry groups should be allowed to submit training curriculum to qualify for a waiver from attending a mandatory City training.
 - d. Landlords who are repeatedly violating laws should be required to take more training.
4. The City should identify goal of the training (ie. teach ORS 90, different organizations as resources) then build the program accordingly.
5. It will take time to prepare the curriculum, trainers, etc.
 - a. It is expensive but crucial to keep training materials current.
6. A certificate or degree for training completion would be helpful.
7. Instructors should be paid.
8. Training should be taken by participants at least yearly.
9. A high-level Chapter 90 training takes 8-hours. It's necessary to prioritize training items.
10. Tenants are being hurt by lack of Landlord familiarity with relevant laws.
11. It's crucial for public-facing housing provider staff to attend the training.

Format

1. Prioritize accessibility for different learning styles through frequency and mode of training.
2. Doing training for landlords and tenants together could be challenging.
3. Applicants should have an opportunity to ask questions about the consequences of potential actions.
4. Effective training needs to avoid information overload.
5. Participants should first attend a longer training. Supplemental or refresher trainings could be shorter.
 - a. Shorter training modules allow for better information retention
 - b. All training topics desired cannot fit in a one-day training
6. Entertainment is key for information retention.
7. There should be multiple modular trainings that are topic specific
 - a. The City should start by with building 3-5 components into modules.
 - b. Taped modules could available online.
8. Online training should use cutting edge technology (ie. pausing the training if other windows are opened, frequent questions to comprehension)
9. The training should be modeled after real estate education process.
10. Industry groups provides a free new hire training if participants first take a Fair Housing course, creating a similar model should be explored.

Content

1. Fair Housing should be a discrete item to avoid being overlooked.
 - a. Fair Housing testing result should be presented.
 - b. Include the City's obligations regarding Fair Housing as a CDBG recipient
2. Landlords should be taking Implicit Bias training multiple times.
3. Include best practices for Landlords (rent increases, security deposits, safety) "How to have a happy tenant."
4. Include an overview of the For Cause Eviction process.
5. Include resources to tenants and housing providers to understand rights and obligations.
6. Present the State of Housing Report.
7. Present City commitments including an equity lens other racial equity statements, and Housing First.
8. Educate tenants about their rights.
9. Include livability for both Landlords and Tenants.
10. Prioritize Chapter 90, and safety.

Expanded Culturally-Specific Tenant Assistance

1. A partnership model with culturally-specific model is very effective at bridging barriers.
 - a. Partnered service provision reduces fear of reporting or engaging.
2. There is systemic underreporting from certain communities.
3. Assistance to Tenants should be accessible.
4. Knowledge of laws and relevant programs is important.
5. This service needs to be funded to meet the need as the existing program is only funded at a pilot-level.
6. Know your rights information and training should be offered in multiple languages.
7. There is a need for translation and interpretation for rental forms and interactions.
8. Tenant training with culturally specific organizations should be explored.
9. Language barriers compounded with intellectual disabilities create an unaddressed need in service provision.

Voluntary Mediation

1. There should be a focus on ensuring any stipulated agreements are realistic.
2. Mandatory Mediation should consider a number of different items.
 - a. Mediation as alternative to FED process would require a new process for the County court.
 - b. Consider the logistics of court case volume and statutory time requirements.
 - c. If mediation is mandatory, it should be specific to certain notices.
 - d. There are challenges in mandating cases into forced mediation.
3. Persuading voluntary mediation as an option is difficult with severe cases.
4. Rental Services Office mediation should be a way to bypass the FED process.

5. With limited resources, voluntary mediation should identify a target population to serve.
 - a. Mediation should be prioritized for City trained Landlords and Tenants.
 - b. Questions remain about the cost of services and who would be responsible for paying.
6. There is a strong interest in avoiding the court system through conflict resolution.
 - a. Resolving conflicts could reduce FED filings
 - b. Mediation is more appealing in conflict resolution cases.
 - c. Quick timing is necessary for mediation to be effective as an alternative to court process.
7. Mediation should preserve legal rights.
8. As part of mediation, the Rental Services Office should have an investigator who can help with things like letter writing.
 - a. There is also a need for eviction court advocates.
9. Optional mediation dependent on mutual agreement could become a Fair Housing concern.
10. There could be obstacles to mediation without a decision-making landlord representative being present.
11. It is crucial for a program to set limits for scope of mediation.
 - a. Mediation should be a resolution for rent withholding due to habitability concerns.
 - b. Currently, nonpayment of rent leads to court cases to reach stipulated agreement.
 - c. Mediation should provide an alternative path to a stipulated agreement without court.
12. Mechanisms should be created to prevent abuse of service.

Additional Services

In addition to the recommended services, the RSC discussed other possible services that should be considered. A complete list is included below.

Education

- One stop shop for tenants, page of phone numbers/agencies and service, RSO staff to assist high-barrier tenants, refer to know your rights information, broadcast updates and changes to laws, quick response to questions by phone, tracking physically accessible rental units, expand landlord training (online, more frequently), expand tenant protections team (culturally-specific tenant assistance), renter's rights hotline expansion, provide materials around best practices (market rent, wear and tear, roommates, etc.), housing provider hotline, financial education (especially for new renters).

Legal Services

- Meaningful mediation, assistance for low-income landlords, expanded FED Pilot, renter assistance, lawyer on RSO staff, Fair Housing testing and enforcement, culturally-specific fair housing services, housemate mediation.

Social Services

- Investigation and case management, third-party letter writing, reasonable accommodations information and assistance, landlord licensing, mandatory housing inspections, translation services for rental interactions, provide translated common landlord forms and letters, rental market analyses, homelessness diversion, relocation assistance pool for landlord hardship, list of affordable housing & how to apply.

Sincerely,

Katrina Holland
Co-Chair

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Co-Chair