



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:21-4275

Agenda Item Number: 5.

Agenda Date: 6/14/2021

In Control: Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee

DEPARTMENT: Neighborhood and Housing Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Verónica R. Soto, FAICP, Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City wide

SUBJECT:

Briefing and Possible Action on the creation of a sub-committee focused on renters' issues that would report to the Housing Commission.

SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending the creation of a sub-committee focused on renters' issues that would report to the Housing Commission. Staff is also recommending a 7-member sub-committee that includes a mix of renters and property managers. These recommendations support the Mayors Housing Policy Framework and facilitate the establishment of a coordinated housing system. This item was previously scheduled to be presented in February.

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:

- A majority of respondents (61%) 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 all 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 renters reported annual income of less than 30% AMI for a family of three.

A detailed summary of all findings from the survey and focus groups is attached.

Staff recommends the creation of a dedicated space focused on renters' issues. Based on the survey results, focus group feedback, and stakeholder meetings, staff identified two structural options that facilitate such a space. These options were presented at the January 12th Housing Commission meeting:

1. Create a subcommittee of the Housing Commission to address renters' issues.
2. Establish a stand-alone Renters' Commission.

The majority of Housing Commissioners supported the creation of a renters focused sub-committee that would report to the Housing Commission. The majority also agreed that a sub-committee should be majority renters and include landlords and property managers.

The Housing Commission's charge is to guide the implementation of San Antonio's Housing Policy Framework. The Framework is holistic and considers homeownership and rental challenges and opportunities. 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 (EDF.) Three of the five current at-large members are renters. The Commission meets monthly and three sub-committees were recently formally established at their annual retreat in April. One committee is focused on public engagement and outreach and will include community members. The second committee will focus on developing an annual report and dashboard for reporting progress on the housing policy framework, and the third is focused on setting the Commission's agenda for upcoming meetings.

ISSUE:

Staff is recommending the creation of a renters focused sub-committee that would report to the Housing Commission. This recommendation is in alignment with the City's Housing Policy Framework which focuses on the establishment of a Coordinated Housing System.

The proposed sub-committee will focus specifically on renters' issues that may require more targeted and frequent meetings. Based on input from stakeholders, the charge of this subcommittee would be to provide recommendations, input and feedback to the Housing Commission regarding:

- Housing policies that specifically address renter/landlord challenges and opportunities.
- Housing programs like the Risk Mitigation Program (refocused as the Covid-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program as response to pandemic), and Right to Counsel program.
- Education/outreach campaigns and curriculum for both renters and landlords on roles and responsibilities.
- Training materials and programs targeting new renters and landlords on fair housing, contract terms, and available programs.
- Legislative items for City support to stabilize housing for renters.
- Others as identified.

Staff is also recommending a 7-member sub-committee that includes a mix of renters and property managers. Staff recommends that two members of the Housing Commission serve on the sub-committee. One of the Housing Commission members must be the Chair of the sub-committee. The other five members will be appointed by the Housing Commission and will include:

- Three 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.
- Two property managers/owners. Appointees should have experience operating a range of rental properties including those that contain a high number of vouchers, large multi-family properties, small multi-family properties, single-family homes, housing authority properties, or a mobile living communities.

NHSD staff will provide support to the sub-committee to include administrative and legal support. Additional legal support services may be contracted for specific purposes if necessary. Recommendations from the sub-committee would go to the Housing Commission for action before going to the appropriate Council Committee.

If the Culture and Neighborhood Services Council Committee approves staff's recommendation, staff will work with the Housing Commission to develop an appointment process for the sub-committee members and return to the Culture and Neighborhood Services Council Committee in August or September for consideration.

ALTERNATIVES:

Council could change the number and qualifications of appointees of the proposed sub-committee recommendation as well as alter the proposed sub-committee recommendation to have a standalone commission.

FISCAL IMPACT:

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

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff is recommending the creation of a renters focused sub-committee that would report to the Housing Commission. Staff is also recommending a 7-member sub-committee that includes a mix of renters and property owners/managers.

