

City of San Leandro

Housing Protections in San Leandro

Community Meeting 1 (October 10, 2023)

Workshop Topline Summary

The impending expiration of the pandemic-related eviction moratorium, which expired in July 2023, enlivened concerns around the rights of both tenants and housing providers. As a result, the San Leandro City Council requested in July 2023 that the City of San Leandro (City) explore additional housing protections. The City is taking a broad view and considering a new rent control ordinance, tenant anti-harassment, rent registry, and just cause. They are also evaluating existing protections such as the Rent Review Board, Tenant Relocation Ordinance, and State AB 1482.

The community has been invited to participate in constructive dialogue on how to tailor protections to be both feasible and effective. Public input will help the City understand the community's priorities and potential areas of common ground. The City will use public engagement findings to guide the development of a new ordinance(s) and/or enhance existing City and State housing protections.

The City hosted the first of two community meetings on October 10, 2023 in a virtual format. Approximately 70 community members attended. Interpretation was available in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish. Participants were asked to weigh in on their vision for housing in a thriving San Leandro, hopes for housing protections, concerns about housing protections, and advice for the City. Key themes and sentiments expressed during the meeting are summarized below. This workshop summary is not intended to be a transcription.

Affordability

- Many attendees felt that there was a need for more affordable housing in San Leandro, as well as more housing for different income levels, and more housing overall.
- Participants shared a desire to preserve existing affordable housing.
- Participants spoke to the needs of different populations for affordable housing, including seniors, retirees, families, and people who grew up in San Leandro.
- Some attendees shared that people who work in San Leandro should be able to live here, while others expressed feeling that it was not realistic for everyone who works in San Leandro to be able to afford to live in San Leandro.
- Several attendees shared that rents have increased, especially when new owners take over rental properties.
- Some attendees raised concerns for people who are unhoused, and shared that all people should be housed, no one should be experiencing homelessness.
- One participant suggested, to support affordability, the City should provide support for home ownership, such as down payment assistance for renters who want to purchase a home.

Balance

- Several participants expressed the need for balance and fairness in the rules. Some expressed that it should not be assumed that landlords are always right, while others expressed that it should not be assumed that renters are always right.
- Some participants raised concerns that the conversation about housing protections would create or exacerbate conflicts between renters and property owners.

Communication and Process

- Some participants expressed appreciation that the City is seeking input from both landlords and tenants, using professional facilitation, and taking the process seriously.
- One participant shared that the term “housing protections” was biased against landlords.
- Some participants raised the concern that the loudest voices raised will be against housing protections. Others shared concerns that renters may be fearful of retaliation and may hesitate to attend meetings.
- There were several suggestions including additional outreach to tenants with postcard mailings to rental units, conducting diligent research and hearing from all parties, increasing input through surveys, and bringing all stakeholders together.

Data and Research

- There were several disagreements about the facts related to existing housing protections and results of housing protections in nearby cities.
- Some participants suggested that the City should more closely study the impacts of housing protections in neighboring cities and discouraged a “one-size-fits-all” solution.

Education

- Many participants with different views on housing protections agreed that more education is needed for tenants, landlords, and advocates on existing housing protections.
- Several ideas were suggested including neutral counseling on the laws about housing providers' rights and tenants' rights, education of middle and high school students, and accessible posters on tenant and landlord rights.

Enforcement

- Several participants mentioned the City's Rent Review Board, noting that it has not convened in a long time. Some expressed concern that it is biased against tenants because it is chaired by a developer.
- Participants made several suggestions for the structure of a new ordinance, including that it have “teeth” for enforcement, that the City ensure enough staffing and funding to support implementation, and that the language be clear and unambiguous.
- A participant noted that the City's Tenant Relocation Assistance Program has been effective but needs to be revised.

Housing Stock

- Many participants expressed support for additional affordable housing for low-income and moderate-income households. Others expressed support for new housing development in general, including market-rate housing.
- Different ideas were shared for increasing housing stock including, encouraging developers to build more housing, that the City should take over vacant properties like warehouses and convert them to housing, and that developers should not be able to pay a fee instead of building affordable units.
- There was a general consensus that housing should be safe, and of high quality.

Incentives

- While there were many strong opinions both in favor and against new housing protections, there was a general acknowledgement that there are many “good actors” on both the tenant and housing provider sides, and that good behavior should be incentivized.
- Ideas for incentives included tax breaks for homeowners who sell properties to tenants to encourage homeownership among tenants.
- Several participants suggested taking a “more carrot, less stick” approach to housing protections.

Protections for Tenants

- There were differing opinions on the need for more housing protections in San Leandro. Many participants expressed support for new protections for tenants, while many others expressed opposition.
- Many participants expressed support for just cause protections, tenant anti-harassment, and a rent registry. They advocated for more protections for tenants, with fewer exemptions for landlords, and stated that existing protections at the State and County level are not sufficient.
- Several participants shared that rent control would bring more predictability and stability for tenants.

Protections for Housing Providers

- Several participants shared that housing providers need additional housing protections. Ideas included protections from non-payment of rent, property damage, and a fair rate of return. One idea was a way to record tenants found guilty of destroying property.
- Participants raised the issue of the eviction moratorium and shared that it put a lot of financial pressure on housing providers.
- Several attendees expressed that there are misconceptions about landlords' operating costs. They share that there are higher costs, especially for new owners. Costs are increasing for repairs and materials.
- Many attendees spoke about “Mom and Pop” landlords, in contrast with large corporations. One attendee asked that the City define “Mom and Pop” landlords because it has been self-defined by landlords. Another shared a concern that local landlords are being manipulated by big property management firms.

Unintended Consequences

- Some participants raised the issue of unintended consequences of new protections, including discouraging development, discouraging new landlords to enter the market, and prompting landlords to remove units from the rental market due to increased risk.
- Some participants shared that rent control benefits existing renters but hurts new renters because it makes it more difficult for them to find a unit.
- Some participants shared concerns that new housing protections will compel small housing providers to sell their rental properties, resulting in big corporations buying up multi-family units and small family homes.