

City of San Leandro

Housing Protections in San Leandro

Tenant Focus Group (October 23, 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 a series of focus groups with advocates, tenants, housing providers, mobile home park owners, and mobile home park residents. The focus groups were designed to gather input from different groups with a strong interest in housing protections. The tenant focus group was held on October 23, 2023 in an in-person format. Eleven people participated and represented tenants and tenant advocates. Key themes and sentiments are summarized below. This workshop summary is not intended to be a transcription.

Affordability

- Participants expressed the need for improved affordability, sharing that the current caps of 7% or 10% are unsustainable, especially when applied multiple years in a row.
- Participants noted that incomes are not rising at the same rate as rents, and that any increase is challenging for people with fixed incomes, such as seniors relying on Social Security.
- Participants shared concerns about new building owners raising both rents and fees, resulting in less affordability for renters.

Education

- Participants expressed strong interest in more education for tenants on their rights. Suggestions included making information clear and accessible, ensuring information is available in multiple languages, and sending information home with students at local schools to ensure broad reach.

Enforcement

- Participants noted that decisions by the City's Rent Review Board are non-binding, which undermines the effectiveness of the Board.

- Participants expressed concern about the City's capacity to implement and enforce new ordinances, and shared that the City needs a robust housing department with enough staff and funding to be effective.
- One participant suggested that there should be a process for binding arbitration that is located in town, is enforced, and is not chaired by a landlord.

Existing Protections

- Participants expressed distrust and dissatisfaction with the City's Rent Review Board, stating that it is "ineffective and biased." They noted that it is chaired by a landlord which creates distrust.
- Participants noted that in order to dispute increases, tenants must travel to the Hayward Hall of Justice, which is especially challenging on public transit. Participants suggested that there should be a way to address issues locally in San Leandro.

New Protections

- Participants expressed support for new protections for tenants, including just cause, rent registry, tenant anti-harassment, and rent stabilization. Participants suggested that protections apply to single-family homes as well as multi-family units, and be inclusive of fees.
- One participant shared that to be effective and avoid loopholes, the City needs to implement all of the proposed protections at the same time. Another participant requested that rent registry be the top priority because it would make other protections enforceable and provide useful data to the City.
- One idea for new protections included the creation of a Rent Stabilization Board to which landlords can appeal if they have issues.
- Several participants expressed that any new fees associated with a new ordinance should be paid entirely by landlords and not be used to raise rent on tenants. Others shared some willingness to pay a small fee if necessary for the implementation of housing protections.

Voice in Public Process

- Participants expressed concern that landlords have a stronger voice in the policy process.
- One participant shared that landlords have created a predatory atmosphere and that tenants are not able to sit down with landlords to discuss compromise without protections. Participants shared that many tenants are fearful of retaliation if they go against their landlord.