

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL WORKGROUP

Meeting #9

Meeting Notes

November 20, 2020 | 9.30 AM–11.30 AM

By the end of this meeting, we will have:

- Agreement on the priority elements of additional tenant protections
- Agreement on the information and outreach actions for immediate implementation

Agenda Topic and Notes:

9.45 AM Presentation: Supporting renters through policy and information & outreach

Chris Kizzie, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. David Huaman, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

Summary of comments from discussion:

- Believes an education campaign to inform tenants of existing rights (rent escrow rights) is necessary and would be helpful.
- There was a comment regarding the difficulty understanding the benefit of a 2-year lease - many residents may not want a 2-year lease. Believes landlords may look to maximize rent increases within the 2-year lease which would be a disadvantage to the resident.
- The 2-year lease is not particularly popular in Montgomery County. Some of the compromises made to accept a resident for a 2-year lease may result in some potential residents being screened out (setting of a higher standard).
- Last year, the County attempted to address 2-year lease agreements and repairs by tenants via CB-056-2019.
- County currently offers 2-year lease agreements to seniors. One participant is interested in how the 2-year lease agreement is going as a reference.
- D.C. offers month to month lease agreements.
- Residents may not be well-versed in hiring a contractor to make repairs. Can a 3rd party representative oversee tenant escrow i.e. the Housing Authority?
- Montgomery County has a list of “trusted contractors” that have been pre-screened.
- UPenn research emerging about the correlation of tenant evictions to COVID deaths – believes it is important that a moratorium on evictions be extended. States and localities should extend moratorium as well.
- There should be outreach about the affirmative defenses afforded to residents facing eviction on the basis of COVID-related household illnesses or impacts. Tenants need to know more about these protections.
- Can OCS vet contractors to develop a list of approved contractors who can provide contracting/repair services to rental units? This can also be a mechanism to connect renters with competent businesses and additionally encourage the use of County-based businesses.
- Emergency Rental Assistance 2.0 Snapshot:
 - Application is submitted by Landlords of rental properties
 - **Opened:** Oct. 27th **Closed:** Nov. 10th
 - \$1800 per month, not including utilities
 - Assist those up to 80% AMI
 - Assistance for up to 6 months

- Total request: \$14M (from small-, medium-, and large-units)
- Complete review within 7 to 10 days
- Expend \$6 to 8 million

10.15 AM Large-group discussion: Policies for tenants **Facilitated by Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.*

What are the top 3 tenant protection that the County needs to adopt (or push state lawmakers to adopt) as soon as possible? Needed for the HOFA Workgroup's 2021 report to the County Council

- Most popular: Emergency policies to prevent evictions (23%); centralized assistance office (22%); and legal representation in eviction court (19%)

Discussion regarding the above listed policies and priorities – any other issues not listed other participants did not see listed or hoped would rise to the top?

- Start a fund for people going through evictions, perhaps through the business or non-profit community.
 - This option was tabled for the time-being. Councilmember Glaros added that the County's resources were limited and the prioritization was placed on addressed immediate needs while also building long-term resilience.
- Another participant commented that the sealing of evictions was important, as the publicizing of this record could lead to persons being forced to live in substandard housing.
 - Councilmember Glaros added that this is something that has been on the radar of the County Council. They have been working with Maryland Legal Aid. It may be something that needs to be resolved at the State level and may be included in this respect as part of recommendations offered by the Workgroup.
- Coordinated social services need to be provided across government agencies that can address the wave of evictions that may come in 2021.
- Lack of rent forgiveness was concerning to a participant. It was felt that individuals who proved they could pay their rents going forward should have their rents forgiven. The implication of rent not being forgiven is that residents who experience difficult times but were now in the position to fully pay their rents may be subject to eviction once the moratorium is lifted.
- Centralized assistance office would be a single place to provide resources, and could also provide access to resources which the resident may not realize exist – “people can't take advantage of what they don't know about.”
 - “This is incredibly helpful to people who don't know about dealing with bureaucracy.”
 - A one stop location is needed.
 - Centralized assistance should also be accessible via phone and be able to assist all representation, to include the disabled population.
- Another participant was concerned about the notion of rent forgiveness – this may put landlords in precarious positions since they also have mortgages and expenses to pay. However, this is a different story if there is some type of governmental financial assistance provided.

10.50 AM Large-group discussion: Information and outreach for tenants **Facilitated by Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.*

What are the top 3 actions related to information and outreach for tenants that PGC needs to implement as soon as possible?

- Most popular: One-stop shop for information (20%); Tenants' right (17%); and Centralized tenant assistance (16%). However, there was much more variation on the answers with three other issues landing at 12% or greater.

Discussion regarding the above listed policies and priorities – any other issues not listed other participants did not see listed or hoped would rise to the top?

- There was a comment that the one-stop shop for information is not working well in Montgomery County since there are not people available who are very familiar of all the subject matters.
- There were questions regarding the differences between “one-stop shop for information” and “centralized tenant assistance.” A “one-stop shop” is more of a self-service option, vs. “centralized tenant assistance” providing some amount of hand holding.
 - Some people need assistance remedying their existing problems – a knowledgeable rental housing liaison could serve that function.
- One-stop shop and Centralized tenant assistance should perhaps be a combined recommendation and an ongoing need.
- In the chat box, it was recommended to invite speakers from Montgomery County Office of Landlord-Tenant Affairs and DC Office of Tenant Advocate to discuss their programs.

Second round of voting – most popular:

