

RENT CONTROL RESOLUTION

By Councilmembers Licata and Sawant

A RESOLUTION regarding RCW 35.21.830, the prohibition of ordinances or other provisions that regulate the amount of rent.

WHEREAS, the Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes housing as a human right; and

WHEREAS, unaffordable housing in Seattle has become a crisis with apartment rents in the City of Seattle have rising tremendously in recent years, including a nearly 11% increase between 2010-13, the highest rent increases of any major U.S. city in 2012 and 2013; and

WHEREAS, Seattle is now among the nation's ten most expensive cities, with three of five Seattle apartments renting in 2013 for more than \$1,000 per month, and median one-bedroom rents in Seattle neighborhoods ranging from an average of \$1,063 - \$1,871 per month in 2014, and more than 47% of Seattle rental households now considered rent-burdened, paying more than 30% of their incomes for rent and utilities; and

WHEREAS, Seattle Housing Authority, which serves over 16,000 low-income households, reported having over 9,400 households on its waiting lists after opening their waiting list in 2013 for 24,000 people to apply for 2000 vouchers while the 2015 One Night Count found 3,772 unsheltered people in King County, a 21% increase since 2014; and

WHEREAS, in 2014 investors spent an unprecedented \$3.8 billion buying apartment buildings in the Greater Seattle Area, raising rents, and subjecting housing to financial speculation, and depleting the affordable units in the private sector; and

WHEREAS, high rental housing costs make it more difficult for lower-income households to remain in the city, evidenced by the just 61 affordable homes in the State and 15 affordable homes in the City available for every 100 renter households earning 50% or below of the median family income, and just 29 affordable homes in the State and five affordable homes in the City available for every 100 renter households at 30% or below of median family income; and

WHEREAS, according to a City 2008 analysis of impediments to fair housing in Seattle, families who cannot afford rental housing in Seattle are more likely to leave the City for communities with lower housing costs, and families who cannot afford rental housing in Seattle may be less likely to move into the City; and

WHEREAS, people of color comprise about one-third of Seattle's population, yet in 2009, poverty rates in Seattle were 26 percent for African-Americans, 18 percent for Latinos, 16 percent for Asians, and 13 percent for multi-racial persons, compared with just 9 percent for whites; and

WHEREAS, the City's 2008 analysis of impediments to fair housing in Seattle identifies these conditions as impediments to fair housing in Seattle, stating: "An inadequate supply of affordable housing in Seattle exacerbates fair housing challenges by impeding housing choice. Seattle's robust private housing market continues to fuel migration of low-income and minority residents toward areas outside of the city as rents and home prices escalate;" and

WHEREAS, Seattle has attempted various strategies for addressing this fair housing impediment, yet the proposed 2014-2017 Consolidated Plan states that "[d]espite numerous public programs and policies to preserve and expand affordable housing, the

force of the private market continues to drive a decline in housing affordability...this translates into reduced housing choice for protected classes, who are disproportionately low-income and racial minorities;” and

WHEREAS, many other U.S. cities have preserved affordability and mitigated the fair housing impacts of rent increases through rent stabilization approaches, including some of the country’s largest cities, including New York City, Newark, Washington, DC, Oakland, San Francisco, San Jose, and Los Angeles; and

WHEREAS, to mitigate the segregative effects of high and increasing rental housing costs on residential diversity in Seattle, including the disproportionate displacement of people of color from the city and the replacement by new white residents, Seattle could similarly benefit from a rent stabilization ordinance or other provisions that regulate rent; and

WHEREAS, RCW 35.21.830 states that “No city or town of any class may enact, maintain, or enforce ordinances or other provisions which regulate the amount of rent to be charged for single-family or multiple-unit residential rental structures or sites other than properties in public ownership, under public management, or properties providing low-income rental housing under joint public-private agreements for the financing or provision of such low-income rental housing.”; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE THAT:

Section 1. The prohibition of ordinances or other provisions which regulate the amount of rent, as reflected in RCW 35.21.830, is regarded as an impediment to fair housing in the City of Seattle.

Section 2. The State of Washington should repeal or modify RCW 35.21.830 so as not to remain a barrier to fair housing in Seattle or anywhere else in the State;

Section 3. The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development should consider carefully whether an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice or an Assessment of Fair Housing for the State of Washington that does not include an evaluation of RCW 35.21.830 and its effects on residential segregation within the state, or identify the repeal or modification of RCW 35.21.830 as a fair housing goal or priority, is consistent with the State's obligation to affirmatively further fair housing.

Section 4. But for the prohibition in RCW 35.21.830, this Council would endeavor to design and enact ordinances or other provisions which regulate the amount of rent appropriate to the City of Seattle.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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