



City of Portland Remote Rental Housing Advisory Committee Meeting

Co-Chairs: Meredith Cook, Tenant Representative and Regan Sweeney, Landlord Representative

ZOOM MEETING INSTRUCTIONS:

The Rental Housing Advisory Committee will hold a remote meeting on Thursday, June 11, 2020 at 5:30 pm. This meeting will take place remotely using Zoom.

Virtual meetings are allowed using emergency legislation approved by LD 2167; 1 M.R.S. §403-A, that authorizes cities and towns to conduct meetings online.

Allow your computer to install the free Zoom app to get the best meeting experience. If you are not able to attend live, a recording will be uploaded to portlandmaine.gov/livestream the next day.

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89456598141>

For public comment, you will need to use the “raise your hand” feature. To raise your hand via the telephone, please hit *9. You will be unmuted by the host when it is time for public comment.

To join via Telephone dial:

US: +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 646 558 8656 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 669 900 9128

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Webinar ID: 894 5659 8141

1. Review and Approval of the Minutes of the May 14, 2020 Meeting
 - a. Minutes of the May 14, 2020 Meeting
2. Public Comment

- a. Members of the public will be given an opportunity to address the Committee. Any person wishing to address the Committee shall give their name and address, and, if applicable, organization represented, and restrict comments to three (3) minutes.

NOTE: The Rental Housing Advisory Committee is not a grievance committee or complaint forum for landlord-tenant issues or dispute resolution. The duties of the Committee are (1) To Provide the Housing Committee with recommendations or proposals for improvements, modifications, or changes regarding landlord and tenant policy issues; and (2) Identify educational opportunities, seminars, and materials that would be useful to landlords and tenants.

3. Ideas and suggestions for COVID-19-related relief issues/measures related to rental housing.
4. Scheduling of future RHAC meetings; setting a regular, recurring date for meetings.
5. Other Business.
6. Adjournment

Rental Housing Advisory Committee

Minutes of Remote Meeting on May 14, 2020

A meeting of the Portland Rental Housing Advisory Committee (RHAC) was held remotely via a Zoom webinar on Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 5:30 P.M. Committee members present at the meeting included Meredith Cook, Regan Sweeney, Aaron Berger, Nora Graves, Wendy Harmon, Travis Heynen, Katherine McGovern, and Crow Norlander. City staff present included Mary Davis of the Housing and Community Development Division.

Item 1: Review and approval of the Minutes of previous meeting held on 4-23, 2020

Katie McGovern noted the minutes from April 23 contained two typographical errors. The word legal should be corrected to be illegal, and, in the following paragraph, the word is should be if.

On a motion made and seconded, the minutes from the April 23, 2020 were accepted. Motion approved 7-0. (Wendy Harmon absent and Amy Carole absent)

Wendy Harmon joined the meeting at 5:37

Item 2: Update on Housing Committee's May 13 meeting, including its consideration of RHAC's recommendation on rental housing application fees

Regan Sweeney summarized the Housing Committee's discussion from May 13 regarding the RHAC recommendation to the Housing Committee. The RHAC recommendation to the City was to enact an ordinance to ban application fees for rental housing units. Councilor Cook was not interested in banning application fees at this time, but the other two Committee members (Councilor Dusen and Councilor Ali) voted to forward the recommendation to the Council for passage. The City Council has prioritized items for their agenda related to issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is not known when this item will appear before the Council. Meredith Cook asked staff to notify the RHAC when this item is on the Council's agenda.

Item 3: Discussion of efforts to educate landlords and tenants on changes to rental housing laws and regulations during COVID-19 pandemic.

Meredith asked if the Group had any comments regarding educating (i.e. “getting the word out”) landlords and tenants on any changes related to rental housing regulations and evictions. Aaron Berger asked if the courts are opening back up in June. Per Katie McGovern, the court held a stakeholders meeting today but nothing was decided. The court has established a special email address for comments regarding the planning process. Katie will send a link to that address to the group. Regan Sweeney noted the court clerks are telling the district courts that landlord can try to schedule eviction hearings for June 4, however the court does not expect to move on that date. They expect that to be postponed, but this is not an official court guidance. Aaron Berger indicated he is interested in education material around navigating this issue for the sake of clarity. Meredith Cook noted this information is available (other organizations have put out information on their website) and the RHAC does not need to duplicate these efforts. Per Katie McGovern, Pine Tree Legal has a COVID-19 tab on their website. Maine Equal Justice also has information on their website regarding housing, unemployment and benefit issues. Katie will share with the group the location of the recorded meeting held between Pine Tree Legal and Maine Equal Justice regarding training on resources for tenants to help with rent, and information regarding evictions. Per Mary Davis, the City also has a COVID-19 resource page containing information relating to landlord/tenant issues.

Aaron Berger asked if the Committee could discuss the vote by the Council regarding short-term rentals. Regan Sweeney noted the Council adopted the second plan for the \$1,000 stipend and limiting these stipends to no more than \$25,000 on a first-come first-serve basis. The Council did not specifically bring-up concerns from the RHAC, but by limiting the total stipends distributed to \$25,000, this policy does address the concern of draining the Housing Trust fund. Per Mary Davis, the City has only received one application request for Affordable Rental Housing Incentive funding.

Meredith Cook opened the meeting to any discussions regarding education or any other issues.

Katie McGovern asked for confirmation that the RHAC is not allowed to put on an educational forum.

Mary Davis noted the RHAC could not host any type of education session but it is not prohibited from putting together educational materials with the caveat that educational material is available elsewhere.

Katie McGovern asked if the RHAC could encourage the City to highlight materials such as those found on the Pine Tree Legal and Maine Equal Justice websites regarding eviction cases.

Mary Davis indicated the Housing and Community Development Division has a section on its website that notes resources such as Pine Tree Legal. Maine Equal Justice is not on the website but can be added.

Regan Sweeney noted he was reviewing the COVID-19 City website and there is a link to the Federal moratorium, but the website could use a refresh and include links to other resources such as the Court, Pine Tree Legal and Maine Equal Justice.

Travis Heynen added MaineHousing has a good COVID19 website resource page.

Mary Davis indicated the City Council would be voting on a supplemental CDBG fund that proposes \$500,000 in additional rental assistance. Once the Council votes on it, if approved, the plan needs to be submitted to HUD, and hopefully, by the beginning of June, those funds will be available to use. Opportunity Alliance is anticipated to manage the city's program as they are managing the state program. People are encouraged to access the state program first, and then look to the city program for additional assistance. The recommendation is up to \$2,500 per household (or \$750 in rent for three months plus \$250 for utility assistance payment). Payment is directly to the vendor or the landlord.

Travis Heynen asked if people in LIHTC housing are eligible for rental assistance.

Mary Davis confirmed people in LIHTC housing are eligible. The only people excluded from the city program are households using Section 8 vouchers because they can apply for an adjustment in their rent based on loss of income. No other households have been excluded from the City program that are excluded from the state program.

Aaron Berger asked what other properties are excluded by MaineHousing.

Travis Heynen indicated MaineHousing is excluding any units with LIHTC or MaineHousing backed mortgages. Assistance is only for private landlords who have no assistance attached to the units.

Mary Davis shared with the Committee the City program is very similar to CDBG entitlements throughout the State as they are also offering rental assistance with their supplemental funding. Guidelines are not exact from community to community, but they are very close. Mary reached out to Maine Housing inquiring into their exclusions and was told MaineHousing included their exclusions because they have other resources to help landlords with loss of operating expenses.

Aaron Berger asked if the rental assistance program would include commercial spaces.

Mary noted this is only for residential rental property. Other money from the supplemental funding will go to assist small business owners to help pay their rent. Micro loans can be used for this.

Meredith Cook asked if there is an outreach plan for the rental assistance program.

Mary Davis indicated there could be. MaineHousing has a goal to assist 10,000 statewide. Around 1,600 to 1,700 have applied in Cumberland County. A marketing plan is on the list of items to do. The city would issue a press release, and post the item to the website.

Seeing no further discussion, Meredith Cook moved to close item 3 of the agenda.

Item 4: Public Comment

Public comment was opened but seeing no one was in attendance, the public comment period was closed.

Item 5: Other Business

Meredith Cook asked if the Committee would like to meet again in June and what should be on the workplan.

Travis Heynen supports scheduling a meeting for June.

The Committee discussed when to set the next meeting. The Committee agreed that meeting after the Housing Committee's meetings is preferred. The Housing Committee is meeting June 10, so June 11 was offered. The Committee agreed to June 11 at 5:30 P.M. via Zoom.

Motion to adjourn by Aaron Berger. Regan Sweeney seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 6:04 P.M.

Respectively submitted,

Victoria Volent