## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 6 | **Name:** | Andy Micklow & Sahar Fathi |
| **Proposed No**.: |  2019-0380 | **Date:** | October 15, 2019 |

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 would establish a Renters' Commission and add a new chapter to King County Code Title 2.

**SUMMARY**

King County Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 would establish a King County Renters’ Commission that would advise the Executive and the Council on issues and policies of importance to tenants in residential rental properties countywide. The Commission would be comprised of fifteen members appointed by the council, Executive, and the Commission. Members would serve two-year terms with the exception of the inaugural term in which members in odd numbered positions would serve one-year terms and members in even numbered positions would serve two-year terms. Commission members would serve without compensation. The Renters' Commission would be staffed through by the Department of Community and Human Services.

**BACKGROUND**

More than 42 percent of households in King County are renter households. Seventy-two percent of African American households are renters compared to 38 percent of white households in King County. Renter households also have a significantly lower median household income compared to the homeowners in King County.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 would amend the King County Code to create a Renters' Commission to advise the Executive and the Council on issues and policies affecting renters in King County.

Other jurisdictions that have established a Renters' Commission include the City of Seattle[[2]](#footnote-2) and Vancouver, Canada. The City of San Antonio, Texas is also in the process of establishing a Renters' Commission.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**ANALYSIS**

Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 would amend the King County Code to create a Renters' Commission to advise the Executive and the Council on issues and policies of importance to tenants in residential rental properties countywide.

The Commission is proposed to have fifteen members. The Council would appoint nine members, the Executive would appoint three members, and the Commission would appoint the remaining three members. All appointments would be subject to confirmation by the Council by motion. Members would serve two year terms, with a limit of two consecutive terms. Members would serve without compensation. The King County Code chapter that would establish the Commission would expire ten years after the effective date of the Proposed Ordinance.

Membership is to be comprised of renters in King County who represent varied renter perspectives including those of renters who live in unincorporated King County and those of renters who identify with or are affiliated with organizations that use an equity lens or work with historically underrepresented groups such as low-income renters, LGBTQ renters, renters with felony records, immigrant renters, those paying rent with assistance, and renters who have experienced homelessness.

The Renters' Commission would be established to provide information, advice, and counsel to the council, Executive, and county departments concerning issues and policies affecting renters such as housing affordability, transportation access, access to green and other public spaces, land use, renter protections, public health and safety, education and economic growth. Other duties of the Commission include the following:

* Adopt an annual work plan;
* Develop an annual report that includes recommendations to improve housing affordability, especially in unincorporated King County;
* Monitoring the enforcement and effectiveness of legislation related to renters and renter protections;
* Provide periodic advice on priorities, policies, and strategies for strengthening and enhancing the enforcement and effectiveness of renter protections;
* Meet periodically with other county Commission and committees, departments, the King County housing authority board of Commissioners, the affordable housing committee of the King County growth management planning council, the Seattle renters' Commission, and other community groups and associations to gather information, feedback, and recommendations related to the King County renters' Commission's work.

Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 requires that the Council, Executive, and Commission itself appoint members, but does not include an explicit process or timeline for appointment. The Proposed Ordinance also specifies that, to the extent possible, appointments should be made so that the Commission membership is representative of the county geographically. The Proposed Ordinance does not further define the meaning of "representative" in this context.

Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 specifies that the Renters' Commission develop an annual report. There is guidance on report content, but there is no date provided in the Proposed Ordinance for transmitting the annual report to the Council.

Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 is very similar to the ordinance that created the City of Seattle's Renters' Commission.[[4]](#footnote-4) Differences between the ordinances include the number of Commission members appointed by the Council, annual report requirements, and groups identified from which to gather feedback related to the Renters' Commission's work. Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 would require the Renters' Commission to develop an annual report that includes recommendations to improve housing affordability, especially in urban unincorporated King County. The City of Seattle's ordinance does not include such a requirement in the annual report. Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380 identifies the affordable housing committee of the King County growth management planning council and the Seattle Renters' Commission as groups from which to gather feedback and recommendations related to the King County Renters' Commission work. The City of Seattle's ordinance does not include these groups.

**OCTOBER 1st HEALTH, HOUSING AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING**

Councilmembers asked the following questions of council staff. Council staff responses are below.

1. Could you provide more clarity about the scope with regard to unincorporated and incorporated?

 The duties in the Proposed Ordinance include developing an annual report that includes recommendations to improve housing affordability in urban unincorporated King County. Additionally, any legislation originating from the Renters' Commission that the Council could adopt would likely be limited to affecting unincorporated King County.

1. How would the Commission consult/work with cities in which King County does not have jurisdictional authority?

 This is an implementation question that is not addressed by the Proposed Ordinance.

1. How is the Commission meant to work with the Affordable Housing Committee of the Growth Management Planning Council?

This is a policy choice for the Council to determine.

1. Could you provide more information about how members are appointed and why this division of authority of appointments?

This is a policy choice for the Council to determine.

1. What best practices were consulted?

 Council staff reviewed other jurisdictions ordinances or proposals for Renters' Commissions. The Proposed Ordinance was drafted to be consistent with how other county boards and commissions are run including language used and process.

**AMENDMENT**

Council staff continues to work with councilmembers on potential amendments.

**INVITED**

* Mark Ellerbrook, Department of Community and Human Services
* Sunaree Marshall, Department of Community and Human Services

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Ordinance 2019-0380
1. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. City of Seattle Ordinance 125280 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.sanantonio.gov/gpa/News/ArtMID/24373/ArticleID/16082/Councilman-Trevi241o-applauds-local-tax-exemption-files-policy-to-establish-Renters%E2%80%99-Commission [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. City of Seattle Ordinance 125280 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)