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SUBJECT: Rental Housing Code and Landlord Fairness Code: Compliance and Enforcement
Overview
DATE: July 23, 2026

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Informational Briefing

SUMMARY:

This presentation will provide an overview of the Landlord Tenant Program including information on the process in which the City receives information related to violations of the City of Tacoma Rental Housing Code (RHC) (TMC 1.95), and the City of Tacoma Landlord Fairness Code Initiative (LFCI) (TMC 1.100) as well as an overview of the enforcement process and any limitations.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Tacoma has several chapters and sections of the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) providing standards for rental housing and protections for tenants. These include the City's Rental Housing Code (RHC), Landlord Fairness Code Initiative (LFCI), and Building Code (TMC 2.01). Washington's Residential-Landlord Tenant Act (RCW 59.18, RLTA) establishes statewide responsibilities of landlords and tenants. Each law covers specific aspects of rental housing and has distinct enforcement authority.

The City's Landlord-Tenant Program provides information and referral services, offers training and education, helps coordinate inspections for habitability and Building Code violations and enforces the Rental Housing Code. There are differences in the role of the program and its staff in relation to each of the chapters of TMC and the RLTA. The Landlord-Tenant Program serves as the City's primary interface for rental-housing information and training as well as enforcement of the RHC. The following will outline enforcement for the RHC and for the other state and local codes pertaining to rental housing.

Rental Housing Code (RHC), Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 1.95

The RHC was adopted via City Council Ordinance 28559 and went into effect on February 1, 2019, with the most recent code amendment effective July 11, 2023. RHC addresses elemental of rental housing such as notices, move-in fees, and evictions. RHC works to improve housing stability by establishing standards and enforcement mechanisms for rental housing. Staff provide information and referral and education on rights and responsibilities to both landlords and tenants. When tenants report RHC violations, they are advised to give written notice to the landlord and then, if noncompliance persists, the City initiates contact through the Landlord-Tenant Program seeking voluntary compliance, followed by formal notices and civil penalties, if appropriate.

Landlord Fairness Code Initiative (LFCI), TMC 1.100

The LFCI was enacted by a ballot initiative and became effective December 8, 2023. Recent code amendments became effective on January 1, 2026. LFCI addresses increased rents, evictions, fees, and notices. Although both RHC and LFCI are City Codes, the enforcement processes differ. While the RHC



allows the City of Tacoma to enforce on violations using a notice of violation and civil penalties, the LFCI does not authorize the City to enforce it and requires tenants to use private civil action to enforce violations. While the Landlord-Tenant program cannot enforce LFCI provisions, it is able to offer information and referrals including referrals to legal services to assist Tacoma tenants in addressing violations if they choose to pursue enforcement.

Residential Landlord-Tenant Act (RLTA), RCW 59.18

The RLTA is a Washington State Act governing the rights and duties of most residential renters and landlords in the state. The Landlord-Tenant Program provides information and referrals including referrals to legal services to assist Tacoma tenants in addressing violations if they choose to pursue enforcement.

Building Code

Under the state RLTA, a tenant may request inspections for Building Code violations when they believe their rental unit has safety or habitability issues, such as structural deficiencies, inadequate heating, electrical hazards, or other conditions that fail to meet building standards. When tenants report potential Building Code violations, Landlord-Tenant Program staff will verify the tenant has followed all the required steps under the RLTA that allows the tenant to request a code enforcement inspection of the rental unit. Once the case has been referred to Code Compliance, a case will be opened and an inspection is conducted within five business days. During the inspection, Code Compliance will inspect the issues reported to the landlord if the tenant has reported that the landlord has failed to remedy the issues. If code violations are found, the landlord is served a "Notice of Violation", which outlines steps to come into compliance.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is an information briefing only. There are no alternatives presented.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an information briefing only. There is no fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information briefing only. There is no recommendation.