

AGENDA ITEM REQUEST FORM

Department: Rent Program

Department Head: Nicolas Traylor

Phone: 620-6564

Meeting Date: April 15, 2020

Final Decision Date Deadline: April 15, 2020

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE: The Monthly Activity Report is designed to provide members of the Rent Board and Richmond community with a summary of the Rent Program's activities for the month. Staff members find it timely to begin producing such reports on a monthly basis.

INDICATE APPROPRIATE BODY

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|---|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> City Council | <input type="checkbox"/> Redevelopment Agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing Authority | <input type="checkbox"/> Surplus Property Authority | <input type="checkbox"/> Joint Powers Financing Authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Finance Standing Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Safety Public Services Standing Committee | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Reuse Authority | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>Rent Board</u> | |

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|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation/Proclamation/Commendation (3-Minute Time Limit) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing | <input type="checkbox"/> Regulation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>CONSENT CALENDAR</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contract/Agreement | <input type="checkbox"/> Rent Board As Whole | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grant Application/Acceptance | <input type="checkbox"/> Claims Filed Against City of Richmond | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> Video/PowerPoint Presentation (contact KCRT @ 620.6759) | |

RECOMMENDED ACTION: RECEIVE the March 2020 Rent Program Monthly Report - Rent Program (Paige Roosa 620-6537).

AGENDA ITEM NO:

F-4.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Rent Board

FROM: Paige Roosa, Deputy Director

DATE: April 15, 2020

SUBJECT: MARCH 2020 MONTHLY ACTIVITY REPORT

Introduction

The Monthly Activity Report is designed to provide members of the Rent Board and Richmond community with a summary of the Rent Program's activities for the month. It is anticipated that the format, content, and detail of this report will evolve over time. Feedback concerning this report may be submitted via email to rent@ci.richmond.ca.us or by calling (510) 234-RENT (7368).

March Agency Highlights

March was a considerably unique month for the Rent Program team, along with the rest of the nation, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent impacts on daily life. As of March 17, 2020, all staff are working remotely. Remote work presents the team with a series of unique challenges and opportunities. Assisting members of the public on a remote basis, who are accustomed to being able to directly contact the Rent Program office, has stressed our ability to be immediately responsive.

The demands of the current crisis have also provided opportunities for Rent Program staff members to work collaboratively with staff in the City Attorney's Office and Community Development Department. The Rent Program has taken the lead on a number of important policy development tasks and associated outreach to the community, including the development of a moratorium on no-fault evictions and those for nonpayment of rent if due to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the establishment of a fund to assist renters struggling with rent payments (progress is ongoing).

In an effort to document the impact of this historic event on Rent Program operations, all staff members were asked to respond to question prompts. The following is a compilation of responses from staff members, organized by Agency unit. Responses have been edited for length and clarity, and to maintain anonymity to the greatest extent possible.

Public Information Unit***How has your role within the Agency been impacted by the current emergency?***

The emergency order obviously called for emergency action on everyone's role. We all had to quickly figure out how we were going to work remotely with the server, manage correspondence with the public, and other operational tasks for the office. I feel my role was

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impacted by daily operations, namely corresponding with the public at the level we are used to such as in person services and by phone. Additionally, this being an emergency matter, my priorities shifted drastically in the first couple of weeks of March to update documents, our website, and outreach materials to provide resources for the public. Although, I understand that the concerns with public safety are the priority, I was prepared in my role to create and update anything necessary to carry out our ongoing operations to serve the public. As of late, I feel less limited in my work that I can do remotely because of access to the server and communication among our team to maintain daily operations and correspondence with the public.

The impact of the quarantine on my job within the Rent Program has been fairly straightforward; whereas I used to operate at the front desk, dealing directly with constituents, triage, and fielding phone calls, I now rely on voicemails as my primary contact with constituents, and then those are almost all forwarded directly to counselors or other members of the Rent Program. The "immediacy" and/or face-to-face factor of my job has basically been eliminated.

The shift from seeing people in person to now speaking to them through email or over the phone. I think it poses different problems and advantages. It might be more difficult for people that are not as savvy with technology to navigate the information that we send through email or is on our website. I think it makes us more accessible in general to the community by having the ability to email or call us.

It takes longer to call back community members, especially because a lot of people won't answer from blocked phone numbers (we are using cell phones) so it usually takes one or two calls back and forth before we make contact. Accessing remote desktop and software takes longer, and makes it such that we cannot check or enter notes in our customer-relations software in real-time while counseling. In addition, we cannot get feedback from supervisor as quickly with counseling questions (though he has been very available, just takes longer.)

What are you hearing from the community in terms of assistance or resources they need (if you are in contact with community members)?

I've mostly heard from tenants who've expressed fear about rent payment, as they aren't sure how long this situation will last and need financial assistance. Once the emergency order expires, many will owe a lot of money and not have the resources to pay it back.

On a daily basis when I check our voicemail messages, I assist in calling back community members to answer any general questions. It depends if I am speaking to a tenant or a landlord. Most tenants have concerns about paying rent during the emergency order because most have been laid off or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19. Even though there is forbearance on their rent during this time, they are still uncertain if they will be able to pay rent six months after the order is lifted because other bills will continue to accrue.

Landlords on the other hand express their concerns that tenants are not paying rent, but still have mortgages to pay and ask for more resources about what they can do to avoid foreclosure on their home if they can't pay the mortgage, which is typically paid by the tenant's rent.

Landlords would like more assistance and resources from our department or clear language available to them to understand how the order is (or not) helping them.

The pattern with voicemails and calls tends toward a lot of people searching for assistance with paying rent, or who need information regarding the moratorium on evictions. These two are the predominant themes, next are landlords calling in with questions regarding the latest round of invoices we sent out.

Most people call asking for rent repayment help. Saying that they have tried to call a lot of different agencies.

Billing and Registration Unit

How has your role within the Agency been impacted by the current emergency?

I have the responsibility of assisting landlords with questions that they may have about their invoices and enrollment & registration forms. Due to the City closure, assisting Landlords has been a bit difficult due to staff not having full access to office equipment like their desktops, printers, and office phones. While staff may have remote access to their office desktops from home, the connection issues and delays in the remote desktop have made remote work from home a challenge. Printing invoices and sending out correspondence to people who don't have access to a computer or email has also been difficult.

My role in Billing & Registration has been impacted quite a bit by the remote access to our network failing for long periods of time most days. It also makes my duty of discussing with landlords their current need to pay our fees even though they may possibly not be receiving rent in the future months a daunting task. I currently do not have the physical access to payments that are mailed into the office, so I rely on our Executive Director to receive all mail, scan necessary forms for processing, and enter payments on a spreadsheet that I then enter into our database for tracking. I also have to compile the physical receipts for payments of invoices that we submit for expense statements monthly and obtain the Director's signature for compliance with Finance Department policies. I'm very nervous in regards to the next billing cycle and how we will achieve it (if we conduct it remotely) without causing financial and clerical chaos.

What are you hearing from the community in terms of assistance or resources they need (if you are in contact with community members)?

A majority of the community members with whom I interact are landlords and the commonly mentioned topic is that many landlords will be having issues paying things like City Department fees (Rental Housing Fee, Business License, etc.) and their mortgage due to the ongoing pandemic.

Most of the Landlords I have spoken to are concerned about how they are going to maintain their mortgage if they are not getting income from the rental units. They often ask me what processes are in place to assist them in this current emergency.

Legal Unit

How has your role within the Agency been impacted by the current emergency?

My duties have expanded as I am now assisting the City Attorney's Office with understanding the various emergency orders issued by different California agencies, assisting the City Attorney's Office in drafting its own Order and amending subsequent Orders, reviewing the Rent Programs forms related to city, county, and state orders, researching law around local government power, including moratoriums, and articulating the boundaries of the Board's powers during this time. All my other duties have remained unaffected, although some may be more difficult to perform than others. For instance, PRA review has been more difficult with limited access to the Program's database.

I believe my role has been in higher demand. Constituents have become more desperate for information during a time where accurate information is either hard to find or is flooded by additional and sometimes inaccurate information. It is clear how my role as a public servant was not only important before but is clearly an essential service in these difficult times. There are so many Orders, rule changes, and other proclamations issued by city, county, state, and federal agencies that it is difficult even for attorneys to keep up, let alone the general public. As a staff attorney and as a supervisor, the weight of these roles appears to be more important as people (public and staff) require accurate information in a shorter amount of time.

What are you hearing from the community in terms of assistance or resources they need (if you are in contact with community members)?

I hear from the community every day and it is clear that people need information about their rights and responsibilities and also financial assistance. Renters need assistance paying rent and landlords need assistance paying their mortgages. As always, legal assistance is in high demand despite our inability to provide it. The community is deeply stressed and agitated and I think people are seeking leadership from our government. Unfortunately, much of the government at large is fractured and therefore even speaking to an official is often an arduous task. This is even more so during an unprecedented emergency period like this one. Thus, the community is also seeking the ability to have confidence in their government and actually have someone from these agencies listen to their questions and concerns and give accurate and timely responses.

Hearings Unit

How has your role within the Agency been impacted by the current emergency?

The biggest change is the short and bridge free commute within my home. I miss holding Petition files, but everything I need is being scanned and made available within our Hearings Unit electronic files. I am not currently conducting Hearings, and we had to cancel two that had been scheduled, but we are likely to do Hearings by conference call in the foreseeable future. I still get inquiries from staff and I am happy to contribute whenever it makes sense. Fundamentally, the impact on my role has been relatively nominal.

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As a Hearings Coordinator, my role has been impacted because I am unable to schedule Rent Program Hearings since we do not have a virtual method in place at this time to hold hearings, we are unable to mail hearing documents to parties, we are unable to access hearing documents that have not been scanned into the P drive because they are held in the Petition file, and we do not have access to office equipment such as the printer, mail service, scanner, labeler, and office files that assists with daily administrative functions.

As Rent Board Clerk, my role has been impacted because we are unable to hold our meetings in the Council Chambers and fulfill the entire administrative functions associated with setting up the meetings. Also, it is an inconvenience for our Boardmembers because they must figure out how to attend the meetings virtually.

What are you hearing from the community in terms of assistance or resources they need (if you are in contact with community members)?

I do not hear directly from the community. My impression is that the Landlord and Tenant populations need reassurance and a path back to normalcy whenever that becomes available to the Richmond community.

Summary of Activities

I. Department Unit Activities

PUBLIC INFORMATION UNIT	Occurrences
Persons Assisted By Front Office Unit (<i>without referral to an Analyst</i>)	48
Total Consultations Provided by a Rent Program Services Analyst	379
Calls Received (<i>Phone Counseling Sessions</i>)	196
Walk-Ins (<i>Includes Appointments</i>)	32
Emails Received	151
Total Consultations Provided in a Language other than English	60
Consultations Provided in Spanish	60
Legal Service Referral Forms Completed	5
Total Hard Copy Notices Processed	18
Hard Copy Rent Increase Notices Processed	12
Hard Copy Termination of Tenancy Notices Processed	6

BILLING AND REGISTRATION UNIT	Occurrences
Total Consultations with a Billing and Registration Unit Staff Member	49
Phone Call Consultations	23
Walk-In Consultations	7
Email Consultations	19
Enrollment/Tenancy Registration Packets Mailed	16
Enrollment Forms Processed	36
Invoices Generated	253
Payments/Checks Processed	28
Compliance Actions (<i>reviewing records, exemption statuses, owner addresses</i>)	9
Rental Units Discovered (<i>not in database, but in existence</i>)	118
Property Information Updated	132
Payments Returned	4
Total Monthly Revenue Collected (<i>03/01/2020 - 03/31/2020</i>)	\$84,686
Total Revenue Collected in FY 2019-20 (<i>through 03/31/2020</i>)	\$2,590,618
Total Revenue Collected in FY 2018-19	\$2,189,836
Total Revenue Collected in FY 2017-18	\$2,173,778

LEGAL UNIT	Occurrences
Owner Move-In Termination Notices Reviewed	3
Ellis Act Termination Notices Reviewed	2

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HEARINGS UNIT	<i>Occurrences</i>
Total Consultations with Hearings Unit Coordinator	19
Calls/Placed Received (<i>Regarding Hearings and Petitions</i>)	6
Walk-Ins (<i>Regarding Hearings and Petitions</i>)	1
Emails Sent/Received (<i>Regarding Hearings and Petitions</i>)	12
Total Tenant Petitions Received	1
Tenant Petitions Based on Excess Rent or Failure to Return Security Deposit Received	1
Total Number of Pending Petition Cases (<i>“Pending Petition Cases” are defined as those awaiting an objection response, a decision is pending, a decision has been issued with an appeal deadline approaching, or where an upcoming hearing has been scheduled</i>)	13
Pending Tenant Petitions (<i>As of March 8, 2020</i>)	10
Pending Landlord Petitions (<i>As of March 8, 2020</i>)	3
Total Number of Cases Closed	2
Cases Settled	2

II. Online Notices Filed with the Rent Program

<i>Type of Form</i>	<i>Monthly Submissions/ Notices Filed</i>	<i>Prior Month Total</i>	<i>% Change from Prior Month</i>
Agent Authorization	0	1	(-100%)
Proof of Excess Rent Refund	0	0	N/A
Proof of Permanent Relocation Payment	3	3	N/A
Proof of Temporary Relocation Payment	0	0	N/A
Change in Terms of Tenancy Notices Filed	3	20	(-85%)
Rent Increase Notices Filed	73	104	(-27%)
Termination Notices Filed ¹	151	195	(-22.5%)
<i>Applicable Just Cause for Eviction – Nonpayment of Rent</i>	143	186	(-23.1%)
<i>Applicable Just Cause for Eviction – Breach of Lease</i>	3	2	50%
<i>Applicable Just Cause for Eviction- Withdrawal from Rental Market</i>	1	0	N/A
<i>Applicable Just Cause for Eviction – Owner Move In</i>	3	7	(-57.1%)
<i>Applicable Just Cause for Eviction – Nuisance</i>	0	0	N/A
Total Online Form Submissions	230	323	(-28.8%)

¹ Note: Termination Notices filed with the Rent Program does not indicate the number of Unlawful Detainer (eviction) lawsuits filed in court. In some cases, the Tenant may cure the issue for the notice (e.g. Tenant pays the rent that is due) and the eviction process is not initiated.