



**HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT**
consortium

June 21, 2019

Burien City Council
400 SW 152nd St, Suite 300
Burien, WA 98166

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Housing Development Consortium Seattle-King County (HDC), we thank the City Council and Mayor Matta for prioritizing the health of Burien residents by proposing rental housing policies and the rental inspection program. We urge your strong support of the range of tenant protection policies and the local rental inspection program (RLIP). We encourage prioritization of a budget proposal for funding the RLIP program in the 2019 Supplemental Budget. In addition, we offer the following recommendations as you work to craft policies and a program that best fits your local context.

HDC is a nonprofit membership organization consisting of 180 private businesses, nonprofit agencies, and public partners who are working to develop affordable housing across King County and who are dedicated to the vision that all people should live in a safe, healthy, and affordable home in a community of opportunity. We very much appreciate Burien's work toward achieving this vision, through the proposed Rental Inspection Program and your work to support stability and opportunity for all of Burien's residents. According to the data from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, more than half of Burien households experience common housing problems such as inadequate kitchen or plumbing facilities, overcrowding, and cost burden. The data shows that 58% of renters in Burien have at least one such housing problem, above average for South King County. We know that housing quality is a strong determinant to physical and mental health.

The proposed suite of policies would introduce key tools in protecting renters from substandard living conditions. A Rental Licensing and Inspection Program would regularly inspect rental housing units to ensure minimum quality standards are being met and can be anticipated to be fully self-funded by 2020.

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Successful local rental housing inspection programs already exist in our region. The Kent Reporter notes that Tukwila, Pasco, Seattle, Lakewood, and Bellingham all have established programs; Tukwila's program was adopted in 2011, and city officials have received fewer landlord-tenant complaints since its inception.

We urge you to act swiftly to adopt and implement a similar program to ensure that all rental housing in Burien is safe and healthy, better for its residents and the community. Specifically, HDC recommends that cities work to achieve the following goals when adopting rental inspection programs:

1. **Prevent and reduce the burden of displacement** by using fines and fees collected by the program to support and rapidly rehouse tenants who are displaced due to housing conditions.
2. **Address issues of accessibility and cultural sensitivity** through multi-lingual, multi-modal outreach to both renters and landlords. Cities should actively address fears and misconceptions by ensuring inspectors have clearly defined roles and receive cultural competency training.
3. **Incorporate the [National Healthy Housing Standard](#)**, a set of health-focused property maintenance guidelines, into your building code.
4. **Use rental licensing information to better understand affordability** by gathering data on rental units, rental costs, and how affordability is shifting over time.
5. **Engage with the local landlord community to promote preservation**, identify challenges to bringing buildings up to code, and discuss potential solutions.
6. **Create a self-sustaining program** that will be fully funded by the licensing fees collected.

We urge your support on all the proposed rental policies including the Rental Licensing and Inspection Program and ensure they are funded in the budget. By implementing these policies, you are working to ensure all of Burien's residents have the opportunity to thrive in a healthy home. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this critically important issue. We hope to continue working with you as you develop your rental inspection program and adopt the proposed policies. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments about our recommendations.

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