

A panoramic view of the Seattle skyline featuring the Space Needle, various skyscrapers, and Mount Rainier in the background under a clear blue sky.

# Overview of Rental Programs

Photo by John Skelton



**Seattle** Department of  
Construction & Inspections

Housing & Human Services Committee  
Nathan Torgelson, Geoff Tallent, Maureen Roat February 28, 2024

# SDCI Vision, Purpose, and Values

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- **Our vision** is to set the standard for awesome local government service.
- **Our purpose** is helping people build a safe, livable, and inclusive Seattle.
- **Our values** are equity, respect, quality, integrity, and service.

# SDCI Overview

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- 482 current employees in six divisions
  - Code Compliance 58
  - Org. Development & Support 62
  - Director's Office 21
  - Engineering Services 109
  - Inspection services 125
  - Land Use Services 107
- 2024 adopted \$118M budget (~91% funded by permit fees and other revenues)
- 58,781 permits issued in 2023
- 17,068 enforcement complaints in 2023
- 27,282 registered rental properties with about 174,052 units in 2023

# Seattle Rental Programs

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- Who is involved
- Housing Conditions
- Rent and Fees
- Eviction Protections
- Relocation Assistance
- Housing Discrimination
- Outreach
- How we do our work
- 2024 Priorities

# Who is Involved – One Seattle

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- ***Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections*** – Housing conditions, rent and fees, eviction protections, relocation assistance, outreach, grants.
- ***Seattle Office for Civil Rights*** – Housing discrimination laws, including Fair Chance Housing and First in Time, testing program, mediation, outreach
- ***Seattle Public Utilities*** – Utility accounts and payment, shutoffs, and the Utility Discount Program
- ***Office of Housing*** – Rent and income restricted affordable housing development, housing weatherization
- ***Department of Neighborhoods*** – Renter’s Commission staffing



# Housing Conditions

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- ***Housing and Building Maintenance Code (HMBC)*** – Establishes detailed minimum standards for structural integrity, heat, ventilation, electrical, fire, and security for housing units.
- ***Rental Registration and Inspection Ordinance (RRIO)*** – Requires all rental properties be registered with the City and inspected regularly to ensure all rental housing meets basic housing maintenance requirements. Properties are selected at random for inspection every 5-10 years and registration must be renewed every 2 years.

# Rent and Fee Regulations

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- ***Move-In Costs*** – Security deposit and move-in fees cannot exceed one month’s rent. Fees are limited to screening and cleaning. Total fees cannot exceed 10% of one month’s rent. Tenants have a right to pay move-in costs in installments.
- ***Late Fee & Notice Fee Limits*** – Fees for late payment of rent cannot exceed \$10 per month. Notice preparation and notice delivery fees are prohibited.
- ***Non-Electronic Payments*** – Landlords must offer tenants a rental payment option that does not require electronic banking.
- ***Required Notice for Rent Increases*** – Landlords must provide 180-day notice for rent increases.
- ***Rent Increases in Substandard Housing*** – Landlords may not increase the rent on a property that does not meet minimum housing code requirements under RRIO.

# Eviction Protections

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- ***Just Cause Eviction Ordinance (JCEO)*** – 16 “just causes” in order to issue an eviction notice. Includes failure to pay rent, violation of lease terms, criminal activity, owner intent to sell or occupy the property, and more.
- ***Lease Renewal Right of First Refusal*** – Requires the offer of a new lease 60-90 days before a tenancy ends unless just cause not to renew the tenancy.
- ***Roommate Law*** – Tenants have a legal right to add additional occupants to their household: immediate family, one additional non-family roommate, and the immediate family of additional non-family roommate. Landlord may screen additional occupants but may not deny occupancy to immediate family.



# Eviction Protections, Cont.

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- ***Right to Counsel*** – Free legal counsel for any tenant who receives a court summons for eviction if they cannot afford an attorney. The City contracts with the Housing Justice Project to provide this right to legal counsel.
- ***School Year Defense to Eviction*** – Defense to eviction for households with children, students, educators, or support staff during the school year. Exemptions for tenant criminal activity and owner intent to sell or occupy the property.
- ***Winter Defense to Eviction*** – Defense to eviction for tenant households up to 80% AMI during the months of December to March. Exemptions for tenant criminal activity and owner intent to sell or occupy the property. Properties owned by landlords with four or fewer rental units in the City are also exempt from this defense.

# Relocation Assistance

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- ***Tenant Relocation Assistance Ordinance (TRAO)*** – Displacement due to demolition, substantial rehabilitation, or removal of rent restriction. Provides (1) early notice for all tenants and (2) \$4,917 in financial assistance for households up to 50% Area Median Income.
- ***Economic Displacement Relocation Assistance (EDRA)*** – Displacement due to a rent increase of 10% or more. Households up to 80% AMI can receive three months of rent. Paid up front by the City and collected afterward from the property owner.
- ***Emergency and Other Relocation Assistance*** – Displacement due to the actions or neglect of the landlord. For example: unsafe building with an emergency order to vacate, unpermitted unit that cannot be brought into compliance with the land use or building codes.

# Housing Discrimination

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- ***Discrimination based on Protected Classes*** - Landlords may not deny an applicant or treat a tenant differently based on 20 protected classes (includes federal and state)
- ***Source of Income Discrimination*** – Landlords may not deny an applicant or treat a tenant differently based on their subsidy or source of income (i.e. Section 8, disability payments, short-term vouchers, etc.)
- ***Reasonable accommodations or modifications*** – Landlords must provide accommodations (which may include service animals) to people with disabilities.
- ***Protection from Harassment and Retaliation*** – Landlords must not engage in harassment or retaliation practices.
- ***Fair Chance Housing*** – Landlords may not require a housing applicant to disclose their criminal history or take adverse action against a tenant based on criminal history. Owner-occupied single-family homes, ADUs, and DADUs are exempt.
- ***First in Time*** – Landlords must offer a rental agreement to the first applicant who submits a completed application and meets the screening criteria.

# Outreach – Renting in Seattle

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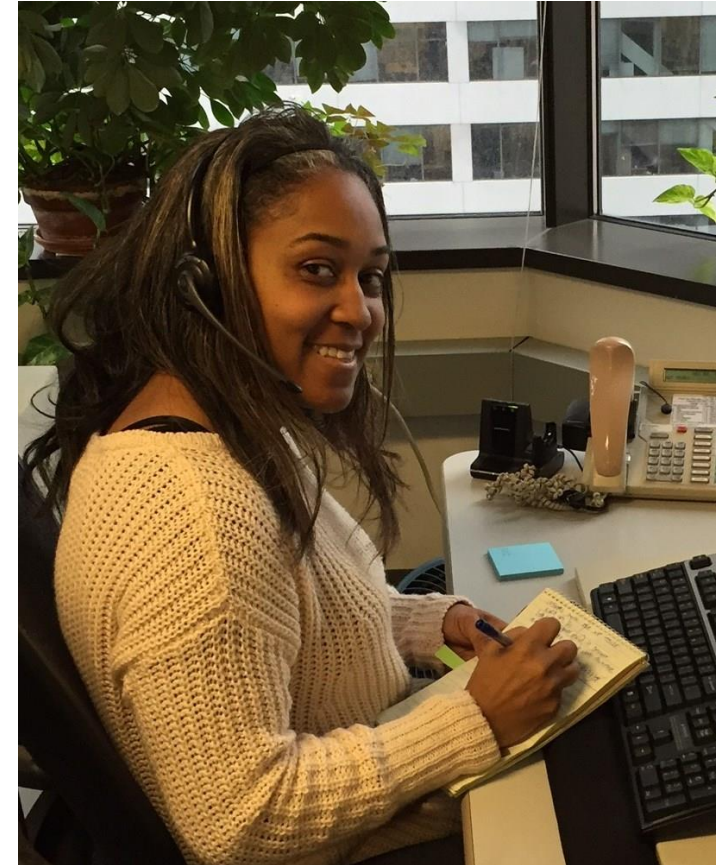
- **Website** written for both tenant and landlord audience – [www.seattle.gov/rentinginseattle](http://www.seattle.gov/rentinginseattle)
- **Landlord Trainings** – four planned for 2024
- **Renter’s Handbook** – in 14 languages, partner with Rental Housing Association on distribution
- **Landlord newsletter**, sent approx. quarterly to ~19,000 email addresses
- **Partner Trainings** – community organizations, landlord organizations, etc.
- **Community events** – SDCI home fairs, SHA housing fairs, food banks, etc.
- **Grants** – community organizations, including BIPOC led and serving orgs

# How Customers Reach SDCI Renter Programs

## ***Renting in Seattle*** phone line – 206-684-5700

- Staffed during business hours
  - Monday, Thursday, Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
  - Tuesday, Wednesday: 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- Phone line staff handle basic questions, referrals, intake
- All calls that need follow-up are tracked & referred to inspectors or renter program analysts
- Return call time varies based on urgency & workload
- First priority to emergency conditions, lock-outs, evictions, rent increases

***RRIO*** Phone Line – 206-684-4110 or “send us a RRIO question” at [www.seattle.gov/RRIO](http://www.seattle.gov/RRIO)



# Our Numbers (2023)

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- Calls answered Renting in Seattle and RRIO lines – 17,231. Up 40% over 2022
  - Questions and complaints referred to a specialist or inspector – 6,420. Doubled since pre-pandemic
  - Calls for RRIO Customer support - 9,353
- Enforcement cases – 341. Very high pre-enforcement voluntary compliance.
- Renter households displaced by development activity – 668 ; Households that applied and qualified for financial assistance – 137
- Renter households qualifying for EDRA – 90
- RRIO Registrations – 27,282 properties with 174,052 units
- RRIO inspections – 4,030 properties



# 2024 Priorities

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- Meeting customer needs
  - Staffing
  - Improving response times
  - Working to improve customer intake process
- Harmonization of City and State Landlord-Tenant Laws
- TRAO and EDRA process improvements
- Increased outreach to landlords and tenants
- RRIO Audit Response
  - Improved customer communication
  - Scoping IT system improvements
  - Record cleanup and enforcement

# Contact Information

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SDCI Renter Programs -

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