



Tenant Solidarity

News and Information from the Tenants Union of Washington State

January 2012



TU staff Stina Janssen and Jonathan Grant hold up the TU's new banner. 2011 was a year of tremendous growth for the TU.

Seattle Healthy Housing Ordinance at Risk

Advocacy needed to make the Rental Housing Inspection Program effective for tenants

By Jonathan Grant, TU Executive Director

Everyone has the right to live in a safe and decent home. However, making that right a reality for Seattle tenants is being hindered by landlord lobbyists. In June 2010 the City Council passed a model ordinance that would license all rental property owners in the city limits. Much like the food or medical industry, a property owner would have to demonstrate every three years that the units they rent out meet basic health and safety requirements in order to receive a license to rent in the city. The law would be enforced by the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), which conducts building inspections for code violations.

Prior to the law going into effect, the city convened a

A Banner Year for the TU

In the last twelve months, the Tenants Union:

- Grew from two to five staff members
- Provided individualized counseling and education to over 1500 tenants about their housing rights
- Opened two satellite Tenants' Rights Clinics in Lake City and West Seattle
- Supported tenants from the Downtowner Apartments in Seattle to win long-term affordable housing and set national precedents in low income housing policy
- Conducted 11 tenants' rights workshops to over 300 tenant leaders
- Completed a 4 month planning and training process to create a volunteer program to expand our tenants' rights education program set to start January 2012
- Successfully advocated with other housing advocates for comprehensive changes to the Residential Landlord-Tenant Act that resulted in critical, long-overdue improvements for Washington State tenants

stakeholder group to provide input on how the DPD should implement the policy. The group was comprised of community members, the Tenants Union, single family unit landlords, multifamily property owners, students, building inspectors, the health department, and legal aid groups. The group had ongoing meetings and negotiations for six months and provided the DPD with direction on how to create an inspection and licensing program that was both efficient and effective. The DPD was to craft a draft proposal based on this input to present to the City Council.

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Seattle Rental Housing Inspection Program

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However, on November 30th, 2011 the DPD surprised stakeholders by crafting a proposal that divorced the requirement for landlords to show their rental homes are safe and healthy from the issuance of a license. In its place, the DPD proposed requiring “drive-by” inspections of the exterior of buildings, which would miss the most egregious cases of substandard housing such as faulty electrical boxes, structurally unsound walls or floors, broken plumbing, vermin infestations, and the many other issues that the Tenants Union hears from thousands of renters every year.

Cities across the country are enacting proactive rental housing inspection programs and have had great success in eliminating substandard housing in their communities. Seattle should be no different. The Tenants Union testified this December in favor of a proactive inspection program for the City of Mountlake Terrace, which successfully passed the ordinance. Seattle tenants have a brief window of opportunity to demand the same kind of protections to ensure that all rental housing in the city is safe and healthy. Continue reading for information on how to get involved and share your story!



This kitchen/bathroom is an example of unsafe housing conditions in Seattle. Over 27,000 households in Seattle are considered substandard.

Take Action

In support of landlord accountability & safe and healthy housing for all Seattle renters

Have you have had bad experiences living in an unsafe or unhealthy home in Seattle? Work with the Tenants Union this January to ensure stronger tenant protections. We are organizing a meeting of tenants to make sure a strong ordinance is passed by the City Council. Contact Community Organizer **Emily Murphy** at emilym@tenantsunion.org or call 206-722-6848 x 114 for meeting location and details. The first meeting will be held in late January.

Any tenant or ally who is interested in seeing effective rental housing inspection in Seattle can take action in support by calling the Mayor and Committee Members with the following message:

Dear Councilmember/Mayor: I am a Seattle tenant who lives in [neighborhood] and am asking you to support a strong, proactive rental housing inspection program. A landlord must pass an interior inspection to make sure our homes are safe and healthy in order to be licensed to rent property. Seattle is 50% renters, and more than 27,000 tenants in the city live in substandard housing. The DPD's proposal must have a strong requirement for landlords to be inspected to be licensed. Thank you for supporting Seattle tenants.

Mayor Mike McGinn

Mayor's Office
P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749
(206) 684-4000

City Council Committee Members Sally Clark, Sally Bagshaw, Tom Rasmussen

Seattle City Council
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025
council@seattle.gov



Housing & Homelessness Advocacy Day — HHAD

Join TU members and the WA Low Income Housing Alliance for a day of legislative advocacy

By Tenants Union Staff

Tell our lawmakers: Housing, not cuts!

HHAD is January 20, 2012

Tenant screening agencies are lobbying in full force to keep their industry unregulated and unchecked. Tenants and advocates have fought over four years to enact fair tenant screening legislation, and this is a decisive year. Legislators need to hear from us to know that we care about access to housing. Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day (HHAD) is our opportunity to show our lawmakers why tenant rights and housing matter. Here's what's at stake:

- Over the past three cycles, the Housing Trust Fund has been reduced by 61.5%—from \$200 million to \$50 million, which prevented 4,294 affordable homes from being built.
- Everyday tenants are locked out of housing because of mistakes in the volatile tenant screening industry. We want to fix these problems with a bill that would regulate tenant screening practices (Fair Tenant Screening Act: SB 5826/Kohl-Welles).
- We must protect the Housing and Essential Needs Program, and revenue to fight homelessness through Document Recording Fees (HB 2048/Kenney and SB 5952/Kohl-Welles).

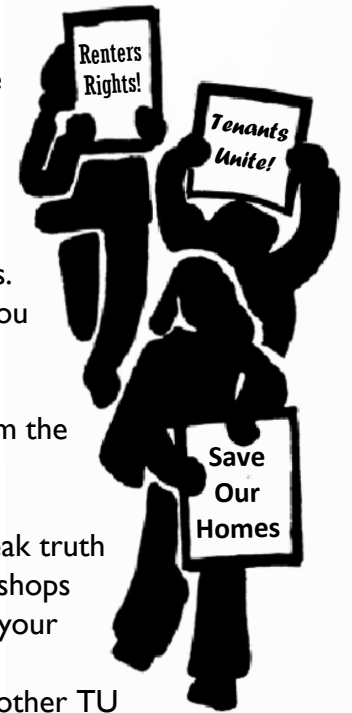


Housing advocates gather at HHAD 2011

Come to Olympia with the Tenants Union and remind our government to take tenant rights seriously! This legislative session, it will take power in numbers. Your voice matters. Will you join us on January 20th?

Here's what you'll gain from the experience:

- Training on how to speak truth to power: attend workshops on lobbying and telling your story to lawmakers
- Meet and get to know other TU members, staff and board members
- Knowledge and information on the political issues affecting tenants
- An empowering opportunity to build power in the tenant rights movement and represent tenants at the Capitol
- Lunch & fun!



HHAD is on Friday, January 20th, 8AM to 4PM (program begins at 9 am) at the United Churches of Olympia, 110 Eleventh Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501-2259. The Tenants Union is coordinating transportation from several locations. Contact us to inquire about transportation options.

To register or ask questions, contact Community Organizer **Emily Murphy**, at emilym@tenantsunion.org or 206-722-6848 x 114.

Your voice matters! Join the TU at HHAD and share your story with decision-makers in Olympia.

Downtowner Tenants Save Affordable Housing

Set new precedent in national policy

By Emily Murphy, STOP Community Organizer

The 2011 campaign at the Downtowner Apartments was a major victory for tenant leaders in the Section 8 Tenants Organizing Project (STOP) of the Tenants Union. Downtowner tenants were among 100,000 families across the country facing displacement due to the current wave of expiring HUD-subsided mortgages. The Downtowner is an incredibly diverse 240-unit building, populated by low income non-native English speakers, elderly people, and people with disabilities. Emphasizing thoughtful leadership development, political education, and grassroots leadership, the campaign empowered Downtowner tenant leaders and set a national precedent in HUD policy. Tens of thousands of families across the country will now be eligible to receive Section 8 vouchers who would have otherwise been displaced due to mortgage expiration.

The TU educated tenants on their rights, ranging from complex HUD policies to varying comprehensive preservation strategies. STOP organized



Tenants from the Downtowner Tenants Association gather with Margaret Salazar from HUD at the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT) Annual Conference.



Downtowner resident Kim Bovee takes tenant demands directly to officials from HUD.

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building-wide meetings that were held in three languages and attended by 80 residents.

Tenant leaders collaborated with HUD, the Seattle Office of Housing, SHA, and Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn to request that all income-eligible Downtowner tenants get Section 8 housing vouchers in order to avoid displacement. As a result, in February, the national HUD office granted all income-eligible Downtowner tenants Section 8 vouchers, and in July, national HUD officials confirmed that the agency adopted our precedent as its national policy, staving off displacement for tens of thousands more families nationwide.

In September, the owners of the Downtowner refused to sign the contract to accept Section 8 tenants and attempted to evict tenants en masse. Downtowner tenants organized into a formal tenant association, retained legal counsel from the Northwest Justice Project, and successfully sued the owners. The lawsuit resulted in negotiations barring eviction and forcing the owners to rent to Section 8 tenants. The Tenants Union will utilize tenant leadership and momentum from this victory at the Downtowner to launch into more housing preservation work in

Congratulations Downtowner Tenants!

Tenants Union Launches New Website Winter 2012

TU website www.tenantsunion.org is a revamped and expanded resource for tenants

By Emil Paddison, TU Deputy Director

The Tenants Union's website has been completely redesigned and extensively expanded. Beginning January 18th, www.tenantsunion.org will be the most comprehensive resource in Washington State for renters seeking information about their housing rights. Done in collaboration with Solid Ground Tenant Services, the new TU website contains in-depth information on a multitude of issues impacting tenants, from Repairs to Privacy Rights to Section 8 tenants rights. It also contains detailed information on TU programs, history, and will feature regular action alerts on issues impacting renters.

The website also includes answers to common landlord-tenant questions. The website expansion is part of a larger plan to increase access to Tenants Union services for renters with questions about their rights. (TU staff are not attorneys, and none of the information on the site should be considered legal advice.) The site features an extensive tenant resource list, as well as detailed program information national tenant resources. We are extremely pleased to present this website as an essential tool for Washington renters. The website will launch in Winter 2012.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Tenants Union of Washington State. At the top, the title "TENANTS UNION of Washington State" is displayed in large blue letters. Below the title is a navigation bar with a search box, a "Search" button, and links for "Become a member », "En español », and "Donate now »". The main content area is organized into a grid of links. The first row includes links for "Moving In" (Housing Search, Rental Agreements), "During Your Tenancy" (Repairs, Seattle Laws, Utilities, Privacy Rights, Roommates & Neighbors), "Eviction & Termination" (Eviction, Foreclosure), "Housing Discrimination" (Retaliation, Fair Housing & Disability Laws, Domestic Violence & Harassment), and "Resources" (Legal Assistance Guide, Renters Resources, Researching Your Landlord, Small Claims Court). The second row includes links for "Moving Out" (Vacating, Deposits, Credit & Collections), "Education Programs", "Section 8 Tenants Organizing Project (STOP)", "Legislative Advocacy", "Tenant Ownership", and "Justice in Southeast Seattle". At the bottom, there is a section for "Join the Tenant-Alert email action list" with an email input field and a "Join" button. To the right of this are links for "Become a Member" and "Volunteer with TU", each with a brief description and a link to contact the organization.

TENANTS UNION of Washington State				
<input type="text"/> Search Become a member » En español » Donate now »				
Moving In Housing Search Rental Agreements	During Your Tenancy Repairs Seattle Laws Utilities Privacy Rights Roommates & Neighbors	Eviction & Termination Eviction Foreclosure Low Income Housing Subsidized Housing & Section 8	Housing Discrimination Retaliation Fair Housing & Disability Laws Domestic Violence & Harassment	Resources Legal Assistance Guide Renters Resources Researching Your Landlord Small Claims Court
Moving Out Vacating Deposits Credit & Collections	Education Programs	Section 8 Tenants Organizing Project (STOP)	Legislative Advocacy	Tenant Ownership
Join the Tenant-Alert email action list <input type="text"/> Join <small>Get occasional updates on issues and actions affecting Washington State tenants.</small>		Become a Member Members are the heart and strength of the TU's work for housing justice. Please join us!	Volunteer with TU We need your talents! Contact us for volunteer opportunities today.	

A screenshot of the TU's new homepage. This website expansion is possible because of a collaboration between the TU, Solid Ground Tenant Services, a fantastic web

developer, and legal services housing attorneys, who edited and reviewed the material for completeness and accuracy. TU history and programming is also detailed.

Volunteer Attorneys Find Boost for Education Program

Margola settlement results in funding increase for tenant education

By Jonathan Grant, TU Executive Director

For the past 35 years, the TU has operated a Tenants Rights Hotline to educate and empower Washington tenants about their rights and the tools they need to protect their housing. Over the decades the TU has educated tens of thousands of tenants, and at the height of funding for the program it served over 7,000 people each year. However, as local governments have disinvested in social and human services because of the diminished general funds in their budgets, the TU has been able to serve fewer and fewer people each year. 2010 was the first year the TU received zero funding from local government in decades, and the future of the program became uncertain.

The Tenants Union collaborated with its allies in the legal community to identify new potential sources of funding to support the TU's work. The TU retained volunteer attorneys **Sara Sanford** (Garvey, Schubert, Barer), **Elisabeth Yandell McNeil** (K&L Gate LLP), and **Merf Ehman** (Columbia Legal Services) who offered their expert services to create a legal framework to disperse funds from a legal settlement in the case *Margola Associates v. the City of Seattle*. The legal team both

represented the TU in negotiations with the City of Seattle and landlord trade representatives to disperse the Margola settlement funds to improve multifamily rental housing in the City of Seattle. In order for the settlement funds to be dispersed, both the landlord representatives, tenant advocates, and the city had to reach a consensus on how best to invest the funds.

Using a brilliant legal strategy and over a year of negotiations, the legal team helped to secure \$50,000 to support the Tenant Union's Education Program, enabling the TU to open two satellite clinics in North and Southwest Seattle. The funds will be expended over three years to continue the TU's program to educate and empower Seattle tenants. The Margola settlement funds also went to support an upcoming affordable housing locator website and a program to educate landlords on their duties and how best to upkeep their properties. The TU's attorneys also researched and drafted tenants' rights information resources such as a model lease, a single page description of your rights, and other resources which the Margola funds translated in over 13 languages. These resources will be featured on the TU's new website, and will serve as an excellent resource for recent immigrant communities in Seattle. Thanks to the excellent legal work of our volunteer attorneys, Seattle's tenants will have even more resources and tools to protect their housing.

Many thanks for all your work for the TU and Seattle tenants! Volunteers are essential to the continued work and growth of the Tenants Union.



Volunteer attorneys who represented the Tenants Union in the Margola Settlement: Merf Ehman, Sara Sanford, and Elisabeth Yandell McNeil.

Work for Housing Justice as a TU Tenant Counselor

Tenant Counseling Internship volunteer program starting January 2012

By Stina Janssen, VISTA Volunteer Coordinator

**KNOWLEDGE
IS
POWER**



Are you passionate about tenant rights? Did you receive support on our hotline and want to provide tenant rights counseling to others?

The Tenants Union is launching internships in tenant rights counseling this January. The internship program is an opportunity for committed volunteers to work on the front lines of the tenant rights movement. Interns provide housing counseling on the hotline 3-10 hours a week for a minimum period of 6 months. As an intern, you would listen to tenants' concerns, ask questions to draw out key information, and identify the housing issues. You would then describe or show tenants the laws, explain the options, and help the tenant take the action necessary to resolve their housing crisis. Interns also connect tenants with the larger housing justice movement and invite tenants to take action through membership, advocacy campaigns, and organizing.

Interns will receive extensive specialized training on landlord-tenant law and tenant rights, and training in empowerment-based counseling techniques and referral practices. The next training begins in mid-January. Apply as soon as possible to begin this winter, or apply throughout the year for future internship cycles.

Contact **Stina Janssen**, Volunteer Coordinator with questions or to request an application at (206) 722-6848 x 102 or coordinator@tenantsunion.org.



TU Member Frances Mead (with TU members) testifies in support of funding for human services in the King County Budget.

King County gives Tenants Union \$20k for Education Program

The Tenants Union extends our heartfelt thanks to King County Councilmembers Julia Patterson, Larry Gossett, and the entire King County Council for designating \$20,000 in the budget to support the Education Program. The TU will use this money to **dedicate 320 hours educating 900** tenants in King County on their rights. The TU works with renters to provide essential resources and information to prevent housing loss, and organizes tenants to improve housing conditions, laws and policies. We continue to be inspired by a vision of a strong, healthy and equitable King County, and are extremely pleased to be a part of the network of strong advocates and organizations working together for social and housing justice.

Thank You King County Council



- Drawing by Aya, Age 8
Tenants Union Member

Members Make the Tenants Union Strong

The Tenants Union builds power in the movement for tenants' rights and housing justice.

Access to housing, affordability, safe and healthy living conditions, eviction prevention and the power to assert our rights are only the beginning. Tenants need information about their rights and how to use them, stronger protections, and meaningful ways to enforce the law. With a proud 35-year history of work for housing justice through education and organizing, the TU is uniquely well-suited to respond to the challenges renters face in Washington State.



Tenants Union Members:

- Grow the organization and our ability to do effective work
- Secure the TU's long-term stability
- Strengthen TU's influence with legislators and policymakers
- Shape the direction of the work based on the most emergent issues impacting Washington State renters
- Stay informed on current issues and have priority access to TU services

Members are the heart and strength of the Tenants Union's work for housing justice. Please make a gift or renew your support to the Tenants Union today!

Renew your membership to keep the TU growing

Visit www.tenantsunion.org or call the Membership Line at (206) 722-6848 x 109

TU Education Program Hours

Tenants Rights Hotline **206-723-0500**

10 am - 12:30 pm Mon, Tues, Wed

Members Hotline: 206-722-6848 x 8

Current members can leave a message — calls are usually returned within one week.

Walk In Clinics

Tenants Union Office, Columbia City

1:30 - 4 pm Mon, Tues, Wed

West Seattle Tenants Rights Clinic

5 - 7 pm Wednesday

Lake City Tenants Rights Clinic

5 - 7 pm Thursday

For addresses and directions, see:

www.tenantsunion.org

Tenants Union of Washington

5425 Rainier Ave South, Ste B
Seattle, WA 98118

www.tenantsunion.org

Admin: (206) 722-6848

Hotline: (206) 723-0500

