

Tenant Solidarity

News and Information from the Tenants Union of Washington

August 2015



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Get Involved!

SEIU Local 6 organized a direct action against Amazon's Shareholder's meeting that was held here in the City of Seattle on June 10, 2015, and **Tenants Union of Washington State** and other Allies united with them. Amazon's growth is contributing to rising rents and it is profoundly altering our city. As Amazon moves into our city our demands to them were simple. **Good Jobs.** Every worker that contributes to Amazon's success deserves a good, stable job that allows them to support their families. **Public Transit.** Thousands of new commuters increase traffic and congestion, which affects air quality and the environment. **Affordable Housing.** Amazon's new development will bring thousands of new renters and, pricing long-time residents out of our neighborhoods and the city. **Diverse Workforce.** Ensure the people of color who work at Amazon, primarily in service positions, have the benefits of job security, fairness, and respect on the job. Our city deserves responsible business owners and good neighbors to see that any new development proceeds in the best interest of Seattleites. The Tenants Union of Washington welcomes all who would love to get involved and volunteer for us. We believe that every renter should deserve safe and affordable housing, which is free from discrimination, retaliation. Come and join us, we need your skills and talents! **To join our volunteer program call Violet at (206) 722-6848 ex 102.**



Director's Corner

Hello, Tenants Union membership and Washington community.

I'm proud to introduce myself as the Interim Executive Director of the Tenants Union. Jon Grant, long time housing advocate, current Seattle City Council candidate, and former TU Executive Director, stepped down in March 2015 after a successful campaign launch for the Seattle City Council. We at the TU wish Jon a successful future and many more successes in the housing sector! I am incredibly honored to be in this position at such a pivotal time in housing. As the effects of Dodd-Frank are increasingly felt by those searching but denied from homeownership, as rent increases threaten housing stability for tens of thousands, and as the need for advocacy for substandard housing increases - the Tenants Union is standing strong and ready to organize, advocate, and educate the community to take a stand to demand equitable, affordable, and healthy housing.

We have new employees ready to get down to business, and long time TU veterans to show us the way. We're not slowing down, nay, we've only just begun. The TU is the biggest it's ever been with staff, donor, and volunteer support. We don't plan to slow down until the right to housing is realized by every landlord, property owner, and government official. Onward!

In solidarity,

Liz Etta

Interim Executive Director
Tenants Union of Washington



Presenting the 2015 TU Staff Members!

Say Hello to our new Staff!



Steven-Tenant Education Coordinator began at the Tenants Union in April 2015. Steven was first introduced to issues surrounding housing through his volunteer work at a local homeless shelter on Maui, where he grew up. A graduate of Wesleyan University in Connecticut, he took part in direct action initiatives that sought to alleviate hunger in the local community. Upon moving to Seattle, Steven's interest in housing led to his first job as Property Management Coordinator at a large, housing-first organization where he supported a team of property managers. While he gained valuable knowledge regarding Seattle's housing climate, he was dissatisfied that the bulk of his work was seen through the lens of the landlord. This, coupled with Seattle's urgent housing crisis, compelled him to redirect his priorities to becoming a tenant advocate. In his free time, Steven enjoys reading, hiking, camping, going to live shows and collecting obscure board games.

Violet-Membership & Development Coordinator began at the Tenants Union in May 2015. Violet grew up in the SE Seattle community for more than 30 years, and today she to calls it her home. She thinks that if everyone got involved in their own community what different world it would be. She went back to school to further her education in Accounting and Administration. In 2011 she was fortunate to go on a trip to Washington D.C "Take back the Capitol" where the Government was cutting unemployment for the many Americans who had lost their jobs during the recession. Standing together with other fellow Americans there was a sense of unity and it changed Violet — she looked at our world a little more differently from that day on. She's excited to have joined the Tenants Union in advocating for fair housing for all, and she believes that housing should be people before profits. Violet also sings and plays the guitar.



Dinah-VISTA Community Organizer began at the Tenants Union in May 2015. Dinah grew up in Carmel Valley, CA and earned a degree in Environmental Systems from the University of California, San Diego. After journeying to Seattle, she developed her intersectional understanding of poverty and marginalization through her involvement with Gender Justice League. Several months after receiving counseling at the TU's drop in Walk In Clinic she is excited to join the Tenants Union and help preserve the regions affordable housing, a goal that becomes more pressing with each passing month. In her spare time Dinah enjoys being pedantic, helping her partner in the garden, and spending time with friends. Oh, and eating, she really likes eating.

Caitlin-Operations Coordinator began at the Tenants Union in May 2015. Caitlin is excited to join the Tenants Union and their work for housing justice. She grew up and went to school in central Illinois where she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Graphic Communication and a Master's degree in Instructional Design and Technology. After graduate school, she lived for a brief stint in Atlanta, GA, before ultimately landing on the Pacific Northwest where she feels most at home. Caitlin is excited to use her skills to further develop the TU's goals and relates deeply with the housing crisis and those affected by it. In her free time, Caitlin is an avid photographer, belly dancer, and dog fanatic.



Housing News

SCOTUS Backs Disparate Impact Claims

On June 25th, 2015, the United States Supreme Court announced in a 5-4 decision that it would uphold disparate impact claims under the Fair Housing Act. Disparate impact claims arise when a policy is written without discriminatory language, but has discriminatory effects against a protected class under the Fair Housing Act. This win for housing advocates means that policies which perpetuate discrimination, segregation, and racism can be brought to court and deemed illegal.

Check out [NPR's](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/25/417433460/in-fair-housing-act-case-supreme-court-backs-disparate-impact-claims) article on the matter for more information. Hyperlink: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/25/417433460/in-fair-housing-act-case-supreme-court-backs-disparate-impact-claims>

Predominantly African-American Churches & The Idea of Space

The Tenants Union stands in solidarity with those victimized by the recent acts of terror against Charleston and the US South.

We at the Tenants Union are still reeling from the recent events surrounding the recent church massacre and arsons in the US South. As a group of citizens strongly against racial discrimination, and as a group of advocates for housing and shelter, we are disgusted with these horrendous acts of racial violence and domestic terrorism.

As many know, predominantly African American churches are a central meeting location in the African American community. All are welcome to these spaces for fellowship, solidarity, and to learn about oneself and discuss the origin and purpose of mankind. The cowardly acts by Dylan Storm Roof were intended to terrorize and incite violence in the African American community. Most importantly, Roof's actions were intended to send a message to those of recent African descent that no place is safe.

Several churches were burned down after this act. According to [NPR](#):

"Fires in Charlotte, N.C., and Knoxville, Tenn., are both being investigated as arson. Authorities in Macon, Ga., are investigating another there as "suspicious." A fire at a Tallahassee, Fla., church was likely caused by electrical problems, authorities have said. Another in Gibson County, Tenn., may have been caused by lightning. One burning in Charlotte is being investigated to determine if it could have been a hate crime."

Though these events have yet to leave the investigatory phase, it's important to consider the implications of such acts. In a time where housing supply is becoming increasingly unavailable, inequality is worsening, and angers are heightening – we must ask, where can people of color be safe? Is there a public gathering space for communities of color? When will the killings end?

Hyperlink: <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/29/418490411/arsonists-hit-6-black-churches-in-5-southern-states>



HEALTHY HOUSING FOR ALL

Save Our Homes

In June 2015, members of the Tenants Union attended the Save Our Homes conference put on by the National Alliance of HUD Tenants (NAHT). Tenants from all over the country gathered in Washington, DC to discuss our shared struggles dealing with management, unresponsive HUD offices, and the ever present threat of displacement. We heard from one tenant who, with the help of her neighbors, not only prevented the conversion of her complex to market rate housing after renovation, but got the owners to pay for moving and storage costs while the repairs were taken place. We learned the story of a Chicago building which secured tenant ownership and then pushed further to demand that the renovations being done to their building employ residents.

With so much excitement it is hard to pick out a highlight, but for us here in The Evergreen State the choice was a little easier. Among our delegation of Washingtonians was a new tenant leader from West Seattle, Sue Luke. Having just formed her tenant association days before attending the conference, Sue was eager to learn everything she could. Already highly motivated and informed by the end of the conference she affirmed her commitment to housing justice by running for, and subsequently being elected, as the Northwest representative on the NAHT Board! This position has been vacant for quite some time, so the TU is very excited to see this region get the representation it needs. **Way to go Sue!**

News from Spokane

Spokane is HOT!! Not just the weather, but the activity of the Tenants Union in Spokane is hot with tenant meetings, the opening of a walk-in tenant education clinic at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, a city of Spokane campaign for housing justice, and STOP organizing in Section 8 project based buildings. A tenant and organizer attended the NAHT conference in Washington, D.C. and the visibility of the TU is increasing with the Pride parade table and upcoming events at Eastside Reunion, Unity in the Community, Hillyard Days and the Riverfront Park Inter-tribal Powwow.

Phil Smith, tenant leader from Park Tower Apartments helped save tenants property, pets and stress levels when a unit in the 17th floor of Park Tower caught fire in downtown Spokane (see photos). The Park Tower Tenants Association helped tenants by asking local restaurants to provide seating and free ice tea and ice water to tenants suffering from the heat on June 18 as tenants fled their units in the tallest Section 8 project building located directly across the street from the Spokane Convention Center in downtown. A STA bus was dispatched to the building to provide air conditioned seating to tenants.

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News from Spokane...continued

...Two days later, the same tenant leader Phil Smith from Park Tower, attended the NAHT conference in Washington D.C. with organizer, Terri Anderson. The conference provided leadership development and valuable information for Phil to bring back to tenants at Park Tower in Spokane. TU organized tenants when tenants received notice that the owners were opting out of the HUD contract in 2013. The building was sold to a new for-profit owner and is currently under a 40 year HUD contract. Tenants continue to work for the right to organize and address health, safety and privacy concerns as well as respectful treatment to all tenants by the new property owners who also provide on-site management of the building.

VISTA organizer, Amber Abrahamson, has been organizing tenants living at Hillyard Plaza in northeast Spokane. Tenants have been working to address issues of bullying, accessibility, respect and privacy and convened one meeting to organize. Two weeks later, the owners of the building who are located in Seattle, travelled to Spokane to meet with tenants to discuss past incidents and make on-site management aware that tenants have a right to a safe and healthy home environment and any incident that threatens a respectful and helpful environment is not acceptable. The tenants continue to work with Amber until the new twenty year contract that is currently in progress is finalized.

Terri continues to serve as a stakeholder on the Public Safety Committee of the city of Spokane as the city is considering moving public policy through the passage of ordinances to address rental issues, current resources in the community to deal with those issues and what gaps are in place and how to fill those gaps. The Tenants Union of Washington State in Spokane is currently working for the passage of a just cause eviction ordinance, a meaningful and effective rental registration and inspection ordinance and relocation funding for tenants who live in condemned buildings in Spokane through organizing tenants and providing greater awareness to the community and policy makers.

A long, hot summer is in front of us in Spokane as we continue to work collectively with tenants, community partners and citizens of Spokane for housing justice locally and to **build power with tenants across the state for greater tenant protection for everyone in the state of Washington.**

A Short History of Rental Inspections in Bellingham

By: Richard Conoboy

Awareness of the problems associated with the condition of rentals in Bellingham arose several decades ago in discussions among and within the neighborhoods, however, there was little in the way of support for any measures to ensure the health and safety of tenants. A decade ago, the issue was raised again but there was little or no support from the city council after a very large citizen/council meeting that was, in effect, taken over by the landlord/real estate groups by the overwhelming presence of their memberships. The council ran for cover.

Over the past five years a new, concerted effort by neighborhood organizations gained the attention of the city council but this time Western Washington Students came to realize that they were the ones living in unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Since there was no city-wide tenants' union, the student government (Associated Students) stepped up to represent the 10,000 or so student renters who comprise approximately 25% of the tenant population (40,000+) in Bellingham. Although the university administration refused to

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... become involved, in 2010 the student government passed the first of several resolutions calling for the city council to pass legislation to register and inspect rental units. This was followed by editorials and articles over the next four years in the student newspaper, the Western Front, that also called for health and safety inspections of rentals. Students also conducted and published two surveys of renters that indicated the problem of unhealthy and unsafe rentals was widespread and serious. **Opposition from the landlords, the landlord association, and the real estate community was strong and characterized by deliberate misinformation and scare tactics.**

A concomitant effort was made around Bellingham's neighborhoods to push council into adopting an ordinance. Several attempts by council to do so were thwarted by lack of votes. The mayor pitched her own proposal that called for inspection of .5% (only about 67) of the 14,000 rental units per year. All other action on rental health and safety was to depend on a complaint-only system which was the then current, unworkable model. Then a newly elected council member who had arrived in Bellingham from Tacoma, floated a proposed ordinance based on what she described as a very successful program in that city. This was a complaint-based proposal with registration only. The council voted to move that version forward, however, in an opportune turn-around a long-time opponent of rental inspections declared that he had changed his views on rental health and safety and would support an ordinance with registration and inspection. At the same time, citizen investigation of the Tacoma model found that it was deeply flawed and could not possibly achieve the goal of safe rentals. That turned the tide and in December 2014 the Bellingham city council voted 7-0 to adopt an ordinance to register and inspect all of the city's 14,000 rentals. With a new Planning Director taking the helm of the city's Planning Department in late 2014, much of the internal opposition from that unit faded. Funding for the start-up costs has been approved by the city council. The new director has created an aggressive timeline of implementation that will see inspections starting later this year after a period of registration of properties and education of renters and landlords.

The Central District

By: Afam Ayika

Another inexplicably warm Seattle dawn cuts sunlight across the six story tall blue-gray building on 10th and Alder in which I live. I often spend sun-drenched mornings like these sitting on the black metal picnic benches on my apartment's rooftop, staring across the expanse of downtown Seattle; scanning the towering water-front cranes, the two iconic stadiums, and the imposing, white tipped peaks of Mount Rainier. Like clock work my eyes stop and consider certain aspects of the Central District, particularly the changing face of 12th and Yesler, and the youth detention center: which exploitive developers and politicians want to rebuild into something more aesthetically pleasing. A building that will blend better into the planned urban landscape.

Gentrification is the reason they drew those neon green bike lanes and why we rarely see families pushing their kids around in strollers. Gentrification, like a racially vindictive amoeba, is devouring the Central District's working poor and East African communities and pushing them further and further away from the action and the money.

As an immigrant child from a poor single parent household I'm familiar with constantly moving from place to place and relying on strangers for a roof over my head. I do consider moving to Tukwila often, so I can afford a backyard and a lot more space. Unfortunately I like living in the Central District and don't want to spend hours riding the bus and battling Seattle traffic. Therefore my twenty one month old daughter and I will stay in our overpriced studio apartment until they raise my rent or the city facilitates the availability of homes that people can actually afford.

Tenants Union Healthy Housing

By: Jose Camacho

The Pacific Northwest is one of the most beautiful regions this country has to offer, opportunities are ever growing and expanding, and the weather reflects true seasons. Like the changes in weather, housing issues can reflect an instability that one does not expect, when we invest our efforts and resources for healthy affordable housing, we expect that the path of stability be just that, stable. Unfortunately, for some of us stability is never a reality. We at the TU recognize the patterns of substandard housing concerns. Tenants, reaching from Vancouver to the pockets of unincorporated King County and all the way out to Spokane are calling our hotline seeking out educational resources to approach their housing concerns.

Many tenants may be facing housing issues for the first time, where they are simply looking for an answer to a question, but for some tenants our hotline is an all too familiar experience, members and non-members alike are looking for answers. Housing is a large complex web and the scope and reality for some is far more problematic, where they face immediate need and only have limited resources. In particular, South King County tenants don't realize we are ready to help and need some initiation from folks who are ready to tell their stories and fight for change with one another.

I was contacted by a handful of tenants from the same building located in Tukwila who were fed up with their substandard living conditions; major repairs, "seasonal infestations", and concerns about the safety of their neighbors. The concern was that although they followed the letter of the law, they were still subject to a neglecting landlord. Soon after recognizing that they were not alone, the group of tenants became motivated by the opportunity to organize and stand up for their housing rights. Days after their initial tenant meeting and organizing efforts they began to see a change in the management's response. They reported that the owner of the building came by their units asking for an opportunity to inspect their units for any and all possible repair needs which they began to work on in a timely manner. Tenants were shocked to say the least, but overall pleased.

We encourage you and your neighbors to continue this discussion and provide the Tenants Union with real positive feedback about what you wish to see within your community and housing. The laws may not always be on our side, and as individuals we may face barriers that seem almost impossible to overcome, but **like the change in weather there is always a chance of brighter days to come.**



We Love Workshops!

Steven Le, our Tenant Education Coordinator, is always seeking workshop opportunities.

If you work with renters, housing providers, or you're just interested in finding out about your tenant rights, please contact him at stevenl@tenantsunion.org for more information. Workshops are free, but we do request that a minimum of 10 interested folks be in attendance. Our workshops give a broad overview of your rights and cover topics such as tenant screening, repairs, deposits, and evictions. However, these workshops can be specifically catered to your community's needs. Remember that there is no governing body in Washington that enforces tenants' rights. Landlord-tenant laws in Washington are considered self-help, so it is up to tenants to assert their rights. Get scheduled for a workshop today!

TU & General Events Calendar

August 2015

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2	3	4 Make sure your ballots are in for the Primary Election!	5	6	7	1 / 8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20 Gender Odyssey Aug 20-23	21	22
23	24 Monthly Membership Meeting at 6pm	25	26 Women's Equality Day	28	29	30
31	1 September	2	3	4	5	6

Call for Submissions

Do you love housing and the written word? Are you looking for an audience for your social justice oriented artwork? Well, look no further! The Tenants Union continuously receives and publishes works from those in the housing community. Out of state submissions welcome!

To submit your work to the Tenants Union Tenant Solidarity newsletter, please email info@tenantsunion.org. You may also send your work to our physical address at:

Tenant Solidarity Newsletter Team
Tenants Union of Washington State
5425 Rainier Ave S., Ste. B
Seattle, WA 98118

Terms for submission: All written works must be sent in .doc, .docx, .rtf format. Please, limit your submissions to 750 words or less. Please understand that we may resize any artwork to fit within the allotted space within the newsletter.