

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-10

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON DIRECTING THE ADMINISTRATION TO CREATE A LIMITED TERM ADVISORY WORK GROUP TO STUDY AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CITY LANDLORD AND TENANT PROGRAMS

WHEREAS, the City of Bellingham recognizes the importance of a balanced approach to landlord and tenant relations, prioritizing life safety and habitable living conditions as well as acknowledging tenant's right and ensuring that landlords can continue to provide essential rental housing in a city where more than 50 percent of residents are renters; and

WHEREAS, the City assists landlords and tenants in understanding their rights, responsibilities, and resources available to support them; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the City has enacted new requirements to support fair, affordable and accessible housing, including regulating unfair and excessive or "junk" fees; and

WHEREAS, the City's rental registration and safety inspection program is critical for maintaining the quality and safety of rental housing, with approximately 22,578 rental units registered within the city; and

WHEREAS, existing regulations, ordinances and programs that provide a framework for the rental registration and property inspection processes may benefit from lived and/or professional experiences that help to inform programmatic updates to better serve the community; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Kim Lund's Housing Executive Order (2024-2, November 21, 2024) called for supporting rental inspection and protection programs and enhancing future policies by creating a limited-term working group to better inform City policies, practices and actions; and

WHEREAS, the City's 2025 Comprehensive Plan (i.e., the Bellingham Plan) under Housing policy H-46, calls upon the City to "Enforce the City's Rental Registration and Safety Inspection Program to ensure that rental housing units comply with life and fire safety standards and provide a safe place for tenants to live;" and

WHEREAS, the Bellingham Plan's Community Wellbeing chapter includes a goal to expand and strengthen equity and inclusion throughout the City's civic processes and practices. Policy CW-27 specifically calls upon the City to "Foster community representation in City decision making, by evaluating opportunities to tailor the appointment process and reduce barriers to achieve a diverse perspective and representative set of advisory groups;" and

WHEREAS, there is a need for additional engagement with landlords, tenants, legal representatives, advocacy groups and other interested parties to address a range of issues including, but not limited to, rental affordability, availability, stability, regulatory complexity, and increasing costs to landlords; and

WHEREAS, input from a diverse group of community members is essential for continuing and enhancing programs and policies that are effective at achieving City goals and priorities, as well as reflecting the unique needs of our community; and

WHEREAS, the City aims to foster a collaborative environment that encourages constructive dialogue and the sharing of ideas and best practices among interested parties regarding rental protections and requirements; and

WHEREAS, the formation of a limited term advisory group will provide a structured platform for discussing issues, recommendations and strategies for improvement; and

WHEREAS, the advisory group will be charged with identifying actionable recommendations to improve the City's rental protections and programs while minimizing potential negative impacts on the rental housing market.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BELLINGHAM THAT:

SECTION 1. Advisory Work Group

The Bellingham City Council directs the Mayor to appoint a volunteer limited-term work group ("work group"). The purpose of the work group is to research, discuss, and develop informed recommendations regarding the City's landlord and tenant requirements and programs.

The work group shall consist of not less than 9 and not more than 13 community members comprised of the following:

- a. **Tenant Experience:** At least 4 residents who are currently tenants in Bellingham. Preference for these positions shall be given to applicants who: are income-constrained; are students renting off-campus housing; represent vulnerable communities; or have other experiences that reflect the diverse demographics of Bellingham's renters.
- b.
- c. **Landlord Experience:** At least 3 residents who are currently landlords or rental property managers within Bellingham.
- d. **Community Connections:** At least 1 individual with experience and training in building/construction trades and/or inspections, non-profit housing, tenant advocacy, conflict resolution, community engagement, or related experience. Individuals in this area shall not represent the views of their employer but may draw on that experience.
- e. **Legal Experience:** At least 1 individual with legal experience and training in tenant rights, landlord-tenant laws, housing, human rights, civil liberties, or similar fields. Individuals in this area shall not represent the views of their employer but may draw on that experience.

- f. **Ex-Officio Members:** Elected officials and people employed by the City of Bellingham shall not be appointed to the work group but may serve as non-voting ex-officio members at the discretion of the Mayor. Other individuals or organizations identified by the Mayor may also serve as non-voting ex-officio members. Council confirmation is not required for non-voting ex-officio members.

The administration shall advertise, through usual and customary means, for applications from interested individuals, residents, community members, and professionals working in the City of Bellingham. The Mayor shall give preference to residents of the City, then residents of Whatcom County in considering appointments; however, the Mayor is authorized to make appointments to persons not residing within City limits or Whatcom County if they have extensive training, knowledge and experience, or the number of applicants from interested City residents is not sufficient to meet the needs of this work group. Consideration of a diverse and inclusive group reflecting the diverse demographics within the City shall be made in forming the work group.

Interpretation and translation services will be provided as needed to support full participation by work group members.

In the event of a resignation or vacancy, the position will be filled by Mayoral appointment with City Council confirmation. Unexcused absences of more than two meetings shall be considered a resignation from the work group. Substitutes or alternates shall not be allowed for any member.

The Mayor and administration shall support the work group by providing overall direction and administration, assigning a project manager and staff support, recruiting for and contracting with a facilitator, reviewing applications and appointing members, coordinating and implementing communications strategies, and receiving and considering the recommendations of the work group.

The City Council's role is to confirm work group member appointments and receive and consider the recommendations of the work group.

SECTION 2. Work Group Facilitation and Project Management

Council directs the Administration to contract with an outside entity or individual to serve as a neutral facilitator to chair the meetings and support and guide the work of the work group. The facilitator will be selected using the City's usual and customary means, with a preference for those demonstrating experience and/or direct connections to landlord-tenant or housing needs and issues in Bellingham.

The facilitator's scope of work, selection and contract award shall be made by the Mayor or their designated project manager and not by the work group. The facilitator shall work at the direction of the City's project manager. The City's project manager will administer the facilitator's contract, prepare and approve agendas, meeting minutes and work group reports, and generally support the facilitator and the work group, based on the direction provided in this resolution. A final report shall be drafted by City or contracted staff on behalf of the group, to

include an overview of the group's work and the recommendations as adopted by the work group.

Funding for this work shall be from the 2026 budget and shall be further authorized in the 2027 budget.

SECTION 3. Scope of Work

The work of the work group is limited to the scope described in this resolution. The work group shall have no authority to expand the scope of work, set policy, direct City staff or the work group facilitator, communicate on behalf of the City, or otherwise replace or supplant any authority reserved for the Mayor or City Council.

The work group shall address the following items and present a final report and recommendations to the City:

- a. Evaluate existing City regulations, policies and systems relative to landlord and tenant requirements and make recommendations for improvement.
- b. Identify and/or consider potential funding sources for future program enhancements.
- c. Review rental inspection processes and checklists and make recommendations for enhancements and improvements that are allowable within applicable laws, codes and ordinances, including the International Residential Code, the International Building Code, and the International Property Maintenance Code.
- d. Review existing communication, education and promotional materials, City events, and other City resources, and make recommendations to enhance and improve strategies to reach intended audiences.
- e. Review survey, focus group and other data and public engagement feedback previously gathered by the City about landlord and tenant needs and experiences and consider ways for the work group to use this information in its work.
- f. Review and provide feedback on proposed plans for future data gathering and public engagement efforts, as outlined in Section 6 below.

To accomplish the scope of work, work group members will:

- a. Participate in discussions with work group members, City staff and others who have information and expertise relevant to the scope of work, at established meetings.
- b. Participate when possible in optional sub-groups outside the established meetings.
- c. Participate when possible in optional opportunities for further education outside the established meetings, to establish a base of common knowledge and shared understanding.

- d. Participate in generating, considering and voting on recommendations presented to the work group for approval.
- e. Contribute to a final report, compiled by City or contracted staff on behalf of the group, to include an overview of the group's work and recommendations adopted by the work group.
- f. Participate in presenting a final report to the Mayor and City Council at a City Council Committee of the Whole meeting.
- g. The workgroup may identify issues that go beyond the scope of work pertaining to current policies, requirements, and programs for inclusion in the final report, for possible follow-up work by the City.

SECTION 4. Quorum, Decisions and Meetings

- a. **Voting Members:** The work group shall be comprised of 9-13 voting members, appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.
- b. **Quorum:** A majority of total appointed voting members shall constitute a quorum. No meeting shall be held without a quorum being present.
- c. **Sub-Group Work:** Sub-groups may be formed as needed to undertake research and collaborative work supporting the established scope of work. Sub-groups may meet outside the established meeting schedule. Sub-groups may only include appointed work group members and City staff and their size must be limited to less than a quorum of the full membership. Sub-groups have no decision-making authority or voting responsibilities.
- d. **Decision Making:** Work group members shall strive for consensus on decisions and recommendations made to the City. In the absence of consensus, the work group shall make decisions and recommendations by simple majority vote of the quorum. In the event of a simple majority vote, the minority votes will be allowed to submit a written dissenting opinion to be included in recommendations made to the City.
- e. **Remote Attendance Option:** Attendance by members may be in person or remote, provided the member is able to listen, speak, and fully participate and view all portions of the meeting.
- f. **Meeting Schedule:** The work group shall meet approximately once per month according to a meeting schedule established by the City prior to recruiting candidates. Each monthly meeting shall not exceed 120 minutes in duration. The work group shall complete and present its work to the City no later than the end of 2027.
- g. **Notice, Minutes, Updates:** The work group shall advise and assist the City as defined in the scope of work. In an advisory role to the City, the work group shall use the following in conducting business:

- i. Work group meetings shall be open to the public for observation but shall not be recorded for audio or video posting or rebroadcast by the City.
- ii. Notice of meetings and agendas shall be published using usual and customary means of the City.
- iii. Summary meeting minutes shall be prepared and provided to the public using usual and customary means of the City.
- iv. Updates and communications about the progress of the work group shall be issued by the City, using the usual and customary means of the City.
- v. Work group meetings shall not include public comment periods, nor shall the work group be obligated to seek public comment on the work outlined in this resolution. Public comment and input on the policy advice and recommendations of the work group may be accepted by the City after the completion of the work and/or in conjunction with its presentation to the Mayor and City Council.

SECTION 5. Work Group Member Roles and Responsibilities

Serving the public's interest is a top priority for all City advisory groups. Expectations of all advisory group members to facilitate successful community engagement and volunteer experiences are outlined in Facilitating Successful Community Engagement with City Advisory Groups: Expectations of advisory group members and City of Bellingham officials, posted on the City website.

SECTION 6. Data Gathering and Additional Public Engagement

Council directs the administration to develop a plan for additional and ongoing data gathering and public engagement, focused on landlord and tenant needs, experiences and education, for review and feedback from the work group (as referenced in Section 3f) and to inform ongoing City decision making. Funding for this work shall be from the 2026 budget and shall be further authorized in the 2027 budget.

SECTION 7. Expected Work Group Timeline

The work group shall take the time it needs to address the work plan, with a commitment to proceed efficiently to create a final report with recommendations following the schedule and expectations outlined herein.

Work group members are expected to be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council by September 2026. The work group shall meet according to a meeting schedule established by the City prior to recruiting candidates. An update on the work group's progress will be presented to Council approximately mid-year 2027. The work group shall terminate and dissolve upon presentation of a final report and recommendations to the Mayor and City Council. All work of the work group and facilitator, including presentation of a final report and related recommendations, shall be completed no later than end of 2027.

PASSED by the Council this 11th day of May, 2026.

Council President

APPROVED by me this _____ day of _____, 2026

Mayor

ATTEST:

Finance Director

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Office of the City Attorney