

Kirkland's proposed Section 8 housing ordinance prohibits discrimination. Landlord screening abilities retained.

By: Eric Shields, Director, Planning and Community Development Department

The City is considering an ordinance that would prohibit a landlord from refusing to rent to a tenant solely based upon the applicant's use of Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. Recent community feedback suggests that there may be misunderstandings about the purpose of the ordinance. To allow time for additional education and community input, the draft ordinance has been moved from the February 19 to March 19 City Council meeting and the City will host a second community meeting on February 26, 7 to 8:30 p.m., City Hall, Peter Kirk Room.

The Section 8 Housing Voucher Program is funded by the federal government and administered by local housing authorities to assist low income families, the elderly and the disabled to afford housing in the private market. For Kirkland, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) oversees the program. Section 8 participants pay a percentage of their household income for rent and utilities. Through a voucher system, KCHA pays the difference between the portion of the tenant's rent and the amount requested by the landlord.

The ordinance Kirkland is considering would require landlords to use the same criteria for Section 8 renters that they apply to any other prospective tenant. Landlords may use their standard screening process, such as rental and credit history checks and may retain existing rental practices for deposits and rental agreements. Landlords are not required to change how they operate their property. Any property that has rents higher than the rent limits established by KCHA would not be required to lowering rents to make units available to Section 8 participants. The program has administrative requirements such as an initial minimum lease period and property inspections. However, landlords who do not normally use the required lease period or who are unable to make any noted repairs, will not be required to participate in the program.

In November 2012, the City Council was presented with the draft ordinance and postponed action to allow for more outreach and education. The City erred in not providing adequate notice to some participants for a community meeting held on January 23, but more than 25 attendees, including Kirkland residents, landlords, property managers, and housing advocates, shared their thoughts on the proposed ordinance. The City committed to hosting another community meeting if needed.

Kirkland's proposed legislation supports the Council's goal of maintaining opportunities for households of all income levels and needs. If approved, Kirkland joins Bellevue, Redmond, Seattle and King County in adopting this legislation.

The City is committed to seeing that all voices are heard and considered in this decision. Community members and stakeholders are invited to attend the next community meeting, the City Council meeting or send comments to the City Council through Dawn Nelson, Planning & Community Development at dnelson@kirklandwa.gov or 425-587-3230.