

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
HOUSING AUTHORITY

TO: HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSIONERS
FROM: CARMELITA HOWARD DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: HOUSING ANTI-DISCRIMINATION ORDINANCE BASED ON
SOURCE OF INCOME

AGENDA ACTION: STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDATION

Informational only.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Study Session is to provide the Housing Authority Board information regarding the Housing Anti-Discrimination Ordinance Based on Source of Income that was proposed to City Council on August 13.

The Council of the City of Santa Rosa adopted a comprehensive housing strategy as part of its Tier 1 housing goals. A component of the housing strategy is to adopt a local ordinance that prohibits rental housing discrimination against tenants using Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and other forms of rental assistance.

BACKGROUND

Santa Rosa is experiencing a housing crisis exacerbated by the 2017 wildfire disaster, with a severe shortage of available and affordable housing. Council identified housing as a Tier 1 priority and planned a comprehensive strategy to address the housing crisis, including sixteen specific deliverables to be completed between June 30, 2019 and the year 2023. Council has developed concurrent strategies addressing homelessness in Santa Rosa, also a Tier 1 priority. The steps outlined in the comprehensive housing strategy were developed during the Council and Executive Staff annual goal setting workshop and were adopted by City Council on May 7, 2019.

The Santa Rosa Housing Authority (SRHA) administers the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program within the Department of Housing and Community Services and has aligned its local policies to support the Council's Tier 1 goals by setting aside Housing

Choice Vouchers for the homeless and for survivors of the October 2017 wildfires. The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is the largest rental housing program in the country, serving over 2.2 million households. Under the HCV program, Housing Authorities use federal dollars to help participants pay their rent in privately owned housing. SRHA has 1,898 vouchers under contract with HUD including 414 vouchers dedicated to homeless veterans under the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

The HCV program was first enacted in 1974 and has proven to be an efficient, cost-effective alternative to government-owned affordable housing with better outcomes for participating families who are able, in theory, to choose housing located outside areas of concentrated poverty that meets their individual needs. In practice, voucher holders may find that their housing opportunities are still limited despite having the financial backing of the voucher assistance, since there is no requirement for housing providers to participate in the program. Research published by HUD in 2001 indicated that 69 percent of families who were issued vouchers were successful in finding housing, with that number falling to 61 percent in some tighter housing markets. SRHA's current success rate is 61 percent, down from 74 percent in 2018 and slightly higher than a 2017 low of 59 percent. Many factors contribute to the voucher success rate, but the number of landlords willing to accept vouchers has been identified by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities as a likely major contributor to this measure.

SRHA voucher holders currently searching for housing have reported challenges in finding landlords who are willing to accept the voucher as a form of payment. A review of local rental advertisements on Craigslist and Zillow revealed at least five separate listings that explicitly stated vouchers would not be accepted. Such policies impede the efforts of SRHA and Council to address the housing crisis by narrowing the pool of rentals available to families who are participating in programs designed to promote housing affordability and opportunity.

Eleven states and more than 50 local governments have enacted laws that prohibit landlords from refusing to rent to voucher holders solely because of their source of income. In areas where these protections exist, the success rate for voucher holders has been estimated to increase between five and 12 percentage points. As of June 2019, sixteen California jurisdictions had passed source of income discrimination ordinances, including several North Bay cities. The purpose of these measures is to give tenants using vouchers or other third-party rental assistance equal access to the rental application process. If approved, Santa Rosa's ordinance will be the first of its kind in Sonoma County.

PRIOR HOUSING AUTHORITY REVIEW

Not applicable.

ANALYSIS

Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guideline section 15378.

COUNCIL/BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable

CONTACT

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