

**TO:** Housing and Economic Development Committee  
**FROM:** Rental Housing Advisory Committee  
**RE:** Dissolution of the Rental Housing Advisory Committee  
**DATE:** February 15, 2024

---

Dear Councilors:

We write to recommend that you dissolve the Rental Housing Advisory Committee. We do this with deep regret that a more constructive partnership could not have been built with the Housing and Economic Development Committee (HEDC) that would have made this committee's work meaningful and more useful to the residents of Portland.

We are not recommending dissolution because we think our mission has been accomplished. In fact, we are dealing with once-in-a-generation forces that make it more urgent than ever that the City tackle issues related to rental housing. While we have been eager to help be a part of the solution to these challenges, we have sought guidance and counsel from the HEDC without response, which ultimately frustrates our ability to carry out our charge.

The Rental Housing Advisory Committee (RHAC) was established in the wake of a City tragedy – the Noyes Street fires – to form a working group that could propose policy suggestions and assist in educational efforts with respect to landlord-tenant relationships and housing safety in the City of Portland.

Since the committee's inception, the RHAC has attempted to communicate with the Housing and Economic Development Committee about housing challenges in Portland. THE RHAC never received an explicit charge from the HEDC, or the City Council, and it was left to the committee, and City staff, to develop a focus for the committee.

The RHAC's focus ultimately included research and a recommendation regarding application fees that was ultimately significantly revised and diminished before passage by the City Council, without continued communication with the RHAC itself. It is worth noting that in the years since, the City, and the State, have adopted language consistent with the initial intention of the RHAC around this issue.

Following the RHAC's creation, our community has seen many large-scale changes to the housing market and critical views of conventional housing policies.

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement sought to address systemic barriers across all levels of government and society, including in the areas of housing quality, housing safety, and affordability.

Our community weathered a global pandemic during which rapid and significant changes to the housing market and housing law occurred. The market changes included a sharp increase in costs as well as increased demand for housing resulting in a high volume of Mainers, and Portlanders, facing homelessness. We are still dealing with the impact of those market changes, and a State study identifies a housing shortage in Maine of close to 80,000 units.

Most recently, and as a cumulative result of these forces, we have seen large numbers of people camping out in Portland because they are unhoused.

The housing crisis, across nearly all economic levels, has not abated and there are still market pressures that will impact our most vulnerable residents well into the future.

There is work to be done, and we have eagerly reached out, via memo and through City staff, to ask how we can help.

It is impossible to fulfill our mission without that direction, and thus, though there is much work for the City to do on these vital issues, we reluctantly request that the City dissolve the Rental Housing Advisory Committee.