

Environmental Health has a Place in the Housing & Homelessness Crisis Response

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Healthy Homes Program

Educates residents of Thurston County to reduce asthma triggers, exposure to toxins, and other housing-related health risks.

Most of our clients are renters.



Healthy Homes Program

Past program practices (2012 - Oct. 2018)

- Healthy Homes Visits.
- AmeriCorps member.
- Volunteers and volunteer trainings.
- Community workshops and classes.
- Housing Action Team member.

Healthy Homes Program

Current program practices (Oct. 2018 – present)

- Technical assistance via phone and email (visits as needed, after TA).
- Healthy Homes Vendor List.
- Increased community workshops and classes.
- Housing Action Team member and Chair of Rental Housing Workgroup.

Today's Presentation

Healthy Homes Program

- What technical assistance and education looks like.
- What kinds of housing conditions we see.
- What's the impact?

Thurston Thrives Housing Action Team

- Housing & Homelessness Crisis Response.
- Getting a voice at the table.
- Rental Housing Workgroup.

Questions

Healthy Homes Assistance

By phone (or email) resident shares housing issues and HH staff members:

- give guidance (healthy homes education) on best practices to fix or mitigate problem.
- share contacts for additional resources available locally (weatherization program, free legal services, dispute resolution center, Family Support Center, etc).

Healthy Homes Assistance

- Take info for program data and following up.
- Send email with summary of phone call, attached guidance materials, applicable links, etc.
- Follow up 1-2 months later with a phone call and short questionnaire.

Housing Conditions

What we see

- Mold and moisture.
- Various indoor air quality concerns.
- Structural damage.
- Pests (mostly rodents).
- Needed upgrades – windows, doors, heating systems.









Housing Conditions

Health Impacts

- Respiratory illness.
- Increased asthma and allergy symptoms.
- Increased symptoms for people with chronic disease, cancer, and those with compromised immune systems.
- Mental health instability.
- Stress.



Healthy Homes Assistance

Short-term outcomes

- Clients concerns are heard and validated.
- Clients gain a fuller understanding of their situation and can form a plan or a few next steps.
- Clients are usually grateful.
- Some clients are upset that there is no enforcement.



Healthy Homes Assistance

But then what?

- Clients are able to get repairs done and the situation is fixed.
- Clients continue to request repairs and follow HH guidance to reduce the impact of their housing conditions.
- Clients move (or try to).
- Clients seek legal assistance.

Laws and Codes

- Washington State Residential Landlord Tenant Act.
- Laws and codes by jurisdiction.

Patchwork of enforcement leads residents to rely on lawyers.

Barriers to legal aid

- Access: cost or meeting requirements for free legal assistance, language and education.
- Time.
- Knowledge and understanding to navigate.

What's happening?

Housing crisis response efforts

- Increased and improved services for homeless population.
- New construction.

Gap: Maintaining current housing stock (housing conditions).

In rental housing

Not enough housing for the population.

Low vacancy rates = no need to compete.

Thurston County Housing Action Team

Thurston Thrives is a community initiative to improve health and safety for all in Thurston County.

Action Teams

- Housing
- Climate and Clean Energy
- Clinical Care
- Community Design
- Economy
- Education & Resilience
- Environment
- Food
- Public Safety & Justice



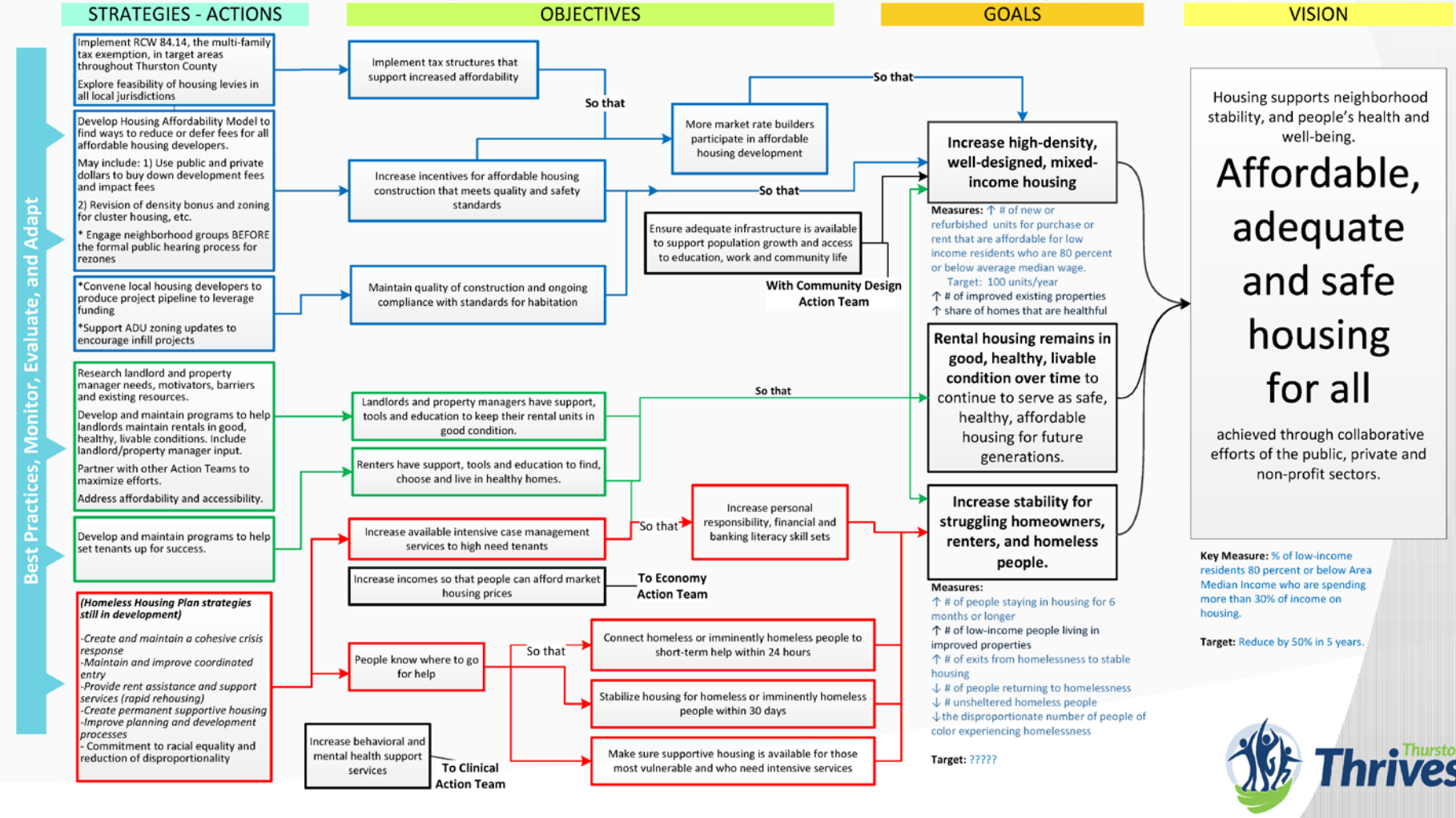
Thurston County Housing Action Team (HAT)

Monthly HAT meetings

Sub-teams

- Homeless Housing Hub
- Incentive Housing (new construction)
- Rental Housing Workgroup
- Senior Housing

Housing for Health Strategy Map



Green, Healthy & Affordable Rentals (GHAR)

- Focus was on energy efficiency.
- Participation was low to non-existent.



2018 Makeover



New name: Thurston County Rental Housing Workgroup

- Broader focus: to improve rental housing.
- Specific project teams for HAT members to sign up for.
 - Landlord Survey.
 - Rental Housing Symposium event planning team.

2018 Projects

Landlord Survey

- Lead by Thurston County Public Health staff.
- Project team and Housing Action Team input.

Rental Housing Symposium

- Event in November 2018 for housing service providers.
- 30 attendees (goal met!).
- Symposium Program included: panel of four local landlords, preliminary Landlord Survey results, discussion of challenges in work with rental housing.
- Invitation to join Rental Housing Workgroup.

Success!



Rental Housing Workgroup

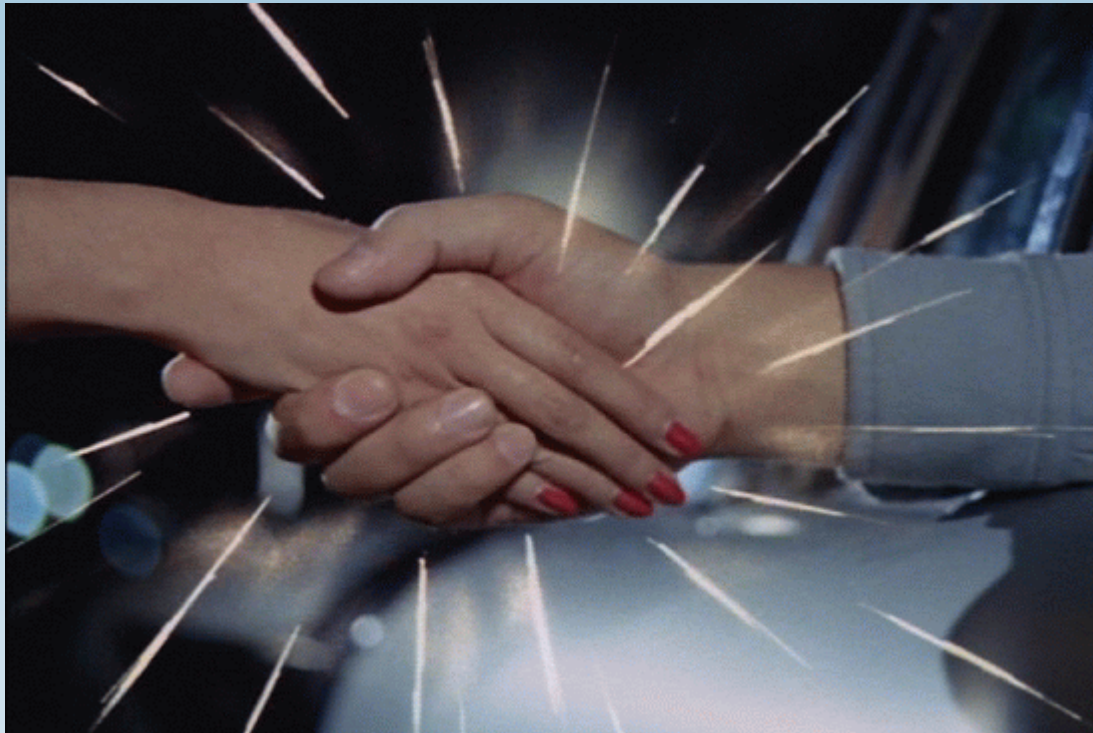
Working together to improve multiple aspects of rental housing for landlords and renters in Thurston County.

We look into ways for renters, landlords and property managers to get the support, tools and education to help improve the physical conditions and the experience of rental housing.

Goal: For rental housing to remain in good, healthy and livable condition over time to continue to serve as safe, healthy and affordable housing for current and future generations.

Members: housing-related services providers, local government staff, lawyers, members of the general public.

What did we learn from the symposium?



Relationship building is everything.

Landlord & Property Managers

Why focus on landlords?

- They're people and business owners.
- Building relationships with landlords is key to getting vulnerable clients in homes.
- We can help them succeed.
- We can continue to support renters.

About the 2018 Survey

Approach

- Target:
 - Property managers and landlords
- Mail:
 - Introduction letter
 - Paper and online survey option
 - Follow-up letter
- Conducted:
 - October-November 2018

Response

- Completed:
 - 62 surveys out of 235
- Rental units: 8,238
 - Lacey
 - Olympia
 - Rainier
 - Tenino
 - Tumwater
 - Yelm
 - Outside of city limits

Structure

What are the most common structural issues in your units?

Percent	Response
26%	Leaky pipes
20%	Old or damaged windows
20%	Old or damaged roofs
14%	Poor insulation
12%	Poorly sealed doors, windows, or other parts of structure
12%	Mold

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

Repair

What are your biggest challenges with making repairs?

Percent	Response
54%	Timely reporting by tenants
30%	Having reliable contractors or maintenance staff
26%	Cost of repairs
25%	Scheduling repairs
14%	Having tenants in unit

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

Upgrades

What are the main reasons for not making upgrades to your current rental units?

Percent	Response
43%	Cost
17%	Inconvenience to tenants
13%	Not requested by current or prospective tenants
13%	No return on investment
11%	Time to arrange or plan

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

Upgrades continued

What are the most important reasons for making upgrades to your rental units?

Percent	Response
85%	To keep units in good condition
64%	To make units more attractive or marketable
58%	To retain tenants
47%	To improve energy efficiency

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

Energy Efficiency

Are you interested in improving the energy efficiency of your rental units?

Percent	Response
48%	Yes, I am doing it
14%	Yes, but I am not sure how to do it
10%	Yes, but I cannot afford it
14%	No
14%	Not sure

(May not add to 100% due to rounding)

Energy Efficiency continued

Would any of the following motivate you to make energy efficiency upgrades?

Percent	Response
69%	No cost or low cost technical assistance
18%	Loan or other financial assistance

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

Organizations

In the past year, have you worked with a local organization that helps people who need housing?

Percent	Response
67%	Yes
26%	No
7%	Not sure

(May not add to 100% due to rounding)

Organizations continued

Would you describe your experience with local organizations that help people who need housing as:

Percent	Response
52%	Mostly good
19%	Somewhat good
6%	Somewhat bad
6%	Mostly bad
17%	Not sure

(May not add to 100% due to rounding)

Programs

What housing programs would you participate in?

Percent	Response
79%	Local rental housing conference or workshops
67%	Energy efficiency incentives
3%	Other

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

Adding Units

Are you considering adding more rental housing units in Thurston County?

Percent	Response
25%	Yes
47%	No
28%	Not sure

(May not add to 100% due to rounding)

Subsidies

Do you accept tenants with government rental subsidies?

Percent	Response
87%	Yes
9%	No
4%	Not sure

(May not add to 100% due to rounding)

Subsidies continued

What would help you be more comfortable accepting government subsidies?

Percent	Response
48%	Nothing more, I am comfortable with things as they are
40%	Commitment from local organization to help with payment issues
27%	Additional deposit
25%	Landlord insurance program
23%	Commitment from local organization to help support high need tenants

(May not add to 100%, those surveyed could select all that apply)

2019

Rental Housing Workgroup is building on this data by doing more research this year.



2019

Landlord Listening Sessions

- Pilot event May 14.
- Small group (about 10 participants – smaller scale property managers).
- Participation incentive \$10 gift card to home improvement store.
- Share ideas for programs and get feedback.
- Ask their ideas for programs.
- Get feedback on structuring additional Listening Sessions.

Second Annual “Rental Housing Symposium”

- Early November.

Brainstorming & Additional Research



- What programs exist elsewhere?
- What new program ideas do we have?
- What kinds of programs would respond to our local landlord's needs?
- What are low cost programs we can start first?

2020

- Invite a few landlords and property managers to join the Rental Housing Workgroup.
- Begin to develop or update programs using research results to inform the work.
- Starting with lowest cost programs
 - Educational materials
 - Workshops
 - Ready to Rent classes
- Third Annual “Rental Housing Symposium”

Goals

- Stronger partnerships between landlords/property managers and local housing service organizations.
- Increased support, resources and tools to local landlords.
- Increased support, resources and tools to local renters.
- Physical conditions of rental housing improve over time.
- Health impacts caused by housing conditions are reduced for renters.





Questions?

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