

**HOUSING COMMISSION  
OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020, 4:00 PM  
ALAMO COLLEGES DISTRICT  
2222 NORTH ALAMO, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78215**

**Members Present:** Pedro Alanis for Nicole Collazo, Member  
Jessica O. Guerrero, Member  
Susan Richardson, Member  
Lourdes Castro-Ramirez, Chair  
Dr. Paul Furukawa, Member  
Sarah Sanchez, Member  
Robert Abraham, Member  
David Nisivoccia, Member

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**Members Absent:** Keith Hom, Member

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**Staff Present:** Lori Houston, *Assistant City Manager*;  
Verónica R. Soto, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;  
Edward Gonzales, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;  
Ian Benavidez, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;  
Sara Wamsley, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;  
Irma Duran, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;  
Azza Kamal, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*;  
Anabel Marroquin-Villa, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*; Vanessa Chavez, *Neighborhood & Housing Services Department*

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- **Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order at 4:10 PM by Lourdes Castro-Ramirez
  - **Roll Call** - The roll was called by Irma Duran; at the time roll call was conducted, eight (8) members were present representing a quorum.
  - **Public Comments** –Duran announced two (2) residents signed up to speak on consent, one (1) for item number one, one (1) for item number three, 14 for item number four, and one (1) for items four and five. The sign in sheet was provided to Castro-Ramirez who announced two minutes are allotted per speaker.

Chad Walling and Cody Doege verbally stated they were both here to speak on item #4 as well.

1. Kim Bragman: [Chad Wohl, Cody Wague ceded their time to Bragman.] 2020 Chairwoman of the San Antonio Board of Realtors [SABOR]. Expressed concern about the proposal to create a renter’s commission, item #4. SABOR agrees renter’s voices are heard, but a renter’s commission is not the way to do so. The

commission would only have residential renters, but not property managers. Commission would not have full story when making decisions, hurting affordable housing. Commission would be first of its kind in Texas; supporters want to model it after Seattle's commission. Since 2017, Seattle has made several moves that SABOR feels will hurt affordable housing such as rent control, moratoriums, elimination of background checks and extension of notice times increasing to six times the normal standard. SABOR recommends adding renter representation to existing commissions instead of creating a new one. Creating a new commission is contrary to the Housing Policy Framework.

2. Marty Hutchinson: [Teresa Brown ceded her time to Hutchinson.] Representing the National Association of Residential Property Managers. Group states the commission as is written is not in the best interest of renter's property rights. Cannot endorse property as currently drafted; framework must be in balance of renters' and landlords' rights in the state of Texas. The policy is inconsistent with the Housing Policy Framework; policy expresses concerns of redundancy of too many boards and commissions that 'muddy the waters.' There are eight boards, commissions or organizations to assist renters [from homelessness to workforce housing]. These are tools and mechanisms for renters to be heard.

Under framework, San Antonio will continue to be a leader in tenant protection. Also added that he has several friends in Seattle area, and they state [Seattle] renter's commission has repressed the industry.

3. Tony Martinez: San Antonio Realtor. Expressing concerns of commission, goes against policies of Housing Policy Framework, which expresses concern over redundancy of too many boards and commissions. Currently San Antonio has several boards and corporations that overlook housing and similar needs—from homelessness to workforce housing. These are tools and mechanisms for renters to be heard. Request support for Housing Commission to be leader in the cause and not dilute their work with redundant new groups.
4. Courtney Gill: Property Manager and Realtor. Informed on impact, a real-world example about property managers in Military City, USA. Military homes do not have equity, so they decide to rent their homes [when they are transferred]. If renter's commission allows tenants to not pay rent for several months, military homeowners cannot pay taxes and their homes will be foreclosed on.
5. Robert Ray: Lawyer. Wanted to reiterate what previous speakers stated; there are too many boards, and the board must have equal representation between landlords and tenants.
6. Phyllis Newman: Landlord of an 8-unit apartment building. Speaker stated she is against the elimination of background checks; she uses to verify tenant is not a sex offender or child abuser. Her other tenants use the list to check who is in the building. Regarding the first-time law: many people in her neighborhood [Government Hill] are not qualified because they are not able to have an income 3 or 4 times more than their rent. Regarding eviction forgiveness, she looks for prior evictions to notify them ahead of time to not apply. For moratorium during winter months, she stated tenants can get savvy and refuse to pay during the winter.

She feels regarding right to counsel, tenants should pay. Some tenants are savvy to the system, and can afford to pay, they simply abuse the system.

7. Kris Bowen: Lawyer. Speaker stated he echoed the previous speakers, especially the explanation that a commission is duplicative of existing organizations present. Will create an analysis paralysis and hamstringing the ability for owners and landlords to effectively make decisions in recruiting tenants, go to greater lengths in [JV] court or eviction court. The Housing Commission needs to consider what the framework will be, there will be unintended consequences if San Antonio follows Seattle framework. He is not for the renter's commission, but if it does occur, great lengths must be made to the policy.
8. Jan Hicenbothom: Realtor. Speaker wanted to make clear that what the Council Consideration Request hopes to accomplish is already in place. Tenants already have a place for input; strengthening connection between city officials and residents is the SASpeak up program; a public platform to share ideas. Anti-displacement is also being addressed through the Risk Mitigation Fund, and emergency relocation assistance. Tenant advocacy groups are available to provide housing stability, remediation and discrimination investigations. Many proposed items are achievable through the existing programs.
9. Tanner Montgomery: Realtor. Speaker addressed that moratoriums and rent control have been tried before and backfired. These incentives hurt the landlord and they leave the business, pushing prices up. If commission is one sided, they will ask for items that cost money and raise taxes. Results in lack of affordability, houses not being taken care of.
10. Pancho Valdez: Speaker has lived in a SAHA property for five (5) years. Stated the previous speakers do not have a clue of what tenants go through. Things are unbalanced, as Texas has some of the worst tenant laws in the country. Express-News article recently came out showing San Antonio tenants are being evicted at high rates, because law is on the side of people with money. It is not true that anyone can get an attorney to appeal if they are on low income. Difference between tenant and developers is tenant does not have money to buy politicians. Right of building owners takes priority over rights of people to have a place to live. Given rate of evictions, it makes sense to have a place for tenants to have a voice.
11. Brett Finley: Speaker stated City has several strict mandates in place to restrict campaign funding from special interest groups. Right to counsel program should be fully vetted from both sides; property owners as well as tenants. Due to it being a \$100,000 fund, wants an RFP to be provided to keep process transparent. SABOR remains committed to assist those in need, support any programs that assist people staying in homes, but want the process to be balanced and vetted
12. Raquel Bonas: Landlord and homeowner. Speaker stated she made her home a rental property when she moved out. She has a property manager that manages property. Worried that she will not be able to pay for mortgage if tenants do not pay, resulting in foreclosure. She represents military that rent out their properties that would not be protected while on duty if policies fall into place. Landlords would have to request higher deposits. If background checks are eliminated, how

will other tenants, neighbors know who is next to them. She asked how people would be able to protect their children. She stated that if commission passes, she [and others] will sell their properties; she is not going to be in a situation where she won't be paid

13. Terri Castillo: Speaker is representing the Historic Westside Resident Association speaking on behalf of the Alazan Residents as well as renters. She read a statement: Renters have distinct issues from homeowners. A renter's commission comprised of renters is a necessity to provide solutions to San Antonio's issues. Forty percent of District 5 residents are tenants and on the Historic Westside, a high percentage of residents are low income. Finding affordable housing for these tenants is difficult. Instead of pushing discussion to further debate, address issues presented today. Rent control has been discussed, but rent control is illegal in Texas. The fiscal year 2020 budget and housing task force mentioned many of the needed new units are rental properties. As renters become the majority, they need a commission to be heard. The Housing Commission has one of the largest landlords on their board, so landlords are represented. As development and destabilization continue, it is important to push discussion further.

14. Luisa Norton: Not Present

15. Dr. Christine Drennon: Speaker Stated that this is a housing commission, not a property owner's commission. Problems are different between renters and homeowners. People that are not part of the community have a louder voice than residents in community. Many people started out as renters. She hears concerns of 'current proposal' but there is not current proposal, concerns can be addressed as the proposal is worked on. Ideally, the Housing Commission would be half renters, or 52%, but there are only one or two seats. The concerns are different between owners and renters.

16. Courtney Rosen: Realtor: Speaker stated she is a property manager, homeowner and past renter. Tenants need landlords and vice versa. Her clients are small landlords that are trying to diversify their income. For the most part, renters comply. But sometimes, a renter falls through and is unable to pay rent, stressing the landlord that will be unable to pay bills. If there is a homogenous group of renters with one perspective and view, they will not have the outcomes that are of best interest to the full picture. As property managers, they look at people and see who they can take a risk to. People say there are so many laws to protect property owners, but this is because they have a higher risk. She is against a renter's only commission; property owners should be included since they are always trying to create a win-win situation.

- 1. Item #4: Briefing and Possible Action on the Renter's Commission Council Consideration Request** Commissioner Castro Ramirez started out by moving item number four to first place due to many of the individuals speaking in public comments were in attendance for this item. She asked Lori Houston and Verónica Soto to come up.

Houston stated that the Governance Committee of City Council, comprised of four council members, took up a Council Consideration Request (CCR) signed by six members requesting a renter's Commission. The CCR was submitted by Councilmember Roberto C. Treviño, attached with suggestions on what the commission would entail. Staff reviewed the CCR and presented their recommendations during the Governance Committee meeting on January 15<sup>th</sup>. The recommendation was to give staff six (6) months to look at how a renter's commission would fit in the housing ecosystem which included the Housing Trust, Housing Authority, Housing Commission and the City.

The Governance Committee saw a need for this commission and requested it be reviewed by the newly form Cultural and Neighborhood Services Committee which will be chaired by Councilmember Treviño. At this time, no meeting date has been established and staff will once again recommend more time to review. Houston added that Councilmember Treviño is open to different ways the renter's commission could be set up. She asked the Housing Commission to put the item for discussion on the Commission agenda.

Verónica Soto stated that she is not sure what document the people are referring to in public comment. The CCR has no specific about details. She will recommend [at the Committee meeting for] more time and will refer to the Commission for discussion. Houston added that it [the renter's commission] is still being developed. Public commentary will be considered, and the makeup has yet to be developed.

Commissioner Jessica O. Guerrero stated that it is very appropriate for the Housing Commission to talk about a renter's commission and important for the format available to be better supported for the community, requests that staff put the item on the agenda again and address disparity [of those in attendance]. She continued to state that it was obvious who was able to attend the meeting today and a future meeting should be held during a time where renters had a good opportunity to attend.

Commissioner Sarah Sanchez asked for clarification on the Housing Commission's involvement [with the renter's commission]. Houston responded that in the Governance Committee, the composition of the commission was discussed and that there must be further discussion.

Commissioner Pedro Alanis suggested that there is a discrepancy in tenant representation and landlord representation [in court], and based off what is being seen, equal representation between tenants and landlords is the way to go. Commissions need to be balanced and equal; things can get accomplished if they are invited in the first place. Various items need to be considered for a future renter's commission. Alanis suggested he would rather see a taskforce to help direct a future policy regarding specific issues in tenant/landlord relationships. He asked if a renter's commission is the right group or would a facilitated work session between landlords and tenants be the best option.

Guerrero asked if the Housing Commission could push back regarding equal representation. The boards and commissions should look at equitable representation. The current boards and commissions have looked at equal representation, and yes there are varied perspectives, but she pushes for equitable rather than equal.

Castro-Ramirez wanted to add a few comments with regards to the Housing Commission's role and the context of the formation. The focus was increasing housing affordability for both homeownership and rentals, preserving housing affordability for both, addressing the pressures of neighborhoods in regards to displacement and gentrification, educating ourselves [the community] on having a place to call home, and look closely on how all this work is being coordinated across the city (by being more strategic, by hiring the Chief Housing Officer, by looking at the intersection between transportation, health, infrastructure). It is important for the Commission to address housing needs like affordability in the community and this includes renters. She doesn't want the community to be under the impression that the Commission is not addressing renter issues. The Commission has a keen sense that individuals, families, senior citizens, young individuals that are struggling economically. It requires much more effort across systems. During these meetings, the purpose and meaning gets lost and she doesn't want to lose sight. Input and the ideas start with the commission, this is the opportunity for people to speak their mind. In this case, it is the opportunity to weigh in on a renter's commission. The Housing Commission will continue to stay engaged and she asked any Commissioners interested in being engaged as a liaison to let staff know.

2. **Item #3: Briefing and Possible Action on the Risk Mitigation Fund and Right to Counsel Pilot** The Risk Mitigation stakeholders group presented as a group. The group looked at their charge and framework to work 'bottom up.' Members included staff, clients who received service and Commissioner Guerrero.

Sara Wamsley, Housing Policy Manager, presented on the background and summary of the risk mitigation fund and the engagement practices involved to provide a comprehensive and compassionate policy. Maureen Galindo, community organizer who had utilized the fund, introduced the additional speakers and their roles in the Risk Mitigation committee.

Nikki Johnson, motivational speaker who had utilized the fund, discussed the purpose, identifying the root causes of the need for a fund. She presented five principles as explained via the presentation; uphold City's core values, understand the community, collaborate with the impacted community, actualize City guidelines for public participation, and the use of best practices.

Galindo explained participatory action research and how no input is higher than anyone else. She continued to explain collective empowerment, having more people able to participate that otherwise would not have an opportunity to.

Anabel Marroquin-Villa, Manager of the City's fair housing staff, discussed outreach with the community. She mentioned the various departments and methods of dispersing of materials. In addition, community conversations and outreach meetings resulted in 116 families assisted, not including others that have gone through fair housing doors.

Guerrero mentioned the meaningful conversations staff and partners had to create community conversations. She thanked several stakeholders and volunteers for the various efforts, including two community conversations on December 10 and 16. The next steps are to follow up on the communication for follow up meetings.

Dr. Azza Kamal, NHSD staff, discussed the data collected from the people assisted and

their demographics. The highest concentration of people helped was in district two with 20% of those assisted from that district. The majority of the people assisted were Hispanic. Twenty-seven percent of those helped were black. She also brought up the numbers of children and disabled assisted.

Vanessa Chavez, NHSD staff, explained the causes of hardship. She told the story of one case. A single mother of seven was aided. By the time the process was over, she had found two jobs and was able to stay in her home.

Kamal explained that the funds were expanded to include people making the area median income or below. Most of the fund was spent aiding households making half of the area median income. Only one household was making more than 80% average median income.

Chavez shared the group's recommendations including that additional staff are needed to track information, continue the community conversation and assist clients.

Wamsley closed with the discussion on the Right to Counsel. It is a short pilot to assist tenants in need of legal assistance.

Castro-Ramirez had questions on how to scale the program. What is the role of the service agencies and how is the program grown beyond the city?

Wamsley stated that they were charged to expand and diversify fund. Guerrero added that they were supposed to look at budget. In the current capacity, it is important when assigning funds to take a close look at what they will be used for. The Risk Mitigation fund is currently for services but does not account for administration.

Galindo added that it has been discussed but not explored that other organizations are saving money because of the assistance the group is providing.

Houston thanked city staff and volunteers for their time. She stated this is what she talks about with the Housing Trust and the Housing Authority.

Commissioner Robert Abraham added that when the fund was first approved, he was concerned because there were no blueprints. He stated he had respect for the group for the work they provided.

Verónica Soto presented certificates to Galindo, Guerrero, and Johnson for their work. Galindo added that she felt Johnson did not get enough recognition throughout the process. Johnson thanked all for allowing the risk mitigation fund to exist. She is beyond grateful since she had been laid off and has to choose what she would pay. She stated the experience is due to the women alongside of her.

Commissioner David Nisivoccia stated the Housing Authority is always trying to find ways to be good neighbors. His board and staff will be looking at the strategic plan and the move to work plan. He thinks that conversation had started in how to participate in programs and expects that they will be a formal partner in the process.

Castro-Ramirez stated it was refreshing in how the city works with people that are

impacted. She recognized the staff for the commitment, and thanked Guerrero for her participation.

Soto asked the commission to allow staff to move forward with the Right to Counsel Pilot. Nisivoccia moved, Commissioner Paul Furukawa second. No abstains or oppositions.

- 3. Item #2: Housing Commission 2020 Planning Retreat** Ian Benavidez, Affordable Housing Administrator, presented on the follow up from the Housing Commission Retreat. He presented the draft report compiled from the notes taken during the retreat. He asked for comments for the report.

He started by explaining the logic model and highlighted the edits and comments previously received from the Commissioners. He also added the “keep, stop, start” model which was a consensus on what Commissioners like and didn’t like [regarding the meetings.] With all this feedback, a priority list was created for staff to follow when establishing future meetings. Lastly, a proposed timeline created from the priority list was shown to the commission, including public listening sessions in community spaces. The draft is not final, and documents will be sent to staff.

Castro-Ramirez reminded commissioners to review and send edits to staff. She requested the report be public and shared online. She also stated she did not see the charter amendment required for the City Bond on the timeline.

Houston reminded Commissioners that the bond would be a year before the 2022 bond.

Furukawa raised the issue on the charter amendment. He reminded Commissioners that the City attorney cautioned us it had to be two years from the last amendment and there is no way around that.

Soto clarified that May 2021 is the soonest this could be done. The Charter is one step, the Bond is May 2022.

Furukawa added that he was inspired and hopeful when the Risk Mitigation Stakeholders Group started talking and will have to picture what the child in the presentation photo will need when she grows up. He was inspired in long term planning by spending time with the grandchildren of friends during the holidays.

Castro-Ramirez introduced Commissioner Susan Richardson, the newest commissioner.

Richardson was not sure which presentation was on anti-displacement.

Benavidez clarified that ForEveryoneHome was the presentation and the other is the Homelessness Strategic Plan being conducted by HomeBase. The deliverables look at city data to see needs and roots causes of displacement. The second is the displacement agenda, and the third is an implementation plan for a high-priority item from the agenda.

- 4. Item #5: Director’s Report** Soto presented on the annual report and follow up meetings. She reminded Commissioners that the SA Housing Trust assessment will

have two board meetings after this meeting, so the board will provide feedback. She mentioned the Housing Summit information is included in the binder; this will be an opportunity for the Chief Housing Officer to be on boarded.

Houston stated the Chief Housing Officer would be hired by April 1.

Castro-Ramirez stated the SAHT executive recruiting needs people on the interview panel and to respond the end of the week. Nicole Collazo added that this position will be up for 45 days prior to interviews.

5. **Item #1: Minutes** – Castro-Ramirez moved back to the approval of minutes. Items were approved with the motion that page nine, line five should read “Section 8 public housing clients.” Commissioner Nisivoccia motioned and minutes adopted with the modification.

**Closing-**

**There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned without contest at 6:20 PM.**