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Begin forwarded message:

From: Tiki Archambeau <tikiskis@yahoo.com>
Subject: Charter Change Committee Feedback: "Just Cause"
Date: September 22, 2020 at 2:57:52 PM EDT
To: "jshannon@burlingtonvt.gov" <jshannon@burlingtonvt.gov>, Perri Freeman <pfreeman@burlingtonvt.gov>, "jstromberg@burlingtonvt.gov" <jstromberg@burlingtonvt.gov>

[WARNING]: External Message

Greetings Joan, Perri and Jane,

This note is intended to share feedback on discussions around a proposed charter change regarding "just-cause" tenant removals. My availability to attend your next meeting is limited.

I am a small-time landlord in Burlington as an owner of two duplexes (one of which is my primary residence). I also manage five other apartment units for friends who have moved out of town and needed a responsible local contact for issues that arise. But this is my side job. I actually work for a living from my home on Crombie Street.

Aside from that, I have been active in the Burlington community in many capacities: NPA Wards 2/3 Steering Committee for a number of years, Public Works Commission for 8 years (3 as Chair), establishing the foundations of the ONE Ramble, served on the CDBG board, Community Justice efforts, and so much more. My only reason for sharing this information is to demonstrate a rounded opinion on local matters.

You may be aware of recent communications being sent by a person named Larry Miller. His unsolicited emails are somewhat alarming in their reactionary nature and clearly one-sided approach. They appear to link to the Vermont Landlord Association, a group I have found in the past to be one part landlord resource, one part front for a conservative lobbying group. He contends his unsolicited communication is a response to "bias" by Vermont Legal Aid and the Tenants Union (I have not heard a peep in their regard).

To be clear, I am not a fan of reactionaries. We get it a lot on the PWC which makes it difficult to navigate to the "right" answer. Yet when going to the source - the language in the Council resolution dated August 10th - it is written in legalese. This makes it difficult for an average person like me to understand from a neutral perspective. What are the repercussions? Why is this being explored? Why did I not pursue a law degree just to be able to understand repercussions to my livelihood?

So all I can do is offer an opinion on the basics: I invested in property many years ago. One of the duplexes will one day be the means by which I put my child through college. The other will hopefully care

for us - in part - in retirement. Does this make me rich? Not by a long shot. One surprise furnace replacement or one epic storm ripping apart a roof would put me into a difficult financial position. More importantly, one set of tenants arbitrarily deciding to ruin me financially because they like the sound of "No rent" would bring me great hardship.

Landlords and tenants do not need to be painted with generalities. Are all landlords greedy capitalists? Nope. Are some? Sure. Are all tenants scumbags looking to take advantage of landlords? Nope. Are some? Sure.

I ask what problem you are trying to solve. If it's unkempt and unsafe properties, then I would advocate for giving Code Enforcement more teeth to uphold living standards. It drives me crazy to see fellow landlords taking advantage of people the way some with large holdings do. If it's stability, then know this: The very concept of a lease benefits tenants. Tenants can break a lease without repercussion (unless I decide to sink thousands into attorney's fees to pursue civil action). Yet I cannot break a lease without serious repercussion. I have tenants who just signed a lease in June and thanks to roommate disagreements, have broken it and moved out, leaving me wondering if rent will come in and if I will clear the mortgage payment in October.

I also reflect on the convicted child predator who rented from us last year - crimes committed in our apartment - then took us to the Housing Board of Review on unfounded and unfair claims of withholding his security deposit. I won at that hearing, but not without investing significant time, resources and money to prove every allegation false. With a Housing Board of Review in place, why do we need a "just cause" charter change? Why did the obvious act of violence and disregard for people or property not play a role in my own defense in that situation? They trashed my apartment but wanted the security deposit back. On what planet is that okay? Why would the city seek to adopt language protecting this behavior?

I personally would love to see more efforts of tenants working with landlords through issues - and landlords not dismissing tenant concerns altogether. We're all human in the end. If this charter change and its repercussions come to fruition, then know this: many small landlords in this community will sell their assets to the big-time landlords who already neglect Burlington's rules. That will make the problem bigger. Or maybe I will turn my apartments into hotels, or Air BnB rentals only, reducing the supply of stable housing in Burlington.

Fairness is the best path forward. While I will continue to try and learn more about the tenant perspective of issues they face, I humbly request that you not put me in a position of financial duress with tenants who can game the system - and me - over petty grudges, personal politics, or whatever other grievances one may boil to the surface.

Thank you for your time,

Tiki Archambeau
36 Crombie Street

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