

Resolution Opposing the Seattle Housing Authority’s Plan to Raise Rents on Low-Income “Working Age” Households that Receive Vouchers or Live in Public Housing

Whereas the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) has recently announced that it is considering a plan called “Step Forward,” aimed at phasing in substantial rent increases for 4600 “working age” low-income families, including those who live in SHA-owned public housing or use a Section 8 voucher to cover a portion of their rent in a privately owned unit, and

Whereas, under SHA’s plan, rents could more than double for any very low-income family that includes a working-age adult and holds a voucher or remains in public housing for more than four years, and

Whereas, under SHA’s plan, a household that earns \$15,000 a year (which is more than most SHA households earn) and can afford no more than \$400-\$500 a month in rent (based on the common HUD standard that no one should pay more than 30 percent of income on rent), would see their rent rise to \$1200 a month in their fifth year in SHA subsidized housing, and

Whereas, to afford such a rent increase, a household would have to increase its income from less than 30 % of median income, to about 80 % of median; i.e., c. \$45,000 a year -- equivalent to about \$21-\$22 an hour (slightly more than the hourly wage of most Seattle workers), and

Whereas, given that the average stay in SHA housing is currently about 8 years, the SHA plan would impose dramatic rent increases on about half of SHA’s working-age residents (i.e., 2300 households), and

Whereas implementation of SHA’s plan could have the practical effect of raising rents on 1,000-2,000 units of SHA’s housing inventory, resulting in a permanent reduction in Seattle’s very-low-income housing stock that took years, and millions in levy dollars, to produce, and

Whereas, although SHA has promised – rather dubiously – to provide “wrap around services” to “lift” incomes of its residents so that by year five they could afford to give up their rent subsidies, that would not change the basic fact that there is a lack of good jobs and affordable privately owned rentals in and around Seattle, and

Whereas, without good jobs that would provide incomes sufficient to afford the contemplated rent increases, SHA’s plan would likely force hundreds of households to pay 50%-70% of their income on rent, and/or displace many of them into a tight housing market and/or the streets, and

Whereas Seattle Mayor Ed Murray recently stated in a letter to SHA that he cannot support its “Step Forward” plan because of its disproportionate impact on people of color and first-generation immigrant families;

Therefore, be it resolved that we strongly oppose SHA’s proposed “Step Forward” plan; and that the County Chair shall forward this Resolution to SHA’s Director and Board, with copies to all Seattle Councilmembers, Mayor Murray, the U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Congressmen McDermott and Smith, Senators Murray and Cantwell, and the press.

Adopted _____ *by* _____