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## Regrouped tenants council plans action on rent increases, zoning

By Catherine Hawley  
Emerald Reporter

Eugene renters concerned about rent increases and their rights as tenants now have someone to turn to for information and support.

The Lane County Tenants Council, first formed in the summer of 1988, is organizing and recruiting new members who want to take action on renter issues such as security deposit returns, tenant rights and responsibilities, and rent

control.

Eleven people, including two rental property owners, attended a council meeting Tuesday night to determine a course of action for the organization, which has been dormant for several months.

"Right now our job is to do our homework and get the facts," Morrison said.

People who attended the meeting volunteered to gather information on topics such as increased costs to landlords, possible zone changes to promote the construction of more housing, and rent control legislation in other cities and states.

Those who attended the meeting also decided to investigate a report of a rent strike staged by tenants living in the River Road area and to lend support to those who may be involved in the strike.

One of the main goals of the council will be to repeal a 1985 state law that prohibits the establishment of rent controls, Morrison said.

"It will be difficult to get the legislature to reverse itself," he said. "Landlords will fight every step of the way. It may take more than one try."

Even if the group succeeds in repealing the law, it will still have to promote the establishment of rent controls in Eugene.

Although rents in the Eugene area have been increasing steadily in recent years, rent control is not the answer to the problem, said Mary Stogsdill, president of the Rental Owners Association, an organization that represents about 300 owners of small rental properties in Eugene.

"We are completely opposed to rent controls," Stogsdill said, adding that the quality of housing would deteriorate with rent controls by discouraging owners from reinvesting in their property.

Limited profits would also remove the incentive for builders to create new housing, she said.

Recent rent increases are a re-

sult of 1986 tax reform, which eliminated some tax credits and write-offs for property owners, who compensated by increasing rents, Stogsdill said.

"The amount of profit is not so tremendous as it might appear," Stogsdill said.

The council would propose "reasonable" rent control legislation that would allow owners to make a profit while protecting tenants from unreasonable or unexpected increases in rent, Morrison said.

"We know landlord's costs have gone up," Morrison said. "The question is how much. Landlords can make a profit, but they can't profiteer."

Other cities with rent control ordinances have been pleased with them, Morrison said. "Rent control may be new for Oregon, but it's not new for the rest of the country," he said.

The nearest cities with rent control ordinances are in the Bay Area.

Two landlords who attended Tuesday's meeting encouraged the council to focus their attention on issues besides rent control, such as changes in local zoning laws that would permit construction of new housing.

"The biggest problem in landlord-tenant relationships is that people are unaware of their rights and responsibilities," said Lee Hughes, a rental property owner.

The council was begun more than a year ago as a "bunch of us who were ticked off about rent increases," Morrison said. The group held a public meeting that attracted about 40 people and also established a telephone helpline to answer tenants' questions. But the group's momentum died out and the helpline was eventually discontinued.

"We made the mistake of not having a program of activities for people to plug into," Morrison said.

The council is the organization in Eugene that deals exclusively with tenant issues, Morrison said.

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