

Bloomington Housing Action Team

August 17, 2021

1:30-3:00 P.M.

Virtual Meeting

Introductions

Staff welcomed attendees and did a brief introduction

Eviction Moratoriums Update

Margaret Kaplan, President of the Housing Justice Center, gave an update on changes to the eviction moratoriums.

- The Federal CDC moratorium was extended until early October. It expired but due to advocacy and the case load increase from the delta variant the moratorium was extended.
- There has been a slow speed of assistance going out the door.
- The ramp down will only protect nonpayment of rent
- Landlords can proceed with the evictions they started before COVID
- **On June 30** landlords were able to file eviction or non-renewal notices for material lease violations
- Since payment of rental assistance has been slow landlords started use material lease violation as a rationale for eviction filing even though it was actually for non-payment of rent.
- While not a huge number there has been an uptick and doubling every week of evictions, many of which is Hennepin County.
- **On August 13** leases can be terminated for non-payment of rent but only for those who are not eligible for COVID- 19 rent assistance. It is hard to determine what “not eligibility” means. If a household had applied and were denied for some reason but maybe meet the eligibility are they still protected? What is a household someone is refusing to apply for benefits but is eligible, are they still protected?
- Sometimes the tenant doesn't show up to eviction hearings because they think they won't be evicted. It is important that they show up if there is an eviction filed against them.
- **On September 12** evictions can continue for nonpayment of rent.
- **On October 12** eviction process reverts back to normal. However you cannot be evicted for nonpayment of rent until **June 1, 2022** if there is a pending application for rent assistance. For this reason all those who are eligible should apply.
- Pat Longs pointed out that many didn't apply because they don't understand the application process and need assistance or someone that can walk them through the process.
 - Margaret Kaplan says they can use 211 which has language options and can get you connected to navigators. Housing Justice Center has been working to appeal denials and get people connected to those who should be approved.
- If someone has to move for one reason or another or if the landlord evicts you for reason or unreasonable cause, once the household is out of the unit they can no longer receive rental assistance to cover that back rent. The housing stability program are for your current housing. They want you to continue to live in that housing if it is safe. While the tenant may not get evicted they could have collection agency against them. While the system is frustrating, it is a protection and will help pay that back rent but. It's beneficial for the owner too because they may never get that back rent.
- Pat Longs point out that you need an actual computer to do it. Many tenants need to sit with the manager in their office. The Zero balance project was easier but still difficult. The library kicks you off a computer after an hour which is not enough time to complete the application. Furthermore, many people have a learning disability and cannot understand the application. Many only have a phone that just cannot be used to submit the data. Even with 211 they still can't complete the application because its information they cannot access from their phone.

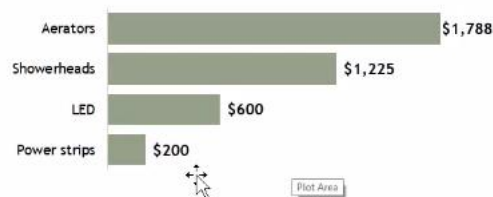
- Margaret Kaplan has been vocal to Minnesota Housing that they need to strip away the requirement. Every document you can do through self-attestation rather than providing a document but they don't make it obvious.
- Applicants also run out of data on their phone. They have often have pay go phones so they run out of minutes or they have a limited number of minutes. Especially in greater Minnesota.
- There is a paper version that you can send it. It goes somewhere and you never find out your status until it's approved or denied.

Multifamily Building Efficiency Program and Energy Assistance Program

Katie Cooper presented on a program from CenterPoint and Xcel Energy for multifamily buildings.

- The program is a joint offering through CenterPoint and Xcel energy. There is no charge to managers, owners, or tenants.
- There are 5 qualification criteria to enroll:
 1. Electricity needs to be serviced Xcel
 2. Gas – CenterPoint or Xcel
 3. 5 units or more
 4. Common entrance
 5. Full kitchen in each unit – would disqualify memory care sometimes
- The process starts with an energy audit to look for opportunities, equipment, common areas, and a couple sample units. So materials that might be installed are smart power strips, water aerators, weather stripping, door sweeps, light bulbs labor and products are free of charge.
- Some of the savings goes into both owner/manager and residents depending on how utilities are paid.
- A report is also created that explains what was done and points out all the opportunities there is if the owner/manager wants to go deeper. They will be provided a list of rebates like water heater setback temps or boiler replacements.
- There is a 2 year window that starts at the date of the energy audit and CenterPoint/Xcel will act as an energy consultant and can answer questions.
- Owners/Managers get bonus incentives on top of rebate about. 30% for market rate and 60% for income restricted.
- The application is 1 page and you can enroll same day you apply. Very easy to do.

Direct Install Estimated Energy Savings: \$3,838 annually per 25 units



Estimated Product Value: \$1,005 per 25 units

- The program serves both market rate and affordable buildings. To qualify for affordable at least 66% of units need to be 60% AMI or less.

- Bloomington had 4 participants last year and in the past they have had 7. Energy cost burden has been increasing in the city so we can help residents through this program.
- More information and the application can be found at <https://www.multifamilyenergysolutions.com/>

Sandra Seemann from the Minnesota Department of Commerce discusses the Energy Assistance Program.

- Minnesota Housing Finance Agency is working on a resource page to help assist with access to some of these resources available.
- The Energy Assistance Program is federally funded through Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds that is run through the Department of Commerce. The focus was historically on cold winter months but now Minnesota is have hot summer months too.
- They pay the money directly to the energy vendor on behalf of household. They have an additional benefit to help with past due and stay connected. They also help owners help get their broken heating systems repaired.
- The program is for both renters and homeowners included those who pay indirectly through rent.
- Targeted outreach is to vulnerable household that would be most affected by low/high heat especially families and seniors.
- Last year the program helped 118,000 households with average 19,000 with average household size of about two.
- Eligibility is last three months of income. They don't count assets like value of home. Right now the requirement is 60% of State median income.
 - For a household of one it is about \$35,000.
 - For a household of four it is about \$65,000.
- They have additional funds of through ARP so they can help more in the middle income range.
- Benefit range from \$300 – \$1,600 with an average of \$580 and still receive crisis benefit up to \$1,200 past due.
- The program is statewide with 28 local service providers.
- Hennepin County's service provider is Community action. They also have water assistance, renter assistance, offices in St. Louis Park and Minneapolis.
- They currently are using paper applications but it is only 4 pages long.
- There was a utility shut off moratorium that has ended.
- The program is on first come first serve but ARP has given them plenty of money to help.
- Households can be protected from utility disconnection for one year if they have submitted an application.
- The City also created fliers this year with some translations.
- A point of confusion is that RentHelpMN does cover utilities but it is not covered by the PUC rules that prevent a shut off. PUC has been reaching out to people when they hear about a pending application but they don't have the information that LIHEAP provides. They are asking all those in RentHelpMN to also apply for LIHEAP.
- You are still eligible and it might create a credit on your account but then you are protected under the program.
- Sandra Seemann's Contact information is Sandra.seemann@state.mn.us or 651-539-1813.
- The program website is <https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/>

Other Updates

- The renter health survey has been postponed till next spring because there has been large turnover in staffing at public health.
- Lyndale Flats at the corner of Lyndale and 94th Street is coming along. Velair Management is the property manager and they will start leasing soon. <https://velairmanagement.com/property/lyndale-flats/>