

League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County
Position on
SHELTER & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County recognizes that shelter is a basic human right. People experiencing homelessness must be allowed to access or create temporary shelter until they can gain and sustain the adequate and secure housing that should be accessible for all.

The increasing gap between wages and housing costs has contributed to a crisis in housing affordability. The League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County recognizes the need for more affordable housing as well as for living wages/living income. LWVT-PC supports seeking all assistance options available to increase the supply of affordable housing. We support a multi-faceted approach to addressing housing insecurity, increasing the amount of affordable housing, and providing temporary shelter when affordable housing is not available, especially among low and extremely low income people and those with special needs.

Homelessness will be reduced only when public resources are directed to increasing housing options that are affordable to low-income people, particularly those living on less than 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Incentives, such as density bonuses, expedited permitting, and reduced zoning, should be reserved for housing that increases housing stability for low-income households and reduces homelessness for all.

Tools for addressing housing and temporary shelter include zoning and regulatory updates, preservation of existing low-income housing stock (including manufactured home parks), and substantial investment in development and maintenance of publicly owned housing. Homelessness must be decriminalized, and shelter must be provided for people living homeless, including safe lots (for people living in vehicles). We uphold each person's right to perform the basic functions necessary to life, including sleeping.

While the state and federal governments may provide funding and enabling legislation, the County and municipalities should implement measures such as those listed below to increase the availability of housing and temporary shelter.

Tenant Protections: Most low income people rent - rather than own - their homes; therefore, tenant protections are an essential component of any practical plan to reduce housing insecurity and homelessness. Tenant protections are also essential for those who own manufactured homes but rent the land on which their home is situated. LWVT-PC supports tenant protections such as rent stabilization, just-cause eviction and fair chance housing (sometimes called "ban-the-box") regulations. LWVT-PC also supports outreach and education in multiple languages to increase awareness of tenant rights and best practices to reduce risks related to ownership of manufactured and mobile homes.

Pierce County and its municipalities should add those who participate in a Section 8 program, and receive vouchers for subsidized rent payments, to their Fair Housing Laws as a protected class.

Zoning: LWVT-PC supports the use of inclusionary housing and increased density to increase affordable housing stock. Additional benefits, such as reductions in urban sprawl, pollution, and traffic congestion can be achieved by implementing:

- Missing middle housing
- Infill housing (tiny houses, ADUs, and DADUs)
- Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units,
- Shared housing, and
- Creative, low-cost pilot projects

Increased density should be encouraged, even when market rate housing is being developed. However, only housing designated for low income people should be incentivized through the multi-family property tax exemption or the use of other publicly held resources.

Manufactured Homes: LWVT-PC supports: educating manufactured home buyers on the potential problems of not owning the land beneath their home, the potential for eviction, and the depreciation of the home's value; a relocation fund to assist those forced to relocate (funded by park sellers and buyers); a transfer of development rights for park owners; short plats to allow residents to buy the land beneath their homes; and use of a Housing Trust Fund to help residents buy their parks. Pierce County and its municipalities should implement land-use policies which assist residents to acquire their parks.

Land Banks and Land Trusts: LWVT-PC supports the use of Housing Trust Funds to establish dedicated revenue sources for affordable housing. These funds, coupled with Land Banks should be used to establish Land Trust housing in perpetuity for low-income tenants. We also support the use of Land Trusts to retain or develop mobile home parks, campgrounds, tiny house villages, and other alternative community solutions.

Inclusive Development and Regulatory Measures: LWVT-PC supports Inclusive Development to reduce the negative effects of gentrification and the disproportionate impacts of gentrification on communities of color. Methods we support include but are not limited to community benefits agreements, land value capture, and removal of land speculation incentives.

Special Needs: LWVT-PC supports zoning which encourages Single Room Occupancy residences (not concentrated in one area), supportive housing units for people with disabilities and/or other special needs that prevent independent living, and transitional housing.

Financial: LWVT-PC supports regional, county and municipal Housing Trust Funds, which would establish dedicated revenue sources for affordable housing. We also support using surplus land, in urban growth areas, for affordable housing.

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