

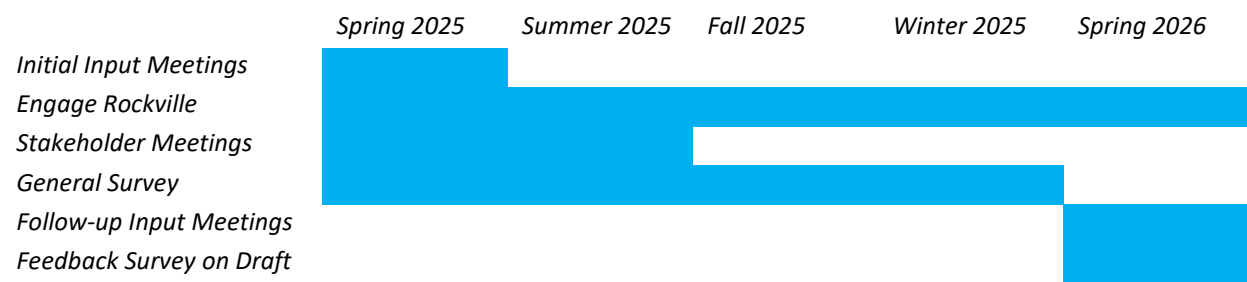
Attachment B - Community Engagement Report

Overview

In Spring 2025, City of Rockville staff launched the community engagement effort for the comprehensive rewrite of City Code Chapter 18, Rental Facilities and Landlord-Tenant Relations. Staff used a variety of strategies to solicit feedback from stakeholders, including landlords, tenants, and organizations representing both groups.

Although input was collected throughout the project’s process, there were two major waves of engagement: first at the beginning of the process to learn generally about challenges and desired reforms, and then second once staff had compiled all recommendations and completed a series of Mayor and Council work sessions to engage the community on the specific policy proposals. Table 1 provides a timeline of engagement activities.

Table 1. Timeline of Community Engagement Activities



Major Takeaways

Below is a summary of what was learned through the Chapter 18 rewrite’s community engagement process, including the challenges faced by landlords and tenants, general feedback, and responses to proposed code changes. Common themes significantly differed depending on whether the individual was representing the perspective of a tenant or landlord, and so have been organized as such.

Takeaways from Tenant Engagement

Challenges and General Feedback

- Consistent, strong desire for a rent stabilization policy borne from high rent prices and uncertainty around or experiences with large rent increases.
- Maintenance response times.
- Fees (particularly technology, amenity, and hold fees).
- Lack of air conditioning requirements.

- Discrepancies between city and county protections, such as a temporary relocation assistance policy in cases where a rental unit is not safe to occupy.
- Interest in an online map of rental properties to display information about rental license status and history, code enforcement history, rental rates, rent increase history, landlord contact information, and complaints made by tenants.
- Incorrect rent ledgers.
- Lack of protection against retaliation.
- Accurate utility billing.
- Other residents smoking.
- Desire to be able to more easily terminate leases early.

Responses to Proposed Code

- Excitement around banning algorithmic rent pricing and restricting junk fees.
- Disappointment regarding the exclusion of a rent stabilization policy.
- Questions about how rent increase information will be collected and displayed.
- Concerns around the six-month cut off for a unit being unsafe to occupy before permanent relocation assistance triggers.

Takeaways from Landlord Engagement

Challenges and General Feedback

- Increasing costs (e.g., taxes, insurance, fees, HOA/condo payments).
- Length and difficulty of eviction proceedings.
- Difficulty and cost of rental license application process, particularly challenges with passing inspections.
- Responsiveness of city staff and lack of clear points of contact.
- Keeping up with and adhering to code requirements.
- Tenant behavior.
- Squatters.
- Responsibility of paying water bill when a tenant moves out.
- Frequent confusion about the city's Voluntary Rent Guidelines, usually due to confusion with Montgomery County's rent stabilization requirements.
- Challenges working with Rockville Housing Enterprises.
- Difficulty adhering to the state's requirements to put the security deposit in a certain type of bank account.

- Strong desire for a lease template and educational resources, such as webinars and handbooks, to better understand all city and state requirements. Suggestion for resources to be provided when receiving or renewing rental license.

Responses to Proposed Code

- General feeling of bias towards tenants in city code, including in the proposed changes, and administration of landlord-tenant affairs program.
- Concern at proposed requirement to offer tenants a two-year lease term. If having to offer a two-year lease term, many landlords wanted to reserve the ability to increase the rent during the two-year term, which they would be allowed to do under the current proposal, but would have to provide a 90-day increase notice.
- Concern around proposed restriction on asking about prospective tenants' eviction history. Several landlords suggested a policy to not allow asking about eviction history from more than a certain number of years ago.
- Concern around proposed repair and deduct policy to allow tenants to make repairs without landlord approval.
- Question and concern around relocation assistance requirements. Concerns were particularly focused on the cost of the permanent relocation payment and determination of responsibility.
- Desire to allow a fee for returned checks and to allow an increased lock out fee for repeated occurrences.

Engagement Activities

Initial Input Meetings

In May 2025, the city hosted two input meetings: one for landlords and another for tenants. The meetings were held virtually and had 23 attendees at the tenant input meeting and 39 at the landlord input meeting. During the meetings, participants were given a short presentation about the Chapter 18 rewrite project. There were then several polling questions before participants went into breakout rooms facilitated by city staff, with questions listed below.

Polling Questions:

- How long have you been a renter/landlord in the City of Rockville?
- How would you rate your familiarity with your rights and responsibilities as a tenant/landlord, per city code?
- How would you rate your experience as a tenant/landlord in the City of Rockville?
- What are the top challenges you face as a renter/landlord?

Breakout Room Questions:

- What are the top three challenges you face?
- If you own/have rented properties elsewhere, what differences have you noticed between those jurisdictions and Rockville?
- Have you ever experienced any unexpected fees? If so, what were they for? (*only at tenant input meeting*)
- What data/information would be the most helpful for you to see on a public dashboard of rental properties?
- Do you have any other feedback about what may be beneficial to remove, add, or change in the city's landlord-tenant code?

The meetings were promoted through an email to all rental license holders and the Department of Housing and Community Development's internal list of property managers, affordable housing operators, and tenant organizations, as well as through the city's standard communication channels.

This engagement activity helped the community to learn more about the Chapter 18 rewrite project and informed the direction of staff's research and policy development process.

Engage Rockville

The project's Engage Rockville webpage launched early May 2025, prior to the initial input meetings, and served as the hub for all information and engagement throughout the project's lifespan. The Engage Rockville webpage included the following:

- Background Information
- News Feed
- Survey Tools
- Submit a Comment Portal
- Ask a Question Portal
- Staff Contacts
- Project Timeline
- Key Dates
- Resources
- Documents (including a fact sheet and staff reports)

Additionally, Engage Rockville allows individuals to subscribe to project updates via email. At the time of writing, three e-blasts were sent to project subscribers. At least one more is planned before the May 18 Mayor and Council meeting and one afterwards, for a total of five e-

blasts. Information from each e-blast is also posted on the Engage Rockville webpage's News Feed.

Stakeholder Meetings

Given that tenants are traditionally a harder to reach population than landlords, in April 2025, staff directly reached out to a number of tenant advocacy organizations¹ to learn more about the challenges facing tenants within the city. Not all organizations responded, and some (Maryland Legal Aid and Jews United for Justice) opted to submit written feedback. Staff held stakeholder meetings with CASA, Housing Initiative Partnership, and the Montgomery County Renters Alliance, as well as spoke with a representative from the Apartment and Office Building Association of Metropolitan Washington on several occasions. The questions listed below were asked to the tenant advocacy organizations:

- What challenges are the tenants you work with most frequently facing? Have you noticed any trends in those challenges?
- Have you noticed any discrepancies between Montgomery County and the City of Rockville's landlord-tenant codes?
 - Are those discrepancies beneficial or harmful to tenants?
 - In what ways, if any, do you have to adjust the way you work with tenants in the City of Rockville?
- What data/information would be the most beneficial for you/tenants to know about landlords?
- Are there any types of fees you have noticed that pose a barrier or additional burden to tenants?
- In what types of situations would relocation assistance be beneficial to a tenant? For example, redevelopment, large rent increases, etc.
- Do you have any other feedback about what may be beneficial to remove, add, or change in the city's landlord-tenant code?
- Who else should we be speaking with?

General Survey

For almost a year, the Engage Rockville webpage featured a survey for landlords and tenants. The purpose of the survey was to best understand the challenges faced by landlords and

¹ The tenant organizations contacted included the following: Action in Montgomery, CASA, Everyday Canvassing, Housing Initiative Partnership, Housing Justice Montgomery, Jews United for Justice, Latino Economic Development Corp, Maryland Center for Legal Assistance, Maryland Legal Aid, Montgomery County DSA, Montgomery County Renters Alliance, Progressive Maryland, Renters United Maryland, and Rockville Renters United. While contacted in April 2025 to ask for a stakeholder meeting, these organizations were contacted at various other points as well to keep them updated about the project's progress.

tenants so as to inform the policy direction of the rewrite. Over that time, the survey received 45 responses, including 19 from tenants and 26 from landlords.

Most landlords (68%) who completed the survey had been operating as a landlord for over five years and felt pretty knowledgeable (62.5%) about their rights and responsibilities per city code. Respondents cited a range of experiences as a landlord in Rockville, with 37.5% reporting a good experience and 37.5% reporting a neutral experience.

Tenant respondents had mostly been renting in Rockville for one to five years (63.2%), with 21.1% renting for less than five years and 15.8% renting for less than one year. About half of tenants said they feel a little familiar with their rights and responsibilities per city code, following by 31.6% pretty knowledgeable and 10% not familiar at all. There was a range of reported experiences as a tenant in the City of Rockville: 36.9% good or very good, 21.2% neutral, and 42.1% bad or very bad. Eleven tenants reported their previous rent increases, which ranged from 1% to 13%, the median being 5% and the average being 6.45%.

Other questions were asked as listed below. Responses have been incorporated into the Major Takeaways section above.

- How long have you been a landlord/tenant?
- How would you rate your familiarity with your rights and responsibilities as a landlord/tenant, per city code?
- How would you rate your experience as a landlord/tenant in Rockville?
- What are the top three challenges you face as a landlord/tenant?
- If you own property/have rented elsewhere, what differences have you noticed between those jurisdictions and Rockville?
- What data/information would be the most helpful for you to see on a public dashboard of rental properties?
- What percentage was your last rent increase? (*asked to tenants only*)
- Do you have any other feedback about what may be beneficial to remove, add, or change in the city's landlord-tenant code?

Follow-up Input Meetings

In April 2026, the city hosted two input meetings: one for landlords and another for tenants. The meetings were held virtually and had 53 attendees at the landlord input meetings and 20 at the tenant input meeting. During registration, there were a handful of individuals who requested Mandarin translation and were directly notified about a separate Mandarin-language input meeting, but during that meeting, only two individuals participated, and both had previously attended the landlord input meeting, so the meeting was ended early.

During the meetings, participants were given a presentation about the project, featuring an overview of the proposed changes. They were then asked several polling questions, followed by an opportunity to ask questions and provide general feedback. Responses and feedback have been incorporated into the Major Takeaways section above.

Polling Questions:

- What excites you the most about what you've heard?
- What concerns you the most about what you've heard?
- What's missing from the code update?
- What resources would be the most helpful in ensuring that you understand and can comply with the new code?

The meetings were promoted through two emails to all rental license holders and the Department of Housing and Community Development's internal list of property managers, affordable housing operators, and tenant organizations, as well as through the city's standard communication channels.

Feedback Survey on Policy Proposals

In April 2026, staff created a fact sheet to explain the most significant of the proposed code changes. Alongside the fact sheet, stakeholders were encouraged to complete a feedback survey asking the below questions, which mirror the questions asked at the follow-up input meetings:

- How do you feel about the current Rockville landlord-tenant code?
- How do you feel about the proposed Rockville landlord-tenant code?
- What concerns do you have about the proposed changes?
- What excites you the most about the proposed changes?
- What's missing from the code update?
- What resources would be the most helpful in ensuring that you understand your rights and responsibilities (either as a landlord or a tenant) under the new code?