

# Summary of Tenant Survey: April-May 2009

Berkeley Rent Stabilization Program

# Overview

- Survey Method
- Tenant Demographics
- Rents and Rent Burden
- Building Conditions
- Tenant Knowledge and Tenant-Landlord Relations

# Four Key Questions

- What is the nature of the long-term tenant population (tenants in place since at least 1998 before vacancy decontrol)?
- How are Berkeley tenants affected by vacancy decontrol?
- What is the condition of the rental housing and the state of landlord-tenant relations?
- How well is the Rent Program serving Berkeley's tenants?

# Survey Method - 1

- Mail survey sent to 1,907 addresses in Rent Program database – registered units and units exempt because tenant receives rental assistance.
- Two samples:
  - 1 in 5 of pre-vacancy decontrol tenancies
  - 1 in 15 of post-vacancy decontrol tenancies.
- Totals are weighted average of the two.
- 766 valid responses, 41% response rate.

# Survey Method - 2

- Margin of error at 95% confidence level is slightly under 5%. With 40 questions, some chance of random larger error.
- Assumes no survey bias – mail surveys get higher response rate from better educated people.
- Survey matches up well with data from other sources.
- Comparable surveys were done in 1988 and 1998, just before full vacancy decontrol in 1999.

# Results and Analysis

- Results are provided for all tenants in registered rental units and for three subgroups.
- 19% pre-vacancy decontrol tenancies, 99% are non-student households
- 29% all-student households
- 52% post-vacancy decontrol, non-student households (includes part-student HHs)

# Average Contract Rent Levels

- Mean (arithmetic average) Rent \$1,239
- Pre-vacancy decontrol tenants, \$745  
( = Portland, Oregon)
- Post-vacancy decontrol tenants, \$1,301
- Student households, \$1,468

# Demographics

## **Pre-1999 Tenancies**

- Median age 49
- 37% have person with disability or over age 65
- 64% alone
- 18% couples
- 9% single parent
- 13% with children

## **Post-1998 Non-Student Tenancies**

- Median age 30
- 17% have person with disability or over age 65
- 38% live alone
- 28% couples
- 3% single parent
- 9% with children

# Income & Rent Burden

## Pre-1999 Tenancies

- Median income, \$38,600
- 65% low-income  
(up to 80% of area median)
  - 44% very low-income  
(up to 50% area median)
    - 25% extremely low-income  
(up to 30% area median)
- Median rent burden, 25% of income
- HH paying over 30% of income, 42%
- HH paying over 50% of income, 21%

## Post-1999 Non-Student Tenancies

- Median income \$45,000
- 56% low income
  - 38% very low Income
    - 20% extremely low income
- Median rent burden, 32% of income
- HH paying over 30% of income, 53%
- HH paying over 50% of income, 28%

# Student Households

- 29% of all households in survey, 30% in 1998.
- 45% of total tenant population, increase from 39% in 1998.
- More students per household.
- Strong student market despite increases in University housing and new construction downtown.
- Median income under \$10,000, likely does not include loans, money from family.

# Building Conditions - 1

- 61% report building in excellent or good condition, up from 47% in 1998.
- 75% report a physical problem in their building.
- Most frequent problems: doors or windows, plumbing, mold, paint, heat.

# Building Conditions - 2

- Average 2.4 problems per building, down from 3.5 in 1998.
  - Mold/Mildew reported by 26%, was 46% in 1998.
  - Paint reported by 19%, was 38% in 1998.
  - Heat reported by 18%, was 27% in 1998.
- Little difference between long-term and more recent tenants except more long-term tenants report problems with paint.

# Building Conditions - 3

- 46% reported an inspection by owner or manager during past year.
  - Of these, 33% reported no physical problems in the building and those who reported problems listed 1.7 problems per building
- 54% did not report an inspection in the past year.
  - Of these, 13% reported no physical problems and those with problems listed 2.9 problems per building
- 16% reported receiving a safety checklist.

# Landlord – Tenant Relations - 1

- Virtually all tenants with building problems have complained to the owner or manager.
- 65% report at least one problem fixed within 30 days.
- 33% report at least one problem only partially fixed or not fixed.
- No substantial difference in landlord responsiveness between long-term and more recent tenants.

# Landlord-Tenant Relations - 2

- Two-thirds of tenants have never had a disagreement with the current owner or manager.
- 31% of recent tenants had a disagreement.
- 43% of long-term tenants had a disagreement.
- Main issue: maintenance
- 8% of long-term tenants had disagreement over being told to move out, 2% of more recent tenants.

# Effectiveness of Rent Registration

- Only 6% of respondents report rents that are 5% or more above Lawful Rent Ceiling
  - Mostly explained by payments for additional services such as parking and storage and respondent errors such as giving rent for whole building.
- 2009 Los Angeles study found 27% reported paying 5% or more above allowable level
  - Report recommended LA start to register rents

# Tenant Knowledge & Resources - 1

- 95% of tenants who moved into their homes more than five years ago, prior to 2004, know the unit is rent controlled.
- 75% of tenants who moved in during 2004 – 2007 know
- 55% of tenants who moved in during 2008 and 2009 know.

# Tenant Knowledge & Resources - 2

- 51% of long-term tenants have contacted the Rent Board, 23% of more recent tenants
  - Major issues: rent increases, repairs.
  - 63% report staff was “very helpful”.
- 16% of long-term tenants have contacted the housing inspection program, 6% more recent.
  - 55% report staff was “very helpful”.

**Tenant Knowledge & Resources – 3:**  
**Major sources of advice for tenants involved in  
disagreement with owner or manager.**

**Pre-1999 tenants**

- Rent Board, 48%
- Other tenants, 31%
- Family and friends, 24%
- Legal assistance, 24%

**Post-1999 tenants**

- Family and friends, 39%
- No-one, 31%
- Rent Board, 28%
- Other tenants, 21%

# Recycling & Disaster Preparedness

- 56% report adequate recycling containers in building
  - 32% report containers often overflow
  - 12% report no containers or don't know
- 8% report they or someone they know is involved in a neighborhood disaster preparedness group
  - 14% of long-term tenants
  - 10% of tenants in soft-story buildings