

The background of the cover is a blue-tinted aerial photograph of the Seattle skyline, with the Space Needle prominently visible in the center-right.

Renters Toolkit for ASEs and Postdocs

**Compiled by UAW 4121's Housing Justice Workgroup
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Introduction

In the Puget Sound region, there are many different organizations committed to tenant rights, including the Tenants Union of Washington, Be:Seattle, and of course, UAW 4121. Our union is active in housing issues for two reasons: first, because a majority of our members are renters in the Seattle area; and second, because we believe it is critical to make housing more accessible and affordable for all. The presence of strong tenant rights in the Puget Sound region—and the ability to enforce those rights—is due to the fact that we are much more powerful when we work together in solidarity, rather than as individuals. Through our Housing Justice Work Group, we have worked to make housing more accessible and affordable by participating in the Tax Amazon campaign. This campaign helped to win a big business tax in Seattle, which will fund affordable, green, union-built housing that will be available to 4121 members who need it.

The history of tenant organizing in the city is also a long one, marked by several important gains such as the founding of the Seattle Tenants Union in 1975 and the incorporation of the Tenants Union of Washington State as a non-profit in 1977 ([Tenantsunion.org](https://tenantsunion.org)). In 1981, at the same time that the landlord lobby was banning rent control across Washington (which remains in place to this day), tenants and homeless advocates led efforts to pass Seattle's Just Cause Eviction Ordinance. Just cause evictions ensure that there is a specific and defined list of conditions under which evictions can happen, banning arbitrary evictions in Seattle. In 1982, the Housing Preservation Ordinance was then passed, requiring that landowners demolishing housing units in Seattle's downtown replace that housing elsewhere or contribute to a low-cost housing fund.

These established rights for tenants came through strong, coordinated tenant organizing. Often, tenant organizing was met with well-funded, significant opposition from the landlord lobby and this is something that tenants still face today. Take the 1980 STU initiative to institute rent regulations within Seattle as an example. Landlords raised \$400,000 to not only oppose this measure, but also lobbied state representatives to pass a statewide ban on such legislation. Not content to own the roofs over our heads, they'd very much like for us to sit quietly and trust them to "efficiently" price such a basic human need as shelter from the elements. For this reason, it's incredibly important to understand your rights as a tenant, and for tenants across the city to organize and demand that we be respected as more than passive income streams.

Despite what might seem like an insurmountable power difference, there is reason for hope. We have won in the past, showing that our collective power has historically been enough to hold back the interests of profiteering landlords. Not only this, but according to [The Seattle Times](https://www.seattletimes.com), renters now constitute solidly half of the Seattle population for the first time since before 1950, and there's reason to expect renters to be the majority in the future. We're entering a time of unprecedented tenant power—if we can manage to organize and assert our rights.

This document will help you to do just that. It provides resources for finding a place to live, learning your rights as a tenant, what to do when you're facing eviction or you need other support, and what questions to ask when you're considering a rental contract. If you find yourself needing additional resources, don't hesitate to contact the Tenants Union of Washington State or the UAW 4121 Housing Justice Work Group at housing-justice@uaw4121.org.

Finding a Place

When you're looking for a place to live, there are a number of things to keep in mind: neighborhoods (and proximity to campus), where to look for housing, and what to look for during a viewing of the unit. In the following section of this guide, we'll also cover what kind of information landlords are allowed to ask from you. Your personal situation will also possibly impact where you can rent, e.g., if you're a single-income or multiple-income household. If you are a single-income household, it is doable to find somewhere to live on your own within your budget, though it is often easier to find a place with at least one other roommate. Once you know you're going to start looking for housing, it can be helpful to start looking at rental postings a month or so in advance of when you actually need to start looking. This helps you get a sense of what is reasonable in terms of price, where units are available, etc. When you're preparing to actively search for housing, you want to start looking about 6 weeks before your ideal move-in date. Be careful when postings offer you a move-in date of the next day or on a short turnaround—you need to have time to view the unit and make sure it's going to work for you as well.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Our members live all over Seattle and the surrounding area. How far away you live from campus will likely depend on your budget and if you will be taking transit, biking, or driving to campus. Before moving to any neighborhood, one of the best things you can do is talk to other people in your department or program who live there about their experiences of that place. For members based at the Seattle campus and using public transit, these are some of the popular neighborhoods that are fairly straightforward commutes:

University District: This area is closest to campus, but this also means that housing here is typically quite expensive—especially if it is designated as “student housing.”

Wallingford: This neighborhood has a lot of houses, but sometimes you can find rentals with roommates or in basement suites.

Fremont, Phinney Ridge & Ballard: A bit further from campus, but still a doable commute.

Wedgwood: This neighborhood also has a lot of houses, but there are apartments as well. Also a straightforward commute.

Capitol Hill: A bit further from campus, but lots happening here.

Ravenna & Roosevelt: Relatively near to campus and apartments can sometimes be a bit cheaper here.

Green Lake: A bit further from campus and units here tend to rent on the higher end, but sometimes you can find apartments affordable to grad students. The Roosevelt Link station is supposed to be finished by September 2021, which will cut down commute times from this area.

Lake City, Maple Leaf, and Northgate: These neighborhoods are further north and a greater distance from campus (longer commute) but you can often find decent apartments in these areas at lower prices. The Northgate Link station is also supposed to be finished by September 2021, which will drastically cut down the commute time to UW.

There are, of course, other neighborhoods in Seattle with units affordable to members. Finding a place near a Link Light Rail station can also be a good strategy.

Neighborhoods of Seattle



GETTING AROUND

UAW 4121, along with other campus unions, negotiated to have a free U-Pass, which is an all-access pass to Seattle regional buses and the Link Light Rail.

FINDING AVAILABLE RENTALS

When looking for housing in Seattle, the most common websites to look at rental listings are:

- [UW Graduate Student Housing](#)
- [Padmapper](#)
- [Apartments.com](#)
- [Craigslist](#) (less popular)
- [University of Washington \(UW\) Housing, Sublets, and Roommates](#) Facebook group
- [UW Off-Campus Housing, Subleasing, Roommates](#) Facebook group

There are quite a few relevant Facebook groups—it is worthwhile to go through them and find some that might post places you're interested in.

There are also a number of big company landlords/property managers in Seattle. It can be difficult to avoid renting from them, but we have also heard from our members that they have faced issues when renting from these types of big companies/property managers. Examples of these landlords/property managers include:

- [American Campus Communities](#)
- [Cornell and Associates](#)
- Fields Holdings, LLC, which owns [The M Tower](#)

APARTMENT VIEWINGS

Wherever possible, you want to ensure that you view the unit, ideally in person, before you sign any paperwork. Sometimes rental postings will show old photos of the unit that are inaccurate of its current status. If you are looking for rentals but have not yet moved to the Seattle area, connect with others in your program! Often people will be willing to go and check out a unit for you, ask questions to the landlord on your behalf, and take current photos for you. Here's a quick checklist of things to look for:

- Quality of flooring/carpets
- Make sure all appliances work
- Make sure all the plumbing fixtures work (flush the toilet and turn on the shower!)

- Ask about the laundry room and view it if there is one—make note of the cost per load so you can compare it to other units you look at
 - If the unit you're viewing has its own machines, open the washer to see if it smells OK, and ask what their maintenance schedule is
- Look for cases of mold, bedbugs, other pests (check inside cupboards, along floorboards, in corners, closets, etc.)
- Ask about pet and parking policies
 - If the lease requires you to pay pet rent, this can sometimes be negotiable
- Ensure the heating system works
- Get a list of all bills that will be your responsibility, and ask if they can give you an estimate of the monthly cost
- If you are able to talk to current tenants about their experience, that is always a bonus! You can also ask them if their rent has increased a lot in the past or not, if management has changed hands, and other similar questions.

Be wary if a landlord says that they're going to do a bunch of renovations before you move in. Sometimes they do not follow through unless you get it in writing. It is also a great idea to ask a friend to come with you to these viewings—they can help take photos of the unit while you ask questions to the landlord, serve as a second perspective, and may notice something that you've missed.

When you're considering a rental, check out [this guide](#) from the Tenants Union of Washington that highlights some questions you might want to ask.

Your Rights as a Tenant

As a renter in Washington, you have tenant rights. You also have additional tenant rights in some cities, including Seattle. These tenant rights cover you when you're moving in, during your tenancy, and when you're moving out. Tenant organizations in Washington have put together comprehensive guides on tenant rights and we recommend looking through them to make sure you know how you're protected. You can also attend a [Tenant Rights Bootcamp](#) which will give you a crash-course in your rights as a tenant. Our workgroup periodically hosts these Bootcamps—watch for announcements in the 4121 membership emails!

[Washington LawHelp: Know Your Rights](#)
[Tenants Union of Washington: Know Your Rights](#)

If you experience something as a tenant and you're not sure if it is a violation of your tenant rights, there are organizations that you can reach out to who can help you!

The Tenants Union has a [hotline](#) that you can call for support.

EVICTIONS

Your Rights

[Tenants Union Info on the COVID-19 Eviction Moratorium, and the call to #CancelRent](#)

[Tenants Union Eviction FAQ](#)

[Solid Ground's Eviction Resources](#)

- [Solid Ground's Get Help page: links to other housing, food, and transportation resources](#)

What to do if you receive an eviction notice (next steps, fighting it, etc.)

Contact 4121: Reach out to the [Housing Justice Workgroup of UAW 4121](#) at housing-justice@uaw4121.org and we can help you find support.

Housing Justice Project: Provides free legal assistance to renters facing eviction in King County

NW Justice Project: To qualify, income must be under 125% Fed Poverty Line or under 200% with allowable expenditures

Student legal services: Free consultation, low hourly payment required for additional consultations, but no income limits (i.e. open to all students)

Defend Your Rights

As renters in Washington, tenants have no governmental agency they can rely on to enforce their rights. You can file a complaint with the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection (see below). We recommend that you do so, should you experience a violation. There are many educational and legal resources that you can access for free. The most powerful tool we have as tenants is our numbers. By organizing and standing together, you can do more than just defend your rights. Alongside your neighbors and union siblings, you can win stronger tenant protections and more accessible, affordable housing for all.

UAW 4121

[UAW 4121 Housing Justice Workgroup \(HJWG\)](#) is available to support members with housing-related issues and questions. Email housing-justice@uaw4121.org for support or to join us!

TENANTS UNION OF WASHINGTON

The tenant education program hosted by the Tenants Union of Washington gives tenants the knowledge and skills to keep themselves and their families housed.

Tenant rights counseling can be accessed via the **Tenant rights hotline: 206-723-0500**

Hotline Hours:

Monday – Wednesday: 10am-12:30pm & 1:30-4pm

Thursday: 10am-12:30pm

Friday: 10am-12:30pm & 1:30-4pm

Saturday: 11am-3pm

BE:SEATTLE

Be:Seattle hosts regular tenant rights bootcamps and workshops for tenants. The schedule can be found [here](#).

WHERE TO FILE COMPLAINTS

In Seattle, code violations can be reported to the [Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection \(SDCI\)](#). You have three options:

Call violation complaint hotline: 206-615-0808

Via the [Seattle Services portal](#), where complaints about building and property can be made.

Or send a letter to:

Seattle Department of Construction and
Inspections
Code Compliance
700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000
P.O. Box 34019
Seattle, WA 98124-4019

Visit [here](#) for more information on when and how to report a code violation to SDCI.