



Attachment A: Engagement Summary

Rental Housing Fee Disclosure Engagement Summary

Austin Housing | May 2026



Engagement Summary

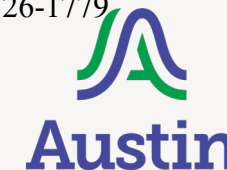
1. Background and Timeline
2. Engagement Methods
3. Focus Group Summary
4. Survey Summary

Background and Engagement Timeline



As part of [Council Resolution 20241024-045](#) City staff has been directed to prepare an ordinance for Council to consider that requires landlords who own five or more dwellings to provide tenants a list of fees at the time of application. Staff is also directed to explore the feasibility of requiring landlords to disclose the fees in the advertising of the rental unit. For more background information, visit speakupaustin.org/rentalfees

Community engagement was conducted October 2025 through April 2026. This report summarizes who we heard from and what we heard.



Engagement Goals & Methods

Methods	Goals
<p>Focus Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landlord/Housing Provider Focused Wednesday, October 1, 2025 — 3:30-5:00pm (in person) Thursday, October 2, 2025 — 10:00-11:30am (virtual) • Tenant Advocacy Focused Wednesday, October 8, 2025 — 5:30-7:00pm (virtual) Thursday, October 9, 2025 — 4:00-5:30pm (in person) 	<p>Facilitate small group discussions with key housing stakeholders to explore rental fees with greater depth and nuance.</p> <p>Ensure that the resulting policy is equitable, enforceable, and responsive to real-world housing conditions.</p>
<p>Public Surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.SpeakUpAustin.org/RentalFees • Opened to the public from October 31, 2025, to December 15, 2025. 	<p>Gather wider feedback from renters, housing providers, and other community members on current fee disclosure practices and a future regulation.</p> <p>Ensure that the policy is responsive to those most impacted and strengthened by a variety of perspectives.</p>
<p>Public Review of Draft Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published Memorandum to Mayor and Council on April 7, 2026 which included draft regulations for stakeholder feedback. A feedback form was open from April 7, 2026 to April 24, 2026. 	<p>Obtain community feedback on the proposed regulation itself.</p> <p>Respond to any concerns and use community insights to improve the regulation if needed.</p>



Outreach Goals & Methods

Goal	Methods
Reach tenants impacted by hidden rental fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Community Newsletter (8,000 + recipients) - Nov. 3 & Dec. 1 • Email to Community Partners (500 + organizations) - Nov. 10 • Flyers at libraries, rec centers and community events • City News (email to all City of Austin employees) – Nov. 26 • Development Services Newsletter • Paid Advertising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On air – Mix 94.5 and Magic 95.5 (English) • On air - Latino 97.1 and La Z 107.3 (English and Spanish) • Print – The Villager
Reach landlords and property managers with 5 or more units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct outreach to area property managers and developers • Developer Newsletter (300+ recipients) - Nov. 7 & Dec. 5 • Email to HACA voucher-affiliated properties (2,900 recipients)

Focus Groups – Overview



Meetings Held



Participants



Focus Groups – Property Owners and Managers

Key Takeaways

- **Fees:** Some housing providers charge a wide range of fees for services, amenities, utilities, and liability coverage, sometimes using third-party vendors.
- **Reason for Fees:** Fees are used to cover service costs, manage shared spaces, reduce liability, support convenience amenities, or offset operational expenses; some are set by third-party vendors.
- **Timing:** Disclosure timing varies across landlords and property types. Fees are disclosed at various points in the leasing process.
- **Opportunities:** a simple, standardized disclosure improves transparency and helps tenants understand costs.
- **Challenges:** inconsistent and variable fees, low awareness among landlords and tenants and added operational burden.





Focus Groups – Tenant Advocates

Key Takeaways

- **Fees:** Tenants face many extra charges beyond rent including amenities, utilities, pets, applications, and penalties, sometimes added mid-lease.
- **Timing:** Fee disclosure is often late or inconsistent with some revealed after application fee is paid, at lease signing, or after first payment.
- **Transparency:** All fees should be disclosed upfront across ads, websites, applications, and lease documents with clear non-revocable schedules at signing.
- **Implementation Challenges:** Tenant fear of retaliation, lack of enforcement, changing fees, limited incentive or recourse for tenants, and education barriers may hinder compliance.





Fall 2025 Survey Overview



Tenants



**Property Owners
and Managers**



**Other Interested
Community Members**



Fall 2025 Survey – Tenant Respondents

Key Takeaways

- **66%** pay fees on top of rent (26% pay none and 8% are unsure).
- Tenants identify varied one-time and recurring fees that are mandatory, optional, or circumstantial.
- **47%** said they learned about their mandatory recurring fees **after** they submitted/paid for their application. 37% said they learned about them **before** submitting/paying for their application. 16% were unsure when they learned about their fees.
- **37%** said that their recurring fees have changed during their lease term, after signing the lease. 16% were unsure if they had changed.
- Of the 37% whose fees had changed, **51%** said they were not notified beforehand.

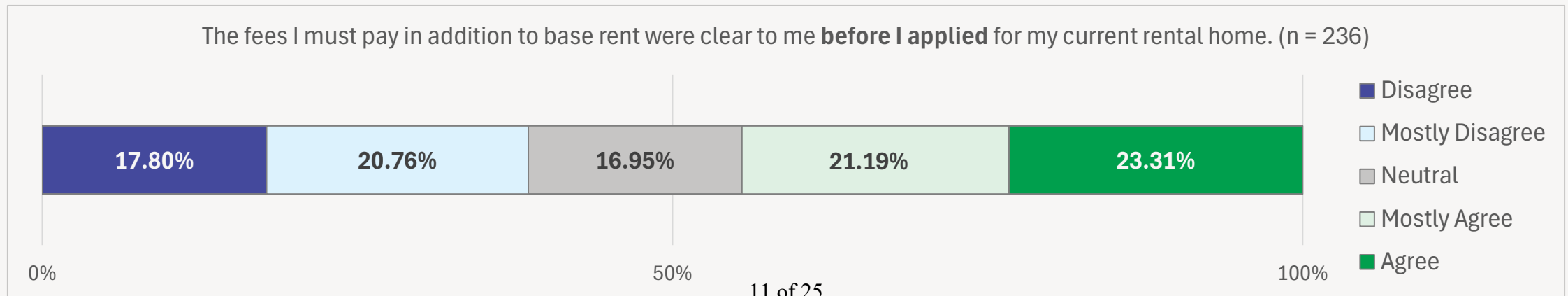




Fall 2025 Survey – Tenant Respondents

Mandatory Recurring Fee Type	Count	%
Pest control	117	44%
Valet trash	100	37%
Trash (non-valet)	93	35%
Amenity fee	84	31%
Administrative fees	80	30%
Renter's insurance (for personal property)	64	24%
Internet/cable	37	14%
Package service	36	13%
Liability insurance	27	10%
Parking	25	9%
Lawn care	22	8%
Surety Bond	4	1%
Other	75	28%
Maybe other fees, but unsure	71	27%
None	56	21%
TOTAL	267	

Some of the most common mandatory recurring fees identified included pest control, valet trash, amenity fee, administrative fees, and insurance. Other somewhat less prevalent but notable were internet/cable and package service.



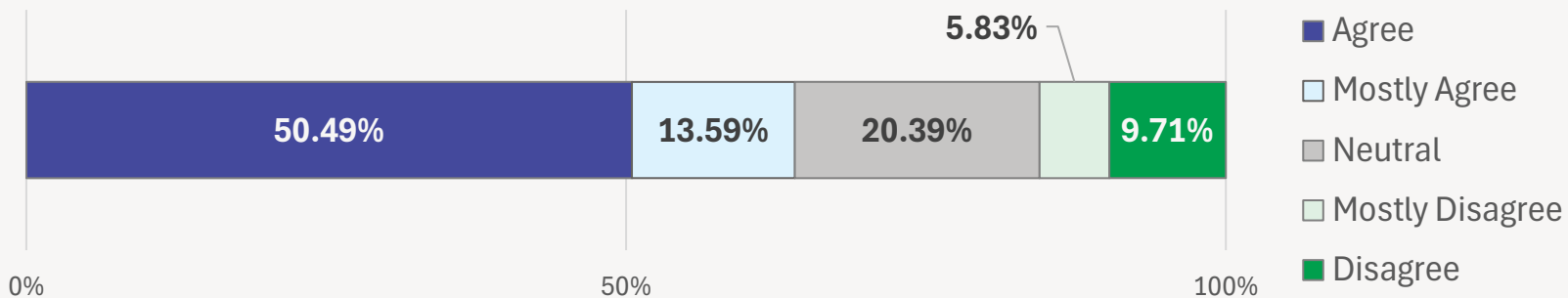
Fall 2025 Survey – Property Owners and Managers



Key Takeaways

- **56%** of landlord/manager respondents with 5 or more homes in Austin said they charge their tenants monthly fees in addition to base rent and utilities. **87%** of those with fewer than 5 homes said they *do not* charge monthly fees.
- **69%** of landlord/manager respondents said that they always include the total price of rent and fees in the advertisements. **92%** said that they always disclose the total price of rent and fees before a prospective tenant applies. **96%** said that they always do before a prospective tenant signs a lease.
- **58%** said that their lease contracts accurately display all rent and fees on the first page.

It would improve my company's business if prospective tenants had a better understanding of total housing costs before they commit to a lease. (n = 103)



City of Austin
Council Meeting Backup: May 28, 2016

Fall 2025 Survey – Property Owners and Managers

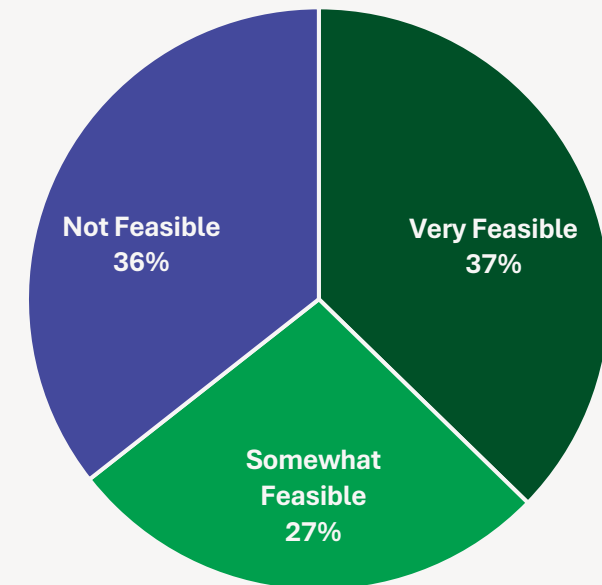
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Key Takeaways

- **Comments: How feasible is it to include fee totals in any advertisement or listing that shows a price?**
 - Most comments speaking to feasibility indicated that disclosure in advertisements is somewhat to very feasible.
 - Feasibility largely depends on the level of disclosure. Mandatory monthly and annual fee totals appear to be the simplest to include in advertisement. These are also the most helpful and digestible costs for shoppers.
 - Most optional and variable fees do not appear to be feasible or practical for advertisements. Can be too much information, confusing shoppers.
 - There are some concerns about technology for online advertisements – e.g., complications with syndicating platforms can cause unintentional errors.

Comments tagged according to following categories:



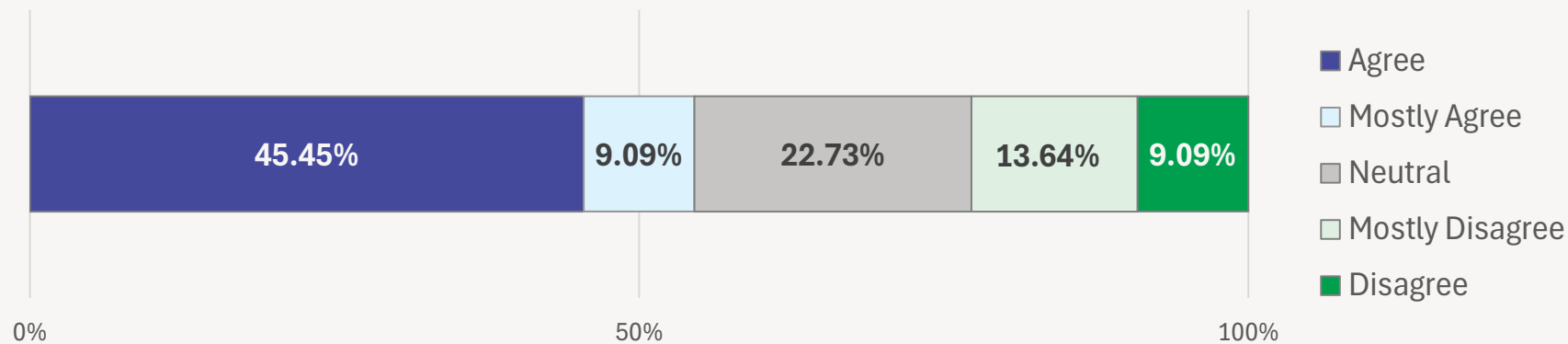


Fall 2025 Survey – Other Community

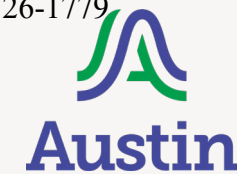
Key Takeaways

- **Best practices for optimal transparency:** comprehensive itemization, upfront disclosure, accessible language, transparent property website and online listings, fees clearly presented in lease, and explanations for fees.
- **Barriers that could undermine a fee transparency ordinance:** lack of standardization, complex/hidden fee structures, a tight housing market that pressures tenants, changes in fees after lease signing, lack of clarity in an ordinance, language barriers (for non-English speaking), misleading/complex language, and challenges with enforcement.

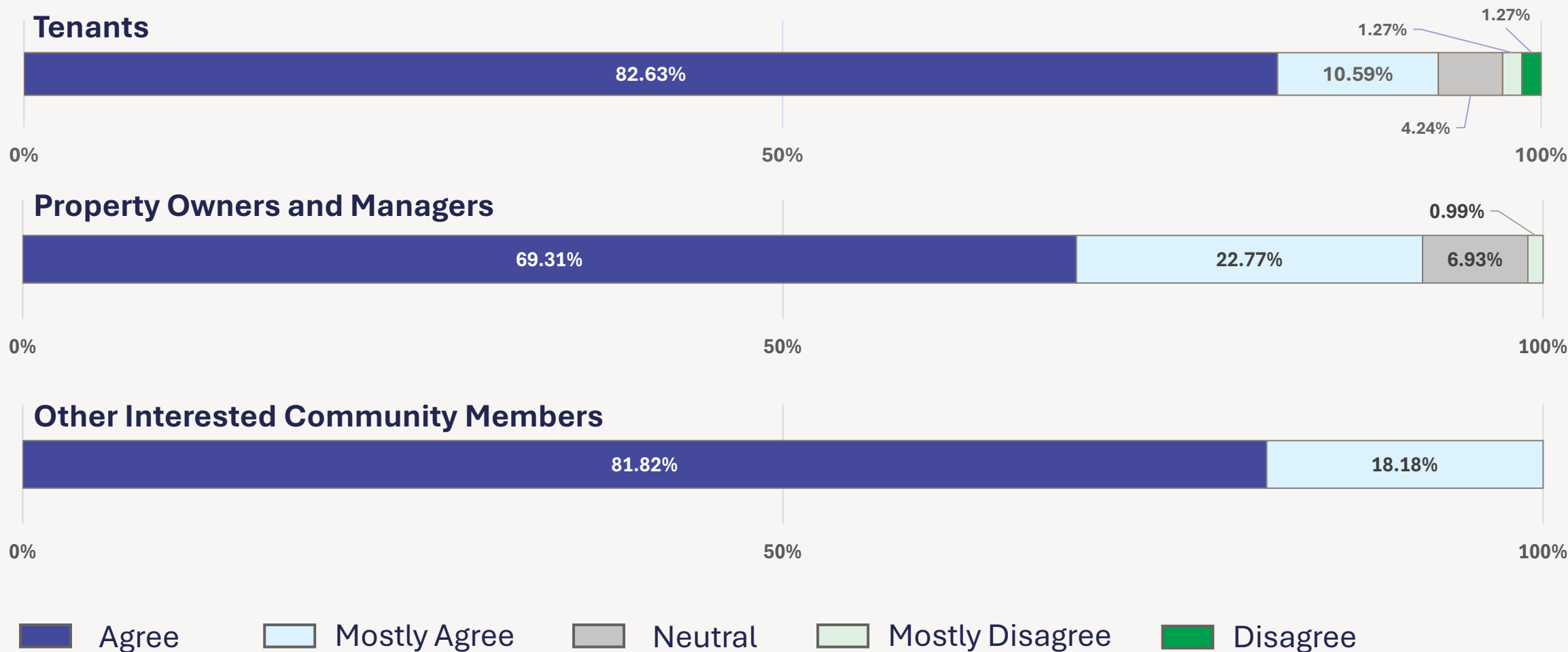
Clear upfront disclosure of rental housing fees would reduce evictions in Austin. (n = 22)



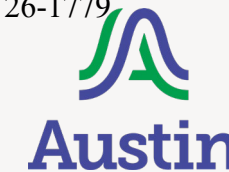
Fall 2025 Survey – Overall Takeaways



Strong majorities of survey participants across categories agree that “upfront disclosure of fees is important for prospective tenants to compare housing options that they can afford”

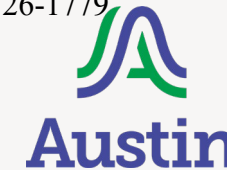


Fall 2025 Survey – Overall Takeaways



- The community at large values upfront disclosure practices.
- Current disclosure practices can vary widely.
- Most landlords and manager respondents believe their business would improve if prospective tenants had a better understanding of their housing costs.
- Many tenants express uncertainty and frustration regarding lack of upfront fee disclosure and clarity. On the other hand, tenants with landlords who clearly disclose costs respond very positively.
- Future statewide or national regulation would be helpful in the future to align jurisdictions.
- Respondents point out problems with mid-lease fee changes and fees being buried or scattered in the lease contract. The ordinance will not be able to address these issues.

Fall 2025 Survey – Overall Takeaways



■ Advertising

- Tenants find their homes through a variety of methods. The most common appears to be using third-party rental listing websites (e.g., Zillow, Apartments.com, etc.), which 30% of tenant respondents used to find their current home. The next most common methods were word of mouth (22% of tenant respondents) and directly on a property's website (16%).
- 87% of landlords with 5 or more dwellings in Austin use third-party listing websites to advertise. The second most common place of advertisement for this group is the property's website (67%).
- Disclosure in advertisements is most feasible for mandatory fees, particularly if any monthly fixed fees are rolled into an all-in price.
- Third party listing websites could help spread awareness of local requirements to landlords.

April 2026 Public Comment – Review of Draft Regulations

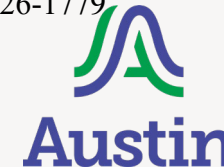


- Austin Housing posted draft regulations to guide the Rental Fee Transparency Ordinance for public comment in April 2026. This was an opportunity for community members to review the previous engagement materials, the resulting proposal, and the underlying rationale to offer feedback and refine the final proposal.
- The survey was open from April 7th to April 24th and received 29 responses. All participants reported residing or owning rental housing in the City of Austin or the 5-County Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).
- Respondents included:
 - 11 Tenants
 - 6 Property Owners (3 owning 5 or more rental dwellings)
 - 4 Property Managers (all managing 5 or more rental dwellings)
 - 8 Others (e.g., tenant advocates, real estate agent, policy advisor, social worker, an individual experiencing homelessness, etc.)

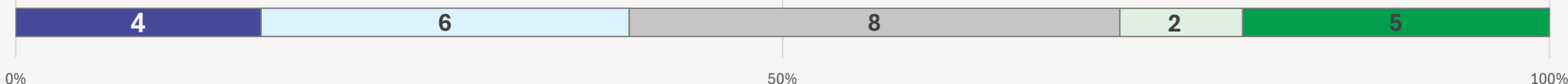
April 2026 Public Comment

Respondents selected their agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

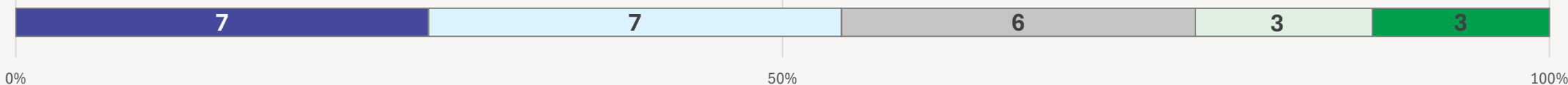
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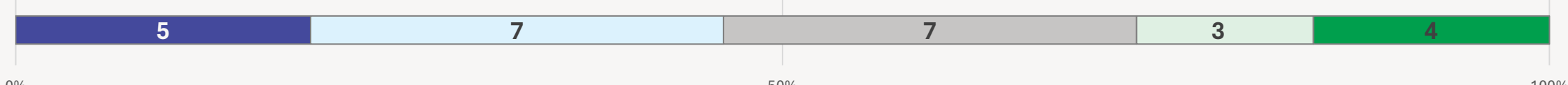
This proposal for the Rental Fee Transparency Ordinance meets the expectations of the Council Resolution No. 20241024-045. (n = 25)



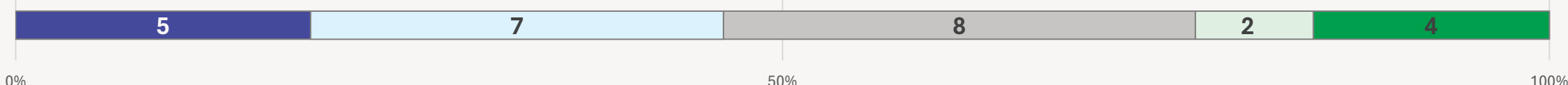
These proposed regulations will make rental housing costs clearer to prospective tenants. (n = 26)



These proposed regulations will make it easier for property owners and managers to know what their competitors charge. (n = 26)



These proposed regulations create a fair standard for consistent upfront communication of housing costs. (n = 26)



Agree Mostly Agree Neutral Mostly Disagree Disagree

April 2026 Public Comment – Tenants



- Comments included but were not limited to the following points:
 - That the City should make the complaint process clear and accessible.
 - Concern that landlords will find loopholes to avoid clear fee disclosure.
 - That the advertising requirements should apply to all landlords regardless of size.
 - Remedy to tenants if they receive a favorable judgement in municipal court.
 - Limit the advertising regulation to advertisements that the property is aware of or has paid for. Sometimes other parties advertise a price for a rental without the knowledge of the landlord.

April 2026 Public Comment – Tenant Advocates



- Comments included but were not limited to the following points:
 - The enforcement mechanism seems lacking and should be a way for tenants to file suit themselves if needed/desired.
 - Don't include pre-written fees options on the standard fee disclosure form.
 - Require the standard form at lease renewal as well.
 - Require the standard form for everyone to make enforcement easier and more consistent.
 - Provide the standard disclosure form template in English and Spanish.
 - Require that landlords include a link to their fee disclosure form in any advertisement.
 - Require landlords to provide a copy of their fee disclosure form to the City at least once a year to make oversight easier.
 - Make the process for filing complaints clear.
 - Require disclosure of average utility costs or a range.

April 2026 Public Comment – Owners and Managers



- Comments included but were not limited to the following points:
 - Ordinance should apply to all landlords regardless of how many units they own or manage.
 - There needs to be a remedy for the tenant if fees are not disclosed up front. Perhaps a refund of the fees and a fine for the landlord.
 - Don't require the fee disclosure form before someone books a tour.
 - Include a utility section in the standard disclosure form.
 - Clarify the expectations for what to include in the standard disclosure form.
 - Account for syndication lag and vendor display limits in online third-party advertising platforms.
 - Extend safe harbor beyond the standard disclosure form.
 - Support for itemizing all costs that tenants will be responsible for, though important to be mindful of complications of clearly communicating third-party charges.
 - Some oppose the regulations or specific parts, while others support.

April 2026 Public Comment – Owners and Managers



- Comments included but were not limited to the following points:
 - On the standard disclosure form, include blank spaces for the base monthly rent, the total amount for fees selected, and the total monthly costs for the prospective tenant. Also, can include a place to sign and date to acknowledge receipt.
 - Ensure that owners and managers only receive a warning after receiving their first valid complaint, or that the general enforcement include a notice-and-cure before citation. Consider resetting the count of complaints against properties on an annual basis or whenever new ownership takes over.
 - Consider collaborating with third party advertising platforms for awareness to prospective tenants and landlords.
 - Make the regulation easy to understand and prevent loopholes that some landlords might use to avoid the requirements.
 - Give enough implementation time to account for phasing in the new form and advertised price, as well as education and awareness.

April 2026 Public Comment – Other Community



- Comments included but were not limited to the following points:
 - Make the complaint process as clear as possible.
 - Ensure that the requirements are flexible enough to account for different practices.
 - Include education and guidance for housing providers and residents alongside the rollout of the ordinance.
 - Concern that landlords may bear costs to comply with the ordinance, which could be reflected in rent.
 - The disclosure form requirement will be easier to enforce than the advertised price that includes mandatory fixed recurring fees.

April 2026 Public Comment – Overall Takeaways



- Respondents from each category offered targeted feedback for ways to make the ordinance function better for tenants and landlords.
- Tenants and advocates generally expressed support for the greater protections and transparency, along with a level of caution that the ordinance might not be strong enough.
- Property owners, managers, and other community members expressed varying viewpoints ranging from full support to full opposition of the proposed regulations. Some recognize the need and welcome what they anticipate to be fair and consistent disclosure standards. Others question the need or worry about regulatory burden.
- Overall, feedback identified improvements to make the complaint process clear and accessible, balance the needs of landlords and tenants, and further clarify details of the regulations and enforcement.