

WTU MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK



ADOPTED DECEMBER 5, 2023



**PEOPLE
OVER
PROFIT**



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PROGRAM

The numbers have shown — and the experts have proven — what Salt Lake City tenants have already known: the rent is too high. The way things are now, if we are lucky enough to get decently priced housing, the conditions are not up to standard. The brand new apartments popping up all over the city may be of a higher quality, but they are overpriced — even units that qualify as “low-income.” With developers and landlords running the city through our mayors, city counselors, judges, and law-makers, we are at the mercy of a housing system meant to extract rent from workers, not to house human beings.

Wasatch Tenants United is a tenant union that exists to fight for our fellow renters against landlords and property managers, to fight for greater rights as tenants before the law, and to ultimately create a system of housing that recognizes housing as a human right. Currently, housing is a commodity, something that is produced and managed to make profit. We believe in a future where housing is produced based on need and controlled by the people who live in it. To start, instead of developers and city officials deciding which homes to raze and which luxury apartments to build, we want true participatory decision making led by the tenants themselves.

We want to *decommodify* and *democratize* housing. This means;

- ★ We affirm that housing is a human right.
- ★ Housing should not be produced, sold, or managed for profit.
- ★ Housing should be created and managed based upon human need.
- ★ We are committed to collective and democratic control of land and housing. The community, collectively, should have the final say over housing creation and management.

To that end:

- ★ We agitate to win legal reforms that benefit tenants in Salt Lake City.

- ★ We organize tenants to fight for each other against greedy landlords and property managers.
- ★ We struggle together to build true tenant power, capable of fighting for and winning a system that serves tenants and all working people instead of just a few wealthy developers.

WHAT EVERY TENANT DESERVES

While the assertions above outline our general political outlook, we need to ground our politics in the present reality. To that end, this is what WTU intends to fight for in the immediate future. A movement for a better world is impossible if our movement can't improve our world now. The four points presented below are our immediate organizational priorities.

1. Housing that is clean, safe, and free from infestations and hazards.

Presently, renters are constantly subjected to poor, inhumane, and often illegal living conditions by landlords prioritizing money over people. At the same time, local governing agencies turn a blind eye to these issues. This takes the form of both passing laws that make it easier to be a neglectful slumlord, and also a general refusal or inability to enforce existing protections for renters. WTU believes that this situation is unjust, and we intend to make it right.

This situation persists because our national, state, and local governments are controlled by the wealthy. Developers and landlords use their money to bribe politicians with campaign donations, direct gifts, and promises of lucrative jobs. Renters, on the other hand, are far more numerous but are not organized.

WTU intends to use our organization to fight for clean, safe housing that is free from infestations, mold, and other haz-

ards. We intend to use our organization to eliminate the legal, cultural, and political protections for neglectful slumlords. We understand that this is only possible with the large-scale organization of renters.

2. Freedom from legal and illegal abuse, harassment, and retaliation.

Renters are constantly subject to all manner of harassment, abuse, and retaliation from their landlords. Landlords can evict you at will. Landlords write leases that subject tenants to unlawful conditions. Landlords violate all manner of legal protections for LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, and people of color. Landlords also use citizenship status to bully and evict tenants. Even openly illegal acts by landlords are only punished if a renter is willing (and able) to hire a lawyer for a lawsuit.

The control that landlords and developers have over our governing institutions is the reason why we have no real recourse to these abuses. Landlords and developers have used their money to write our laws, it should be no surprise that those laws protect them. The irony is that the rent we are made to pay is used to pay the lobbyists and bribes necessary to write these laws.

WTU intends to organize renters to fight against this abuse, harassment, and retaliation. We intend to do this in three ways. First, by organizing renters to confront landlords directly. Second, to pressure government institutions into enforcing their own laws. Third, to change the laws wherever necessary to ensure renters are free from these abuses.

3. Democratic control over our communities.

All community members (homeowners, renters, and unhoused people) benefit from the construction of community amenities such as parks, libraries, recreation centers, and schools. The decision of what gets built where (land use) is determined by government bodies. As we know, these government bodies are largely controlled by the rich and powerful. Developers deliberately and openly make strategies alongside our city council and mayor to raise rents in certain neighborhoods to increase

their profit margins. This has resulted in massive displacement in our city, and a sharp increase in homelessness.

Our government, and the rich few who control it, don't care about your personal feelings about your community. They care about the money they can make from your community. If they need to remake your community or displace you to get their money, they will. If we as renters aren't organized, we can do nothing about this.

WTU intends to organize our whole communities to fight for control over our communities. We intend to use our organization to pressure governing bodies to spend tax dollars on communities, not tax breaks for wealthy developers. We intend to protect and expand democratic control over land in our city.

4. Access to knowledge.

Knowledge is power. Government, housing economics, and politics are somewhat complicated. But these things are absolutely knowable for the average renter. The exploitation and destruction of our communities relies simultaneously on widespread lack of knowledge and know-how as well as material disenfranchisement among working-class people. Further, corrupt local officials and the political maneuvers of real estate developers at first seem very sneaky, but when you know what to look for they are actually very obvious and bold.

WTU is committed to doing the necessary research and investigation to better understand the living conditions of renters in the valley and why these conditions exist. Further, we are committed to bringing this knowledge back to our communities. We want to demystify the processes, institutions, and structures that govern our lives to give more people the tools necessary to organize and fight together to improve their communities.

PARTICIPATION

This organization is focused on housing and welcomes people who are ready to struggle. You do not need to have any particular ideology or outlook, but come ready to work.

TENANT-MEMBERS

Tenants can become members of WTU and can participate in meetings and voting.* Tenant members are encouraged to participate in and request member defense/mutual aid (outlined below).

A tenant is someone who does not control their living situation. Renters, unhoused people, and people living in their parent's/guardian's/spouse's/partner's place can be tenants.

HOMEOWNER-MEMBERS

Homeowners can become members of WTU and can participate in meetings and voting.* Homeowner-members will be expected to participate in member defense while understanding that member defense is for tenant-members.

Homeowners own the place where they live. Homeowners may be paying a mortgage.

LANDLORDS

Landlords of any kind cannot become voting members or hold positions of responsibility in WTU — but they may conditionally participate in meetings or actions. If someone intentionally purchased or acquired a property with the sole purpose of acquiring income, or if the majority of their income is derived from rent collection, they cannot be involved in any WTU functions.

Landlords extract rent from tenants who live in the places that landlords own.

*Tenants or homeowners who have conflicts of interest with WTU's values and goals (such as property managers, cops, etc.) can only join WTU after a discussion and vote of the current membership. They can be barred from membership at any future time with standard WTU consensus/voting procedures.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Members are encouraged to attend at least two WTU general meetings every year. General meetings are usually held at 7 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month.

Meetings are where we plan and organize our fight for tenant rights, so we want members to attend as many general meetings as possible.

Members are encouraged to attend at least two committee meetings every year. Committee meetings are usually held at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month.

We want members to organize primarily in their own buildings or neighborhoods if possible. This neighborhood/building work takes place in committee meetings, so we encourage you to prioritize committee meetings wherever possible.

Members are always encouraged to talk to their neighbors outside of meetings about the union and the benefits of collective organizing!

MEMBER DEFENSE AND MUTUAL AID COMMITMENTS

WTU as a group — and all of its members as individuals — commit, to the best of our abilities, to helping our tenant-members when they need support. We will pool our resources, skills, and labor to help each other. The organization and planning of WTU to carry out these member defense/mutual aid commitments will take place in meetings

that all members are invited to attend.

- ★ Members commit to aid in communications with landlords and/or management companies in person, via phone, letter, or email.
- ★ Members commit to aiding one another in pressuring the city to enforce laws protecting tenants in cases where the city is slow to respond.
- ★ Members commit to helping members who have been evicted move in or out of their residences.
- ★ Members commit to promote crowd-sourcing of needed repairs that WTU and tenants cannot or have decided not to get from landlords and/or management companies.
- ★ Members commit to help organize and execute collective actions for building improvements or other goals of affiliated tenant unions or WTU committees.
- ★ Members commit to aiding members recoup deposits that former landlords are holding without cause.
- ★ Members commit to participate in planning, promoting, and/or attending actions such as rallies, city meetings, and forms of direct action.

Due to limited resources:

- ★ WTU is not currently providing members with emergency rent funds.
- ★ WTU is not currently facilitating fundraising efforts for members to raise emergency rent.

CONDUCT

- ★ We respect one another regardless of race, disability, nationality, gender, sex, citizenship status, criminal record, religion, sexuality, or other marginalized status.
 - Respect pronouns.
 - No slurs.
 - No sexual harassment, including unwanted advances.
- ★ We ask that members who are part of other organizations (including political parties, activist groups, etc.) participate in WTU as individuals and not as members of another group. When possible, all activity — including planning and

investigation — should be done openly within the membership. This means side conversations, and even brief private back and forths, are fine; but organizational actions and activity should generally be accessible and visible to all members.

- ★ WTU is an organizing space. We expect members to center the organization's collective goals and activity at WTU meetings and actions. To that end, we discourage self promotion for economic, political, romantic, or other personal reasons during WTU actions, meetings, etc.

DUES

Members are invited to contribute dues yearly on a sliding scale of \$5 – \$50.

No one will be denied membership based on the inability to pay dues.

Dues will be collected when members join, then once a year in February by the Membership Secretary and/or Treasurer(s).

Dues money (and any other fundraised or donated monies) will be physically managed by the Treasurer(s), but spent democratically by WTU as a whole.

ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

This person is responsible for keeping track of WTU membership rolls, contact information, date of membership, activity status, dues status (i.e. paid or unpaid), and meeting attendance. The membership secretary is responsible for collecting and maintaining this information in an easily accessible digital spreadsheet format. While organizers in a specific building or

neighborhood should be the main points of contact for members in that building or neighborhood, the membership secretary must coordinate with organizers to make sure records are up to date and accessible when needed.

The membership secretary is also responsible for the storage of all printed material and tabling material used by WTU, including the member handbooks, fliers, letters, literature, stickers, membership cards, chairs, tables, etc. The membership secretary must coordinate with local organizers to make sure these materials are available when needed.

The membership secretary is not in charge of determining who is and who is not allowed to be a member of WTU. This is determined by WTU as a democratic organization. The membership secretary is responsible only for what is outlined in this section.

The membership secretary must be elected at a general meeting according to standard WTU consensus/voting procedures. The membership secretary serves for a period of one year. A membership secretary may be recalled at any time by the same method as election. If a membership secretary is recalled, a new membership secretary must be elected at the next general meeting. No membership secretary can serve for more than one year consecutively.

The membership secretary is required to complete a report on the state of WTU membership once a year, or at the request of any member, and present it at a general meeting.

Should the tasks of membership secretary become too great for a single person to handle, the secretary may form, at a general meeting, a committee, open to participation by any organizer, whose purpose is to share the secretary's work.

TREASURERS

There must be two treasurers with access to WTU funds at all times. These people are responsible for keeping track of all money collected by WTU, whether dues, donations, funds raised, or other sources. The treasurers must keep records of

every credit to or deduction from WTU funds including their date, their purpose, who funds were given to or received from, and all supporting documentation including receipts. The treasurers are responsible for getting funds to those who have been approved to receive them by WTU in a timely manner and collecting all relevant information and documentation from the people who receive funds.

The treasurers are not in charge of who does or does not get access to WTU funds. This is determined by WTU as a democratic organization. The treasurers are responsible only for what is outlined in this section.

The treasurers must be elected at a general meeting according to standard WTU consensus /voting procedures. The treasurers serve for a period of one year. A treasurer may be recalled at any time by the same method as election. If a treasurer is recalled, a new treasurer must be elected at the next general meeting. No treasurer can serve for more than one year consecutively.

The treasurers are required to complete a comprehensive report of WTU finances once every year, or upon request by any member, and present it at a general meeting. This report must include the current state of WTU funds as well as records of all credits, debits, transactions, etc.

Should the tasks of the treasurers become too great for two people to handle, the treasurers may form, at a general meeting, a committee, open to participation by any organizer, whose purpose is to share the treasurers' work.

CONDUCT LIAISONS

Two people serve as points of contact for complaints regarding misconduct in WTU, including but not limited to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and harassment based on identity.

The conduct liaisons must be elected at a general meeting according to standard WTU consensus/voting procedures. The conduct liaisons serve for a period of one year. A conduct liaison may be recalled at any time by the same method as elec-

tion. If a conduct liaison is recalled, a new conduct liaison must be elected at the next general meeting. No conduct liaison can serve for more than one year consecutively.

Reports of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or harassment based on other identities do not need to be made only to these people. Members are invited to talk to whoever they feel most comfortable with.

HOW MEETINGS ARE RUN

AGENDAS

The facilitator should post the draft agenda and a reminder of the meeting more than 24 hours in advance of the meeting to allow members to add agenda items.

ROLES

Every meeting of more than 6 people should assign the following roles

- ★ **Facilitator:** The facilitator's job is to move the meeting forward, take stack, and call on people who wish to speak. We try to keep our meetings reasonable in length. This means the facilitator should identify themes, focus them, and focus conversations around emerging themes. Ask about our 'How to Facilitate a Meeting' document for more information.

The facilitator is also responsible for posting an agenda in WTU communications channels at least 24 hrs before the upcoming meeting (see above).

- ★ **Note taker:** The note taker's job is to take notes on decisions made and where the group came to unity. This includes but isn't limited to
 - Votes held.
 - Tasks delegated.

- Deadlines set.
- Important events on the horizon such as public hearings, events hosted by friendly organizations, etc.)

At the end of every meeting, the next meeting's roles should be assigned. It is a good idea to rotate these roles to newer members whenever possible.

HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE (CONSENSUS/VOTING PROCEDURES)

- ★ Anybody can make a motion.
- ★ Motions should be clear and specific.
 - We shouldn't say "I motion, what they said." We should say "I motion that we pack the city council meeting and plan a disruption if the vote does not go our way at the meeting at (time/day of week/date)."
- ★ Motions need a 'second.' This is somebody else saying 'I understand your proposal, and I agree with it!'
 - If nobody seconds, the facilitator should allow the person who brought the motion a chance to re-explain their proposal.
- ★ Discussion should always occur before a consensus/voting begins. If modifications are made to a proposal, a new motion should be made to include the caveats needed to reach unity.
 - NOT: "I motion that we pack the city council meeting and plan a disruption if the vote does not go our way, plus the amendments." Rather: "I motion that we pack the city council meeting and plan a disruption if the vote does not go our way, and that we leave when the cops begin to disperse us, and afterwards briefly gather to summarize events with attendees in the east courtyard."
- ★ After discussion concludes, the facilitator can call a vote. Decisions should be made by consensus. However in instances where consensus cannot be reached, a simple majority vote can be used.

ACTION CALENDAR

All upcoming events, tasks, and priorities named at the general meeting should be compiled and posted by the notetaker in the WTU Slack, or in whatever primary communication channel WTU is using at the moment.



**DECOMMODIFY
AND
DEMOCRATIZE
HOUSING!**



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**STREET
BY STREET
BLOCK
BY BLOCK**