

DATE: December 18, 2025

TO: Rental Housing Committee

FROM: Anky van Deursen, Rent Stabilization Manager

SUBJECT: Hearing Officer and Settlement Conference Facilitator Remuneration

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt fixed hourly rates of \$300 for Hearing Officers, \$175 for Paralegals, and \$125 for Settlement Conference Facilitators, effective January 1, 2026; and establish an annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to be applied at the start of each fiscal year thereafter, unless otherwise adjusted by the Rental Housing Committee.

BACKGROUND

The Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act (CSFRA) and the Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance (MHRSO) provide a process for tenants and landlords to file petitions to modify rents due to a reduction in services, illegal rent increases, hardship, maintenance of net operating income, and capital improvements. The City contracts with Project Sentinel to provide independent Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators as part of administering the petition process:

- “Hearing Officers” serve as independent adjudicators who determine the outcome of petitions based on their review of the evidence and the testimony presented during hearings. Hearing Officers have a Juris Doctor or equivalent degree and have an active or inactive membership in good standing in the California State Bar or other state bar.
- “Settlement Conference Facilitators” are skilled mediators who work with the parties to resolve petitions outside of the formal hearing process.

[On June 8, 2017, the Rental Housing Committee](#) (RHC) adopted a structure for appointing and compensating Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators to conduct petition hearings or settlement conferences. This included setting qualification and experience requirements and contracting with Project Sentinel to provide administrative services, such as contracting with Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators.

[On September 25, 2023, the RHC](#) adopted a revised remuneration scale for Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators which increased the rates and added an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to take effect at the start of each fiscal year, unless the Committee decides otherwise. Attachment 1 provides the approved remuneration scale for Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators, along with the CPI increases to date. The scale outlines varying hourly rates based on the type of work performed by Hearing Officers.

Additional Capacity Needed

Recruiting and retaining qualified Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators has become increasingly challenging. In recent years, the Division has seen growth in both the number and complexity of petitions, placing additional pressure on existing Hearing Officer capacity. Additionally, there have been Hearing Officer turnover in recent years due primarily to retirements. This has resulted in the need for more Hearing Officers

To address this need, Project Sentinel issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in July 2025 but was unsuccessful in recruiting new Hearing Officers. Staff received feedback from applicants that attracting qualified Hearing Officers require consistent and competitive hourly rates regardless of the type of service performed and to allow the use of paralegals for preparation tasks. Currently, the adopted hourly rates vary depending on the type of service and the rates are not competitive (See Attachment 1 and Table 1 for current rates) and paralegals are not included in the schedule.

ANALYSIS

Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators are vital for effectively managing the CSFRA/MHRSO petition program. To retain highly qualified professionals and support the use of paralegals in case preparation when appropriate, staff recommends implementing a revised pay scale for adjudicating and settling petitions.

The current remuneration scale includes various hourly rates for Hearing Officers based on the type of service provided, along with an hourly cap for each service category, and an annual Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) aligned with the Consumer Price Index (CPI)—the same CPI used for the Annual General Adjustment of Rent (CPI-U, All Items, San Francisco Bay Area, February to February). For instance, time spent at a hearing is rated at \$287 per hour, whereas the rate for preparation and writing is set at \$230 per hour. Attachment 1 provides an overview of the current remuneration scale, including current hourly rates adjusted according to CPI.

Staff consulted with comparable jurisdictions in California to research market rates for qualified Hearing Officers. In general, contracted Hearing Officers in other jurisdictions are typically paid a

flat hourly fee, irrespective of the services they provide. Some jurisdictions employ full-time hearing officers, while others utilize a mix of staff and contracted officers.

Based on this review, staff recommends maintaining a standard hourly rate regardless of the type of services provided, with \$300 per hour for Hearing Officers, \$175 for Paralegals, and \$125 for Conference Settlement Facilitators, while keeping the current maximum hour cap (see Attachment 2). Table 1 shows the current hourly rates versus the recommended rates for Hearing Officers and Settlement Conference Facilitators, and adds a new Paralegal category in case Hearing Officers would like to use paralegals for preparation tasks.

Table 1: Comparison of current versus recommended remuneration schedule

Service	Hourly Rate 1)	Hourly Rate incl. CPI	Hour Cap	Recommended Hourly Rate
Hearing Officers:				
Uncontested Tenant Hardship Petition (stand-alone)	\$287 Hearing \$230 Prep and Writing	\$301.06 \$241.66	4 hours*	\$300
Tenant Petitions A/B, Contested Hardship Petition (stand-alone)	\$287 Hearing, Prehearing, Site Visit \$230 Prep and Writing	\$301.06 \$241.66	15 hours*	\$300
Landlord Petition	\$287 Hearing Prehearing, Site Visit \$230 Prep and Writing	\$301.06 \$241.66	20 hours*	\$300
Decision on Remand after Appeal (same Hearing Officer)	\$172	\$180.22	5 hours*	\$300
Decision on Remand after Appeal (new Hearing Officer)	\$230	\$241.66	10 hours*	\$300
Attending Trainings	\$115	\$120.83	N/A	\$150
Settlement Conference Facilitator	\$460	\$482.30	4 hours*	\$125

*Unless prior express authorization for additional hours is approved by the City.

FISCAL IMPACT

For Fiscal Year 2025–26, the budget allocated for adjudicating petitions is \$170,000. Based on the petition volume and types from FY 2024–25—and assuming similar activity levels in FY 2025–26—the projected total increase in cost will not surpass the budget of \$170,000 using the recommended rates in Table 1 for the second half of FY 2025–26. Staff will continue to track expenditures throughout the year and will update the RHC if additional appropriations become necessary.

PUBLIC NOTICING - Agenda posting, posting on the City’s website, and email to RHC distribution list.

Attachments:

1. Current remuneration scale for hearing officers and conference settlement facilitators as of July 1, 2023.
2. Recommended remuneration scale for hearing officers, paralegals, and conference settlement facilitators as of January 1, 2026.