



**Department of Building Inspections &
Neighborhood Services**

414/302-8400
414/302-8402 (Fax)

City Hall
7525 West Greenfield Avenue
West Allis, Wisconsin 53214

www.westalliswi.gov

August 17, 2015

Common Council
Safety and Development Committee
West Allis, WI

RE: Potential Changes to Building, Plumbing and Electrical Codes

Dear Council Members:

The Department of Building Inspection and Neighborhood Services (BINS) has identified several potential areas of the Revised Municipal Code (RMC) which we use, that could use some changes or improvements. This communication is to outline some of these areas, make a recommendation on how to improve our codes, and ask for direction regarding any future code changes based on these recommendations.

We have identified four potential areas for improvement that we would recommend you take a look at. They are briefly described as: eliminating electrical contractor licensing requirements and the Electrical Review Board; eliminating the requirements for fence permits; including commercial properties in the code provisions for Nuisance Abandoned Dwellings; and allowing homeowners to apply for plumbing permits for projects involving replacement of some plumbing fixtures only.

Item 1: Eliminate electrical contractor licensing and the Electrical Review Board

The State of Wisconsin passed a law that any municipal ordinance requiring licensing of electrical contractors was no longer in effect after April 1, 2014. The RMC has an entire section devoted to electrical contractor licensing, which the City required until this state law change. The Electrical Review Board was created to review contractor licenses and listen to appeals pertaining to suspension or revocation of a license. Without licensing, the Board has very few remaining duties. Our recommendation is to eliminate the contractor licensing requirements from our code because they are currently against State law, and eliminate the Electrical Review Board because it will then have very limited duties.

Item 2: Eliminate the requirement for fence permits

The current fence code basically came into effect in 1988, with a few minor setback revisions in the early 1990's. The current code does require permits for fences, however BINS does not perform any inspections as a part of those permits. BINS does this as more of an administrative permit and closes the permits as soon as they are approved. This sometimes creates confusion with neighbors who

assume we do inspect the fence and that we do ensure that a homeowner installs it in the correct location. The recommendation is to eliminate the requirement for fence permits, which will reduce this confusion. The regulations for fences would still remain in place. This would be a similar practice to how we currently regulate sheds. There are rules in place for sheds pertaining to size, location, etc., but we do not require a permit for them.

Item 3: Include commercial properties in the code provisions for Nuisance Abandoned Dwellings

The Nuisance Abandoned Dwelling code section has been an excellent tool for BINS to get houses that are abandoned and neglected to get cleaned up faster than the normal court process. We feel that this program should be expanded to all buildings in the City, and not just one- and two-family dwellings. This will give us another tool to gain code compliance of commercial properties that have been abandoned. This recommendation would allow the City to hire an outside contractor to secure a building, remove garbage, cut the grass, replace broken windows and eliminate other property maintenance issues on all buildings.

Item 4: Allow homeowners to apply for plumbing permits for fixture replacement

Currently, any plumbing work performed requires a licensed plumber to apply for permits on all buildings in the City. Several neighboring communities do allow for homeowners to apply for permits in some limited capacity. This recommendation to allow homeowners to apply for permits would be limited to replacement of existing permitted fixtures only, and it would be similar to what is allowed in other nearby communities. Any new or relocated fixtures would still require a licensed plumber to obtain the permit. The requirement to get a permit for the work would still be in place for homeowners, but the requirement that a permit can only be issued to a licensed plumber in these situations would be removed. We may also develop a reduced fee permit for plumbing fixture replacements only.

I am available to answer any questions about these recommendations if you have any. If these suggested code changes seem like they are in the best interest of the City, I will prepare more formal ordinance language for review at a future Common Council meeting at your direction.

Sincerely,



Ed Lisinski, P.E.
Director
Building Inspections and Neighborhood Services
7525 W. Greenfield Avenue
West Allis, WI 53214
elisinski@westalliswi.gov