



Ed Lisinski
Director
Department of Building Inspections & Neighborhood Services
414.302.8400
elisinski@westalliswi.gov

January 24, 2017

Common Council
Safety and Development Committee
West Allis, WI

RE: Rental Inspection Program

Dear Committee Members,

Mayor Devine and the City of West Allis Department of Building Inspection and Neighborhood Services have been exploring some options for proactively approaching the property maintenance issue in the City of West Allis. One idea that has recently come up is the possibility of developing a rental inspection program in the City. Before too much work is done on this program, we wanted to get your thoughts on it to see if it is something that you would be interested in enacting here in West Allis. Many Wisconsin communities already perform rental inspections. This communication will outline our preliminary thoughts on how the program would look and to start the conversation about it.

Our theory is that good landlords will rent to good tenants, who will do a better job of maintaining the properties. This will lead to nicer neighborhoods, fewer complaints, fewer code violations, fewer complaint calls to alderpersons, and less staff time needed to follow up on complaints. We feel this will be a huge step in fighting the property maintenance issues and blight that is creeping into the city.

There are currently a little over 29,000 living units in the City of West Allis. If we eliminate the single family homes, mobile homes and condominium units, that leaves us with about 14,500 units to be inspected on 3,840 parcels. These are mostly duplexes, mixed uses and multi-family units.

The plan right now would be to hire (I'll get to that later) a new rental inspection inspector who is dedicated to this program. They could also fill in for other property maintenance staff for vacations or sick leave. That staff person would do approximately 3,300 rental unit inspections per year, which comes to about 15 units per day (typically anywhere from 1 to 8 parcels per day). The inspection would focus on a set checklist of both interior and exterior property maintenance and life safety items. This checklist will be provided to landlords in advance of the inspection and be available on the city website.

Each unit would be placed on a 5 year inspection cycle to start. If there are no or minimal violations, they will remain on that 5 year cycle. If there are more violations, they will be inspected annually until they are in compliance for 2 or 3 consecutive years, depending on the severity of the violations and the history of the property. I have factored in that 20% of properties will need an annual inspection in the beginning for the number of inspections above.

We would copy a fee structure from one of the other communities. What we are thinking right now is a \$100 fee per parcel and a \$15 fee per rental unit. For example, a duplex would be charged \$130 (\$100 for the parcel and 2 units at \$15 each) and a 20-unit apartment would be charged \$400 (\$100 for the parcel and 20 units at \$15 each). If these property owners do a good job of maintaining their properties, \$130 or even \$400 over a 5 year period should not have a significant economic impact on them. Based on the number of inspections in a given year, this program should bring in about \$140,000 per year in

revenue from the fees. This will make the program entirely self-funded and self-sufficient. That fee will cover the salary and benefits of the new staff person we would hire, mileage/vehicle costs, administrative costs, clerical costs, office supplies, iPad monthly charges, and other miscellaneous costs associated with maintaining this program.

The checklist of common inspection items will be provided to give landlords adequate time to make any necessary repairs prior to our visit. Our current property maintenance code does not address interior maintenance. That will have to be corrected before moving forward. Even if we do not move forward with this program, I would still recommend that we revise that code to include interior maintenance to assist us moving forward. The International Code Council does produce an International Property Maintenance Code which is used by municipalities across the country. This code is created by a consensus code process and is updated and maintained every 3 years. It would keep us consistent with code enforcement across the country. I would recommend the council look into adopting that code either in its entirety or at least significant portions thereof.

In conclusion, I feel this program would step perfectly in line with the direction that the council is moving. It follows the practice of priority based budgeting, by allocating resources to the city's biggest needs and problem areas. Property maintenance continues to be a huge problem as evidenced by the recently approved Strategic Plan and Mayor's recommended budget. We can't continue to do things the way we have always done them, and expect different results. We need new and exciting approaches to the problem if we are going to make any significant progress. I will be available for your questions or comments at any time.

Sincerely,



Ed Lisinski, P.E.

Director

Building Inspections and Neighborhood Services

7525 W. Greenfield Avenue

West Allis, WI 53214

elisinski@westalliswi.gov