



INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning and Community Development Committee

FROM: Nora Gierloff, Community Development Director

**BY: Lori Solberg, Rental Housing Program Admin.
Joseph Mose, Code Enforcement Officer**

CC: Mayor Ekberg

DATE: March 6, 2023

SUBJECT: Rental Housing Program Update

ISSUE

Review the Rental Housing Program's current activity.

BACKGROUND

The Tukwila Code Enforcement team works to support a safe, inviting, and healthy environment for residents, businesses, and visitors by enforcing the parts of the Tukwila Municipal Code that relate to conditions on private property. Compliance is typically reached through promoting public awareness, communication, and collaboration. In difficult cases monetary penalties and/or legal action may be required. In addition to general code enforcement, the team is also responsible for managing and administering the Residential Rental Business License and Inspection Program.

The City established the Rental Program in 2010 to protect the public health, safety, and welfare by ensuring the proper maintenance of rental housing. It does this by identifying and requiring correction of substandard housing conditions and by preventing conditions of deterioration and blight that could adversely impact the quality of life in the City of Tukwila.

DISCUSSION

Current Code Enforcement activity:

As of February 16, 2023, Code Enforcement has 18 open enforcement cases related to rental housing, most of the cases are for overdue rental licenses and/or inspections, however, a few are for confirmed rentals that do not have a license and/or complaint-based issues.

Rental Housing Business Licensing and Inspection Program:

Tukwila Municipal Code Chapter 5.06 establishes regulations pertaining to rental housing licensing and inspection. Residential rental properties are required to obtain an annual rental business license. The Rental Housing Program has 4,559 registered rental units and 529 active rental licenses (one license per property). As of February 16, 2023, 110 properties have yet to renew their 2023 rental licenses. Late fees begin March 1 at a rate of \$10 per month until the license is renewed.

Rental Inspections and Deadline Extension

In addition to annual licensing, all rental housing units in the city must pass an inspection every 4 years. This allows the city to catch and correct health and safety violations that otherwise tenants might be reluctant to report due to language barriers or fear of retaliation by landlords. The purpose of the periodic inspections is to ensure that all rental units are safe, healthy, and suitable for occupancy. The inspectors check for properly working door locks, functional

appliances, windows that are intact and that open, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, adequate emergency escape routes, mold, and other items. Some of the most common maintenance items that we find during inspections are improperly installed and maintained water heaters, water leaks, and missing or inoperable carbon monoxide or smoke detector(s).

One of the main complaints that we receive from tenants are issues with mold. Tenants and landlords both have responsibilities for addressing water and moisture problems that can cause mold. Generally, finding and fixing plumbing or roof leaks is the landlord's responsibility and reducing sources of condensation, such as around windows, is the renter's responsibility. The Rental Housing Program provides information on how they can work together to avoid and control the spreading of mold.

New this year, properties with up to 12 units may use a city inspector (code enforcement officer). Previously city inspectors only performed inspections for properties with up to 4 units due to staffing constraints but now that we are fully staffed, we can offer more services. Larger properties must use a private inspector who meets specific qualifications. The city may also inspect units in response to complaints and audit inspections submitted by private inspectors when inspection reports are in question. Tenants can also request a courtesy inspection by contacting the Rental Housing Program.

During the first inspection cycle in 2010-2014 we had many more units fail than we did after buildings went through a few rounds of inspections. This shows that the program has been effective in improving housing quality in the city. In 2019, the city conducted 133 inspections, but in 2020 and 2021 they were paused due to the pandemic. In 2022, the Rental Housing Program began scheduling rental inspections again. We are finding that many property owners have deferred maintenance, causing units to deteriorate and therefore fail rental inspections. It is clear that without regular inspections rental housing conditions, and our residents, will suffer.

Staff continue to work to bring approximately 51 properties into compliance that are overdue renewing their rental license or inspection or failed their initial inspection. In 2023, 114 rental licenses (895 rental units) are due for their next inspection and in 2024, 105 rental licenses (1,570 units) will be due.

Here are two situations at different apartment complexes that were reported to the Rental Housing program.

Avana at South Station Apartments

On January 9th, 2023, Rental Housing received a complaint regarding living conditions at 4708 Southcenter Blvd E312 specifically multiple areas spotted with mold. The tenants had notified the property management but there was a delay in response time, therefore the City was later notified.

A City inspector met with the tenants the next day and was able to schedule a courtesy inspection. The unit failed inspection due to severe signs of leakage and mold in the walls. The inspection report and failure notice has been sent to the property manager with a compliance date to respond to the issues and reschedule an inspection by 3/1/2023. Tenants have been in contact with the City inspector to ensure the necessary repairs and deficiencies are being corrected by the property management.



Avenue 42 Apartments

On July 11, 2022, we were contacted by the Fire Department about a water leak at Avenue 42 Apartments. They stated that there was at least 10,000 to 20,000 gallons of water in the crawl space. We responded to the complex the next morning and contacted management. The water to all the units was shut off upon our arrival and a plumber was repairing the leak. Management was already working with the plumber on a plan to pump the water out and repair other sections of piping that could likely fail in the future. Code Enforcement stopped by weekly to check on their progress. The property management has since reached out to the City and has confirmed that the leak under the crawl space has been repaired and worked with the City of Tukwila's Street department in pumping the water out.



FINANCIAL IMPACT

The Residential Rental License and Inspection Program YTD revenue for 2023 is \$32,018; for 2022 revenue was \$82,102; 2021 was \$51,728; 2020 was \$55,123.

2023 RENTAL BUSINESS LICENSE FEES:

- \$80 for properties with up to 4 units
- \$208 for properties with 5 to 20 units
- \$260 for properties with 21 to 50 units
- \$324 for properties with 51 or more units

New this year, the City is offering inspections for properties with up to 12 units for those landlords who would prefer to use City services. The rental inspection fee increased from \$62 per unit in 2022 to \$75 per unit for the first 4 units, then each additional unit is \$35 each up to 12.

RECOMMENDATION

Information and discussion only