

Project Summary



LUA16-000679 Safe and Healthy Housing in Renton Program

Intent

The **Safe and Healthy Housing in Renton** program was first proposed in 2015. The current recommended program is the result of comments received by the Planning and Development Committee (two meetings), the Planning Commission (several meetings), City of Renton staff, landlords, other members of the Renton community, and other municipalities.

A ten year study of housing in the Sunset Area of the Renton Highlands indicates that conditions, particularly in the case of rental units, continue to deteriorate. This is also the case in other areas of the City. Renton is not unique in this regard. Several cities in Washington have adopted programs in an attempt to rectify this situation. The State of Washington has adopted RCW 59.18.125, a supplement to the Landlord Tenant Act (Title 59 RCW) that addresses such programs. “Inspections by local municipalities” regulates the frequency of inspections, number of rental properties to be inspected, notice requirements for inspections, appeals, and penalties.

Renton’s code enforcement officers monitor conditions that may have an impact on health, but generally only as they relate to the exterior of a building. An example would be broken windows or doors. If a resident invites a code enforcement officer into the building and requests an inspection, interior issues may be addressed. When the resident is a tenant with a landlord who has refused to correct a perceived problem, however, they may fear reprisals in the form of rent increase or eviction.

In an effort to improve housing conditions in Renton, the Community and Economic Development Department (CED) has shifted its work from “complaint-based code enforcement” to “proactive code compliance.” As an extension of this program, the Code Compliance Division proposed adoption of new standards for residential health and safety.

Based on recommendations from the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health, the basic standards are:

- Moisture free,
- Adequately ventilated,
- Contaminant free,
- Free of pests,

- Clean,
- Well-maintained,
- Free of injury hazards, and
- Thermally controlled.

Best practices safety standards also include safe and secure access and presence of functioning smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Based on the comments received, as mentioned above, staff recommends new procedures to register landlords and their properties; establish cyclical, area wide inspections; and issue Certificates of Occupancy when units pass inspection. The most important expectation of this new program is a reduction in the need for public agencies to relocate people on an emergency basis due to unsafe or unhealthy living conditions.

If adopted, the “Safe and Healthy Housing in Renton” program will require the following:

- Revisions to Title IV of the Renton Municipal Code adopting residential housing standards based on those recommended by the National Center for Healthy Housing.
- Activation of the feature in the City’s Energov tracking system that will store property owner/landlord registration data.
- Collection of data from the King County Tax Assessor and City of Renton Utility Billing Division related to property owners who own residential rental units in Renton.
- Revise policy to require landlords to obtain business licenses.
- Establish an inspection cycle based on zip code areas.
- Adoption of a schedule of registration and inspection fees.
- Solicit contact information for qualified inspectors.
- Provide training to City of Renton code compliance officers.
- Develop administrative procedures for issuance of certificates of inspection and occupation.
- Adopt a vacant/foreclosed property registration system to identify and contact people/entities responsible for the upkeep of properties in Renton.
- Produce website with online registration form, instructions, FAQ, and education features in multiple languages.

Applicability

All property owners who rent residential dwelling units will be required to register all rental units, with the following exceptions:

- Living units not rented to others;
- Single room rental within a residence that is also occupied by the property owner;
- Residences occupied by family members of the property owner (affidavit required);
- Accommodations for transient guests for which Lodging Tax is applicable (hotels, motels, inns, Airbnbs, etc.);
- Housing units in hospitals, hospice and community-care facilities, retirement or nursing homes, and extended care facilities, i.e. living units subject to regulation by state licensing requirements;
- Rental units that a government agency or authority owns, operates or manages, or that are specifically exempted from municipal regulation by state or federal law or administrative regulation (exemption applies until such ownership is discontinued);
- Units that receive funding or subsidies, such as Housing Choice Vouchers, from the federal, state, or a local government and are inspected at least every four years as a requirement of the funding or subsidy (a copy of the inspection must be provided to the City); and
- Emergency or temporary shelters and transitional housing.

Scope and Timing

The Safe and Healthy Housing Program would be applicable citywide. Business licenses and unit registration would be required upon adoption of Renton Municipal Code regulations.

Inspections and issuance of Certificates of Occupancy would be phased in based on City of Renton zip codes, as follows:

<u>Zip Code</u>	<u>Year Inspection Required</u>
98056	2017
98057/98178	2018
98058/98059	2019
98055/98031	2020