



AD HOC COMMITTEE ON HOUSING & RESIDENT SAFETY
Friday, February 7, 2020 @ 3:30 p.m.
City Council Conference Room

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m.

Council Member Spitzley, Chairman
Council Member Hussain, Vice Chair
Council Member Betz, Member

Others Present:

Sherrie Boak, Council Office Manager
Jim Smiertka, City Attorney
Lisa Hagen, Assistant City Attorney/Council Research Assistant- absent
Eric Schertzing, Ingham County Treasurer
Dale Huber
Emily Brozovic, Local Rental Property Owners of Michigan
Rina Risper
Bob VanArkel

Council Member Spitzley informed the public that this meeting would be look at goals moving forward, discuss inviting stakeholders to future meetings, and the possibility of taking a discussion out to the public.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment at this time.

DISCUSSION

The Committee briefly reviewed their individual goals.

- 1.) Work to identify deficiencies in code/policy that are preventing our building safety and code compliance officers from ensuring a safe and appropriate housing for renters; work on recommendations to rectify.
- 2.) Work to identify inefficiencies/issues pertaining to insufficient resources within building safety and code compliance that is preventing City of Lansing from maintaining an appropriate housing stock for renters, both single-family and multi-family; work on recommendations to rectify
- 3.) Explore/identify innovative programs to assist in bringing properties into compliance; explore task force consisting of city officials and ward representatives to address problem properties and landlords
- 4.) Recommend method of centralizing resources for tenants and educating tenants on rights; should also include policy recommendations that ensure offices and departments are communicating and assisting one another in supporting tenants

1. Develop recommendations that provide a centralized location for tenants to receive information on their rights
 2. Policies, procedures, ordinances, etc that provide stronger penalties for non-compliant landlords
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- 1) Improve the quality of rental housing in Lansing
 - 2) Ensure that tenants are aware of their rights and increase the likelihood that they will exercise those rights
 - 3) Expand the role of the City Attorney in tenant protections
 - 4) Expand protections against discrimination against tenants

Council Member Spitzley informed the Committee that Mr. McGrain with Economic Development & Planning would be attending the meeting on February 21, 2020. She then asked the Committee to prepare questions ahead of time for Mr. McGrain and provide those to Council Staff by February 14, 2020. Council Member Spitzley began the list with the following questions.

- Is there a rental registry list, and if so is it complete, and provide the list.
- What is the rental inspection policy?

Council Member Hussain asked Council Member Spitzley, as Chair of the Committee, to review the list of goals and consolidate into 4-5 goals. Then once those are finalized, the Committee should determine policies, ordinances, the funding and who from the staff should attend to address each goal. Council Member Hussain supported having not just department directors, but the actual staff in the field that are enforcing or relaying the information to the public. He asked that the following questions be added to the list for Mr. McGrain.

- What is the current structure of code enforcement?
- What is the ratio of officer to inspections?
- What is the ratio of officer to housing unit?

Council Member Spitzley stated that the March 6, 2020 meeting would focus on property owners of larger developments, complexes or housing projects. Each would be given 10-15 minutes to speak to the Committee. The Committee members were asked to invite 2-3

Council Member Spitzley asked the Committee members their thoughts on who to invite to the future meetings, and it was determined that the March 20, 2020 meeting would focus on tenants, and each Committee member was asked to invite 2-3 residents to speak at that meeting.

Mr. Smiertka referred the Committee to the City of Jackson ordinance on housing and noted that the OCA has issues with it, but the Committee can look at it and consider alternatives to it. He suggested the option of inviting the City of Jackson code enforcement staff. Council Member Spitzley asked Mr. Smiertka to provide an analysis on the ordinance and what their issues were. She noted, that she was interested in having something similar to that ordinance as a recommendation from this Committee. Her intent would be to not over regulate. Mr. Smiertka agreed to look at the ordinance again.

Mr. Smiertka then asked the Committee what code they were intending to review; general code or the housing code. Council Member Spitzley stated her interest is to merge the two into one centralized area. Back to the Jackson ordinance, she asked Mr. Smiertka for options, because her intent is for the Committee to more than just suggest an ordinance, but present recommendations to the administration. A suggestion of interest if for the City Housing Umbudsman (Joe McDonald) work with code enforcement when they tag homes. Council Member Betz suggested an administrative bureau with blight court to address code and general offenses. Mr. Smiertka suggested legal services attending future meetings.

Mr. Smiertka asked the Committee if this Ad Hoc will focus on specific properties, and it was confirmed that it would not. Council Member Spitzley stated this Committee would address the larger scale and not look at individual apartments, but approach the issue as a whole. Council Member Hussain referenced the charge from the Resolution that created the Ad Hoc; review current ordinances and policies to meet

with stakeholders, community members and city staff, to address and assist residents in housing safety and tenant issues. Council Member Spitzley stated she would be interested in adding to the list of questions for Mr. McGrain:

- What is the rotation of rental inspections?
- Is the rotation based on the ranking of the most recent inspection?

Council Member Spitzley reiterated to the Committee to have their questions to the Council staff by noon on February 14, 2020. She would also work with Council staff to consolidate the earlier mentioned goals to 4-5 goals. The intention is for the Committee then to focus on those goals and provide direction on how to approach and attack each goal, the persons that will be involved in that goal and any outside agency that will address that goal. Council Member Spitzley concluded by stated the Committee will take testimony in the beginning of the process, but then focus on Committee work sessions to create the final document to meet the 9/1/2020 deadline.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Huber spoke in support of the Committee's goals and charge and will be at the March 6th meeting to provide information on his organization and concern to create a standard by which landlords can be successful.

Council Member Betz stated he has heard from landlords that they believe there are inefficiencies in the code, hard to determine when inspections are due and hard to make reports. Council Member Spitzley noted her intention from the Committee is to make things fair, predictable and enforceable.

Ms. Brozovic spoke in support of the information stated so far, she too stated she would reach out to landlords to attend the future meeting on March 6, 2020. Council Member Spitzley stated the landlord representatives will have up to 15 minutes on March 6th and the should come with a list of questions and concerns.

Ms. Risper spoke on her concern with what she believed was different variables on inspections based on the code officer. Council Member Betz noted he would be looking for items that are enforceable and consistently applied.

Council Member Spitzley asked Mr. Smiertka what the fine and penalty was for an unregistered rental. Mr. Smiertka noted it would be a civil infraction at \$250 and would go up for the second offense. Council Member Spitzley noted that as the Committee discussion continues there will be discussion on the need for more funds to address enforcement, so the fee and fines for rentals will need to be looked at.

The Committee and public spoke briefly on the information that is available to the public on rentals, registrations, landlords, tenants, etc.

Mr. Smiertka noted that there used to be a Civil Infraction Court department and he approached District Court on the elimination of it, and in doing so then trained the Code Officers to issues tickets.

Ms. Risper wanted clarity on the defining when someone should register a rental. Council Member Spitzley noted it is defined in the code, and if the owner is not living there, it needs to be registered as a rental.

Ms. Brozovic asked for details on where the funds are applied when a rental is registered.

Mr. Schertzing spoke on the residences that are tax foreclosures, noting increased communication is always necessary. He noted that Economic Development and Planning (EDP) do provide details during the annual Tax Sale events, and that material is also available at the EDP office.

Council Member Spitzley stated the Committee will have goals and recommendations that will not be specifically focused on rentals, but across the line for all residents. Council Member Betz concurred that

the findings will help single family homes as well, because when the rentals are address the neighborhood will be affected as well.

Council Member Spitzley summarized the Committee outlook of questions for Mr. McGrain to Council Staff by 2/14/2020 at noon; each Committee Member contact a couple tenants to attend the 3/20/2020 meeting and a couple large property owners for the 3/6/2020 meeting.

ADJOURN

Adjourned at 4:22 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Sherrie Boak, Recording Secretary

Lansing City Council

Approved by the Committee on February 21, 2020