

Licenses Committee
September 21, 2020
5 p.m. - City Hall Council Chambers

Chairman Jim Bacidore called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Chairman Bacidore, Alderman Herndon (Arrived at 5:51 p.m.), Alderman Demes, Alderman Reynolds, Alderman Crane.

Absent:

Others present: Fire Chief Andy Bacidore, City Clerk Carrie Brown, Deputy City Clerk Brent Bader, Alderman Lavieri.

A quorum was present.

Chairman Jim Bacidore turned the meeting over to Fire Chief and Building Inspector Andy Bacidore. Building Inspector Bacidore explained that he's served as Building Inspector for the past three years and over that time he's started noticing trends such as a lack of communication to landlords and tenants, as well as a need to embrace new technology.

Bacidore explained one thing he's noticed in some suburban communities is that they offer landlord training. Bacidore said when he gets to know landlords face-to-face, and they know him, it becomes a lot easier to get connected and get problems solved. A common problem facing our city is that many times we are lacking information on landlords or ownership changes for frequently that making contact is difficult. He said one way to get them to attend the proposed training meeting would be to increase the rental unit registration fee per property if the landlord fails to attend. He explained that multiple in-person sessions can be scheduled for groups of landlords and/or online training could also be made available through videos. He said some landlords ask that they be notified if there is a problem, but Bacidore mentioned it shouldn't necessarily be up to the City to notify them as other landlords keep a close eye on their properties. He also suggested that rental fees at the time of registration could also be raised if a property has been given a set number of violations. This would be one additional step beyond the fine that we have at the moment. Bacidore said something to contemplate could be a listing of "gold star" landlords and properties that could be added to the City's website. Bacidore said these options could be viewed as a pro-active approach to maintaining rental properties and a better outcome than raising fees across the board.

Chairman Bacidore asked for a clarification and hypothetically asked whether a landlord who is having his rental registration fees raised, as a result of missing a training or having a set number of violations, would have one property raised or all of his properties raised. Building Inspector Bacidore explained all of the properties would have a heightened rental registration fee, which Chairman Bacidore agreed with.

Alderman Demes asked what sort of an increase would be necessary and Building Inspector Bacidore said he wanted to leave that up to the Committee to decide. Alderman Demes asked if Bacidore had a recommendation and Bacidore said it's worth thinking about and returning to later. He did suggest that those going to ordinance court to resolve an issue two or more times would probably be candidates for a higher fee next year to register.

Alderman Crane suggested a tiered fine system that ends with a license suspension could incentivize taking care of properties, and Building Inspector Bacidore explained he has taken licenses away after one offense depending on the severity. Alderman Crane and others said the program is run by Bacidore and they want him to have the freedom and resources to accomplish whatever he thinks would benefit the overall program. Bacidore explained he wants the Committee to think about whether to offer training and the repercussions of not attending as well as whether an increase in annual rental fees is necessary after a certain number of violations.

Alderman Demes noted some of this may appear to be getting worse during the COVID-19 pandemic and Building Inspector Bacidore agreed noting he was sympathetic but that none of these proposals would occur over night and likely wouldn't develop until next year.

Alderman Crane said he thinks the Committee should come to an agreement on price and he suggested it be high. Attorney James McPhedran said the program already includes a tiered fine list that can add up quickly if property owners are being cited. Building Inspector Bacidore said that requires waiting for the next court date and the landlord may not even pay the fine. Alderman Reynolds acknowledged he liked the idea of the training to bring them in and get them informed of the city's ordinances with others suggesting there needs to be multiple meetings to allow them to attend as well as online meetings. Andy Bacidore said he could host the meetings himself and expects most landlords will attend and that there will be enough meetings to ensure everyone has the opportunity to attend. He said many landlords come to ordinance court with the excuse of "I didn't know" and accessible training would ensure everyone in the program knows the ordinances.

Chairman Jim Bacidore noted the City will only see more and more rentals and that any action should be done as quickly as possible and that he should come to the Committee with information on his necessary technology needs. Building Inspector Bacidore said notices have already gone out for this year but that he would hope to have it together by next year. As far as technology needs, his current system requires a lot of paper work which makes it difficult to answer "how many violations" have there been recently when asked by aldermen. He said other technology could make that process easier and allow aldermen to see for themselves how many violations there have been and where they are.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:06 p.m.



Carrie Brown, City Clerk by Deputy City Clerk Brent Bader