

# APARTMENT INSPECTION REFORM

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# THE SCOPE OF THE SITUATION



LAX REGULATIONS

40% of Houston's apartments were built between 1960 and 1979 when building safety regulations were especially lax. As of 2014, approximately **400,000 Houstonians (more than 20% of the city's population) lived in these older apartments.**



COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Before Harvey, **274 apartment complexes** were in poor or unsound condition according to appraisal district records. These units are concentrated heavily in neighborhoods with high percentages of Black and Hispanic residents.



UNSAFE BUILDINGS

Harvey amplified the scale and severity of the City's preexisting unsafe building conditions, with close to **43,000 apartment units** in Houston damaged by the storm, according to reports in the local news media.



CRIMES

Apartments with high levels of crime are pervasive, with a disproportionate impact on persons of color. At one apartment complex in Southeast Houston, **284 major crimes** were reported in a single year.

# CLASS C AND D APARTMENTS



1. There are 427,000 renter-occupied units, which is 54.6 percent of the city's occupied housing stock.



2. A Class C apartment is one that is older with deferred maintenance issues that are at risk of deteriorating into Class D apartments without investments in major maintenance. Class C apartments constituted 32 percent of complexes with approximately 200,172 units.



5. Additionally, according to one study, 43,000 apartment units were damaged by hurricane Harvey producing issues such as mold, bug infestations and deterioration of structural support which created safety issues.



3. Class D apartments are old properties in the poorest condition with lots of deferred maintenance. Class D apartments constituted 9.7 percent of complexes with approximately 47,333 units housing 100,000 tenants or more.



4. According to the appraisal district's tax records, 274 multifamily complexes in the City limits were in poor or unsound condition.

# APARTMENT INSPECTION

## REFORM (A.I.R.)



I am proposing a High Impact Program, Apartment Inspection Reform (A.I.R.), be established by ordinance. This empowers the City with the ability to bring apartment complexes into compliance that have numerous citations and have ignored requests from tenants and city departments to address interior and or exterior violations. These properties will be charged a \$250 registration fee, equivalent to 0.68 cents per day, on an annual basis until all outstanding issues are resolved. Landlords enrolled in the High Impact Program will also be subject to a training program.

The revenue from this annual fee will be used for the sustainability of A.I.R. in addition to other recommendations.

# A.I.R. SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

- THE ANNUAL REGISTRATION FEE OF \$250 WILL GO TOWARDS THE PROGRAM, SUCH AS FUNDING THE INCREASE FOR ADDITIONAL INSPECTORS AND/OR CROSS TRAINING INSPECTORS IN MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES.
- ENFORCE THE CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY REQUIREMENTS ON ALL PROPERTIES WILL GENERATE ADDITIONAL REVENUE.
- CONTINUE ISSUING FINES AND FEES AS APPROPRIATE TO COMPLEXES THAT VIOLATE CITY ORDINANCES.
- EDUCATE TENANTS THROUGH OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS RENTERS TO ENSURE THEY UNDERSTAND WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM.
- ENSURE ALL DEPARTMENTS WITH INSPECTORS ARE COMMUNICATING ON A REGULAR BASIS TO CONSOLIDATE AND COORDINATE INSPECTION EFFORTS.
- EFFECTIVELY MAINTAIN A DATABASE THAT CAN BE SHARED ACROSS DEPARTMENTS CONDUCTING INSPECTIONS.



# MAINTAIN

# COMMUNICATION

PUBLIC WORKS HAS 14 INSPECTORS FOR ENFORCING THE CITY'S HABITABILITY ORDINANCE AND ENSURING APARTMENTS ARE REGISTERED WITH CITY AND HAVE A VALID CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT HAS TWO SECTIONS WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION TO ADDRESS THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF APARTMENT COMPLEXES. THERE ARE ONLY TWO INVESTIGATORS TO ENFORCE INDOOR HEALTH ISSUES.

HOUSTON FIRE'S LIFE SAFETY BUREAU APARTMENT TEAM, WHICH IS A PART OF THE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THAT APARTMENT COMPLEXES COMPLY WITH THE CITY OF HOUSTON FIRE SAFETY LAWS. THE APARTMENT TEAM, WHICH ALSO OVERSEES FIRE SAFETY AT MOTELS AND HOTELS, HAS 14 INSPECTORS.

HPD OPERATES SEVERAL CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMS AT APARTMENT COMPLEXES, INCLUDING PROGRAMS THAT TARGET HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE VIOLATIONS AS WELL AS OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF COMPLEXES.

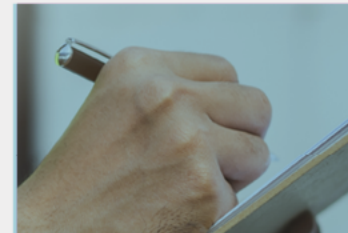


i. Differential Response Teams (DRT's) utilize a community-based policing approach to address quality of life issues in communities, including the poor and unsafe physical condition of apartment complexes. DRTs are often involved in bringing code enforcement actions against apartment owners for multifamily habitability issues. Each department has a DRT ranging from 1-15 officers, depending on the size of the station.

ii. Apartment Enforcement Unit has 8 police officers who oversee implementation of a Houston ordinance governing excessive crime at apartments. The excessive crime ordinance was adopted in 2006 and requires all multifamily rental properties in the city with at least 10 units to register with HPD. 2 officers with the unit oversee the registration. This unit also operates the City's remedial action program, which 2 police officers are assigned to. This unit also operates the Blue Star Program.



iii. Forfeiture Abatement Support Team, which is a part of the Narcotics Unit works in conjunction with the Houston Legal Department to address high crime properties, including apartment complexes, utilizing nuisance abatement tools.



iv. Major Offenders Division oversees the investigation of several specialized areas – predominantly felony offenses – that fall outside other divisions. The scope over code violations at apartment complexes includes environmental crimes such as sewage spills, chemical spills, and illegal dumping.

THE CITY OF HOUSTON HOUSING DEPARTMENT CONDUCTS ANNUAL INSPECTIONS OF MULTIFAMILY PROPERTIES WITH EIGHT (8) OR MORE UNITS THAT HAVE RECEIVED FEDERAL OR CITY FUNDING THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT. THE APARTMENTS ARE INSPECTED FOR COMPLIANCE WITH ONE OF TWO SETS OF HOUSING STANDARDS, DEPENDING ON WHEN THE CITY ENTERED A CONTRACT WITH THE PROPERTY OWNER.

# **DATABASE MANAGEMENT AND SHARING**

- **DEVELOP RISK ASSESSMENT PROFILES FOR APARTMENT PROPERTIES AND CONDUCT MORE FREQUENT AND COMPREHENSIVE INSPECTIONS**
- **COLLABORATE AND SHARE APARTMENT INSPECTION DATA ACROSS ALL DEPARTMENTS TO ENSURE PROPER MONITORING OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF APARTMENT COMPLEXES.**
- **CREATE A REPEAT OFFENDER DATABASE CONSISTING OF LANDLORDS THAT OWN MULTIPLE PROPERTIES THAT ARE VIOLATING CITY ORDINANCES. THIS DATABASE WILL BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH A.I.R. TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE ACROSS ALL PROPERTIES.**

# LANDLORD TRAINING PROGRAM

THE LANDLORD TRAINING EDUCATES LANDLORDS ON THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES ON HOW TO COMPLY WITH STATE AND LOCAL LAWS. IT WILL ALSO EDUCATE LANDLORDS ON WAYS TO MAINTAIN THEIR PROPERTIES, SO THEIR APARTMENTS DO NOT BECOME CRIME HAVENS. INFORMATION TAUGHT IN THE COURSE WILL INCLUDE, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO:

- FAIR HOUSING REGULATIONS
- DANGEROUS DOGS
- LEAD BASED PRODUCTS
- REMEDIATING MOLD AND RODENTS
- ILLEGAL DUMPING
- TRASH BINS
- ILLEGAL ELECTRICAL SERVICES
- FIRE SAFETY
- PARKING
- PROPERTY LIGHTING
- BUILDING STRUCTURE
- TERMITES
- PROPER REPAIRS
- COMPLYING WITH CITATIONS
- RECOGNIZING NUISANCE AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES
- PROPER COMMUNICATION WITH TENANTS
- LANDLORD RESOURCES FOR PROPERTY MAINTENANCE
- NATURAL DISASTER RESOURCES
- WHO TO CALL
- HOW TO WORK WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO RESOLVE ISSUES



# STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED

A. PUBLIC WORKS HABITABILITY DIVISION

B. CITY OF HOUSTON HOUSING DEPARTMENT

C. NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

D. HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT

E. CITY OF HOUSTON RESIDENTS



# NEXT STEPS

An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely Atlanta, Georgia, featuring a prominent river (the Chattahoochee River) and a large park area (Inman Park) in the foreground. The skyline is composed of numerous high-rise buildings of varying heights and architectural styles. The image has a light blue tint and is overlaid with a dark grey banner at the top left containing the text 'NEXT STEPS'.

**COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS WELL AS CONTINUED COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS ON HOW A.I.R. WILL MOVE FORWARD.**

# QUESTIONS

