

In the greater Dallas - Fort Worth Area we are experiencing an up-swing in the formation of city inspection programs. In some areas you even have to be certified to get utilities on, and the coverage of these programs can be very intense. Being unable to turn on utilities is counterproductive and prevents the owners from spreading out some of the costs they incur. In some cases, such as freezing weather conditions, being without utilities is a danger to the property and ends up costing more money. Exterior painting, screens, problems with soffets, raised water heaters and tight interior doors are among the many items being written up. You can see by this list it's much more than ensuring that the property is in good repair and functioning. As a problem code example, raising existing water heaters, gas or electric, when they are in perfect working condition is an unnecessary cost of \$300-400. In most cases, water heaters should be raised, if needed, when they are replaced. Disconnecting and reconnecting a water heater in order to raise it often causes it to break, requiring replacement or repairs up to \$800. Interior issues should not be a City's concern unless it becomes dangerous or threatening to occupants or surrounding properties. Requiring people to keep the inside of a home or unit a certain way is an invasion of privacy. Interior cosmetic issues, such as sticking doors, should not be inspected by the City.

While I agree with the premise that landlords and property managers should be responsible for the upkeep of their properties, we have ended up with some very determined inspectors and inspection programs. In some cases inspectors have written additional things up after the initial inspection; and there can be fines for moving a tenant in before you have passed. In some cities it is an annual inspection, costing the owner \$65 a year even when the tenant renews and stays. In Garland, Texas for example, there was uproar in the City Council over the issue forcing a new election and the removal of some council members because of the controversy. There has also been an argument that it's a form of discrimination to lease property owners, as home owners and occupiers are not required to keep properties to the same standard. The outside conditions of a house should be regulated by ordinances that apply to all property types. Screens, for example, should be required for all homes not just rental properties. Look for this issue to spread across the country if it has not found your area yet, its in place in at least a half dozen suburban cities now in Dallas alone. We have to keep an intricate spread sheet to track all the nuances of each program and what cities they apply to. In many cases, owner and property managers are not notified of a change in standards and ultimately fail the inspection.

Watch your local and city news so you aren't caught by surprise, or even more importantly, to get involved before the city adopts these measures to make sure they are done responsibly and reasonably from the beginning.

Not everyone can afford to buy their own home and all cities are in need of affordable housing. With harsh City codes and inspection programs driving landlords out unnecessarily, where will you be able to find reasonably priced properties for rent?

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