



City of University Heights
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State of Rental Property in University Heights

Currently University Heights has 180 licensed rental units. In the past year 109 of those properties had their systematic licensing inspection. This schedule allows for the completion of all systematic rental inspections on a 2 year cycle. Additionally all rental properties in University Heights had a visual inspection for exterior code violations in the past year. It is my goal that owners and tenants understand that properties should be maintained in substantial compliance with University Heights Housing Code at all times. With yearly exterior inspections and different groupings of inspections I believe this is an achievable goal.

I am pleased to report the University Heights rental inspection program was left in good shape by the former inspector, Norm Cate. Norm did a great job of addressing issues during his tenure and I am happy to continue in his footsteps. Most rental property owners in University Heights have a clear understanding of the expectations and do a good job maintaining their properties.

In the fire-safety/life-safety category the biggest deficiency would be smoke alarms missing batteries in single-family dwellings. While smoke alarms are being provided by the single family property owners, multiple times we would find missing batteries in 1 or 2 smoke alarms. The current placement of smoke alarms does provide some redundancy but I would hope to see this improve in the single family dwellings in the coming years. I was very impressed with the condition of the multi-family dwellings at Grandview Ct and the attention the individual owners and tenants placed on keeping their fire-safety/life-safety equipment operational.

In the general exterior condition of property category the biggest deficiency would be the maintenance of landscaping and trees on the property of single-family properties. This is partially an aesthetic issue but more importantly it's a property maintenance issue. Poorly maintained trees and landscaping damage the exterior building envelope causing water infiltration into the structure. The roots of overgrown shrubs may damage foundations, poorly maintained plantings won't allow for proper drainage away from the dwelling, and tree branches rubbing on the roof decrease its lifespan. Trees that are properly trimmed and monitored also handle high wind situations better. Increased attention in this area over the next few years should pay long-term dividends.

A handful of tall grass and weed complaints were received this past year. All but one was handled on an informal basis with a phone call or e-mail. A letter was sent to one out of town owner, and the response was appropriate.

I formally investigated 3 over-occupancy cases this year. All were founded. One was instigated by the tenants, one by the police department, and one by the management company for the property. All

were brought into compliance. Tenants and property owners are receiving mixed messages about over-occupancy in University Heights. While the code says 2 unrelated, many University Heights residents will turn a blind eye to over-occupancy if the tenants are well mannered. I would encourage the Council to have an honest discussion about occupancy in the future. It would be my recommendation that the definitions for occupancy be changed from “family” to “household” and new definitions of what constitutes a “household” are added.

I have had preliminary conversations with Pat Bauer, Zoning Commission Chair, about adopting the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) to replace portions of the existing University Heights Housing Code. While our property owners are substantially compliant the IPMC would help strengthen the City’s position when dealing with non-compliant properties. The City should also look at the nuisance code as it relates to tall grass and weeds, and snow removal from public sidewalks. Changes could be made to assist with remediation and enforcement. Again it’s a case where we have substantial compliance but with a code change the City could be in a position to resolve issues in a more expedient fashion.

I believe this year we are on track to create a unified archive of past inspection history, building permits, and rental permits through Google cloud. I have had conversations with the City Clerk about this process and I’m confident that we are on the right track with a system that will be a good fit for University Heights.

I enjoy assisting with housing inspection in University Heights. I see it as a partnership between myself, property owners and tenants to insure that basic health-safety, life-safety, and quality of life standards are met in the housing stock of University Heights. I look forward to continuing to serve in this capacity in the coming year.

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