



Department Source: Housing & Neighborhood Services

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: July 7, 2025

Re: Report on rental inspections

Executive Summary

On May 5, 2025, Council requested a report asking for additional information related to inspections that are conducted as part of the Rental Unit Conservation Law.

Discussion

Neighborhood Services (NS) currently has 9,663 buildings and 28,377 units in compliance under the Rental Unit Conservation Law found in Chapter 22 of City Ordinance. Licenses are issued for five years with inspections required at each renewal. The ordinance was updated effective January 1, 2025; prior to that, licenses were issued for three years with most properties inspected on alternating renewals, or every six years.

The software used to track rental inspections is the same used for business licensing and other building permit inspections. It was not built for the specific requirements of rental inspections. Multiple units and buildings are consolidated into a single inspection or license making it unfeasible to create highly detailed reports.

The request from Council related to rental inspections included three questions:

1. How many code violations are there in a year?

Between June 1, 2024 and May 31, 2025, Neighborhood Services staff conducted 2,199 rental inspections. Of those, 1,347 inspections ended with compliance and 852 required a re-inspection or additional follow up to confirm code compliance. Smoke alarm violations are most common, followed by electrical system hazards, general plumbing issues, and window, skylight and door frame violations.

2. Are there repeat offenders?

Staff understands this to mean rental property owners or managers who have violations found on their property during rental inspections, or multiple complaints from tenants. This is not a metric that NS staff tracks. This is difficult to measure due to the range of properties managed or owned by one company or individual. Variables that contribute to property violations are age of the property, damage created by tenants, and investment of time and money by the owner or manager.

One measure is rental complaints. Between June 1, 2024 and May 31, 2025, NS received 320 tenant complaints representing 1.1% of all rental units in the City. Thirty-eight (12%) were closed as no violation; 63 (20%) were closed either due to lack of communication with the



tenant, the tenant moving or under eviction, or the issue is not actionable by city staff; seven were duplicate complaints.

Analysis of the complaints found that they were raised against 116 different property managers or owners. Sixty-eight owners/managers had one complaint, 32 had 2-5 complaints, 12 had 5-10 complaints and four had more than 10 complaints. One management company had 40 complaints filed on their properties. While multiple complaints may be concerning, NS generally finds cooperation in making repairs. In some cases, owners or managers have not been notified by the tenant of the problem prior to hearing from City staff.

3. How long does it take to get properties in compliance?

Time from when violations are identified to when property is in compliance and issued a rental license varies widely. The extent of repairs needed, weather, tenant cooperation, and inspector follow up may have an impact on achieving compliance.

The time from violation identification to license issuance has dropped continually and significantly over the last eight years. In 2025, the average time to compliance is 35 days. Past averages were 47 days in 2024, 61 days in 2023, 80 days in 2022 and 148 days in 2018.

Possible changes to the Rental Unit Conservation Law:

Neighborhood Services staff understands the purpose of this report is to explore if changes are needed to our ordinance to increase the frequency of inspections on properties with the most maintenance issues. Our current ordinance treats all properties equally by requiring an inspection upon renewal, every five years.

Changing to a tiered system where some properties would be inspected more frequently would need to be developed with clear and objective policies. Of the peer cities researched for the November 18, 2025 report to Council, Ames, Iowa has an ordinance that may be a model to follow. The [City of Ames Municipal Code](#), Sec. 13.301, outlines the criteria for one, two, three and four year inspections.

More frequent inspections could be required following charges in municipal court for unlawful rental, building or health code violations. Prohibiting tenants from establishing City utilities could be another tool for properties that are out of compliance with City code or under prosecution.

Additional staff: Should Columbia move to requiring all rental properties to be inspected every four years, we estimate one more inspector would be needed; three additional staff would be needed if inspections are required every three years. Staffing needs for a tiered system are currently unknown. NS staff caution about inspections required on tenant turnover due to the many units that change tenants for the start of the school year.

Should Council desire changes to our current rental ordinance, there would be value in engagement of rental property owners, tenants and residents to get further input.



Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: n/a

Long-Term Impact: n/a

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

[Strategic Plan Impacts:](#)

Primary Impact: Safe Community, Secondary Impact: Inclusive and Equitable Community,

Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

[Comprehensive Plan Impacts:](#)

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Not applicable,

Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
n/a	n/a

Suggested Council Action

Acceptance of this report.