

Department Source: Housing & Neighborhood Services

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: November 17, 2025

Re: Rental Inspection Frequency

Impacted Ward: Citywide

Executive Summary

City Council requested a report about increasing the frequency of rental inspections in the City. Currently, staff with Housing & Neighborhood Services are issuing rental Certificates of Compliance on residential rental properties valid for five years after inspection.

Discussion

The City of Columbia has had a Rental Unit Conservation Law (RUCL) in place since the late 1970s, requiring residential rental units to be registered and inspected. In FY 25, the program had a significant update to fees and structure. Starting January 1, 2025, Certificates of Compliance are now issued for five years, with an inspection conducted at each renewal. At the end of FY 25, there were 28,222 residential units in compliance with the RUCL.

There are currently four Code Enforcement Specialists who conduct rental inspections. These inspectors also enforce the property maintenance code on residential and commercial properties throughout Columbia. Based on past history, Neighborhood Services staff estimate that transitioning to a four-year inspection cycle would require one additional inspector, and transitioning to a three-year inspection cycle would require an additional three inspectors. Fees are currently based on the cost of completing the inspections. Although the fees could remain the same, they would be collected more frequently to cover the additional costs of hiring more staff, vehicles and other budget items.

Additional considerations:

- Significant changes to the RUCL went into effect January 1, 2025. The Council may wish to wait before making further changes to the ordinance, as this has been a recent and significant change.
- Engagement with property owners, tenants and residents in general may provide valuable input on increased inspection frequency and other changes to the RUCL. This feedback may be of value to Council in making any changes to the ordinance.
- The City may want to have a more strategic approach to additional inspections. Staff have previously referenced Ames, Iowa, as a model for inspections. Ames has criteria for one-, two-, three-, and four-year inspections, based on the property and documented violations.
- The addition of a Rental Compliance Specialist to Neighborhood Services could be another way to increase rental compliance. This position would pursue owners of properties that are not in compliance with the RUCL, specifically those who have not

submitted an application for a rental license or allowed their compliance to lapse. This staff member could also assist with tenant complaints and ensure repairs are made following the complaint inspection.

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: Tertiary

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Secondary, Tertiary
Impact: Tertiary

Legislative History

Date	Action
n/a	n/a

Suggested Council Action

Acceptance of this report and guidance on additional action.