

**OWOSSO CITY COUNCIL**

**FEBRUARY 10, 2014**

**7:00 P.M.**

**PRESIDING OFFICER:** MAYOR BENJAMIN R. FREDERICK  
**OPENING PRAYER:** DANIEL HARROW  
**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** EDDIE URBAN  
**PRESENT:** Mayor Benjamin R. Frederick, Mayor Pro-Tem Christopher T. Eveleth, Councilpersons Loreen F. Bailey, David B. Bandkau, Burton D. Fox, and Robert J. Teich, Jr.  
**ABSENT:** None.

**PRESENTATIONS**

**HOUSING PROGRAM PRESENTATION**

Housing Coordinator Sarah Warren-Riley gave a presentation on the City's rental registration and inspection program detailing the frequency of registration and inspection, the cost for registration, the goals of the program, the number of rental units in the City, and the number of rental units inspected to date. She went on to detail concerns expressed by landlords and tenants alike as well as the concerns of the City in regard to the program.

**SHIAWASSEE COUNTY LANDLORD ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION**

Shiawassee County Landlord Association President Ron Guenther presented the Association's concerns with the program as well as some suggestions for improvement including the creation of a pamphlet detailing landlord and tenant rights, developing a written complaint procedure in which the City would function as the final enforcer, and the establishment of a committee of Council members and Association members to create the previously noted items.

**CITIZEN COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS**

Tom Manke, local business owner and landlord, thanked the Council for taking another look at the program. He took issue with the Blue Ribbon Committee and the Council's desire to raise property values and increase the quality of the housing stock in the City. He said Council has taken too much control over people's homes and is putting property first and people second.

Tom Moorehead, Treasurer of the Landlord Association, said he felt that rental inspections on a complaint basis was better than random inspections as the chances of finding something egregious during a random inspection was small. He went on to say that he felt that a pamphlet detailing the rights of tenants and landlords would help give tenants the authority they need to remedy serious issues as there are already laws and procedures in place to protect both landlords and tenants. He encouraged the City and the Association to sit down and work things out.

Mike Cline, 621 Wright Avenue, said he was a member of the City Council that implemented the rental registration program. He said he thought it was a great idea at the time but felt that changes to the program since then had put the onus on landlords. He also pointed out the rental registration ordinance was put in place before the Blue Ribbon Committee made any recommendations to Council. He went on to ask how mobile home parks are different from other rental units in the City and whether suspected crimes in a rental home would trigger an inspection. Finally he noted that at the time of the original adoption of the rental registration ordinance the Council had expressed a desire to see educational efforts for landlords and tenants but he has yet to hear of any taking place.

Richard Bowen, Vice President of the Landlord Association, thanked the Council for agreeing to review the program. He said he felt the City's rental issues weren't that bad compared to some other local communities and he felt that switching back to a complaint based inspection program would be better. He said he felt the random inspections treated tenants like second class citizens. He said he too was concerned with providing safe housing for tenants but felt the landlords already do enough and that tenants needed to take some responsibility. Finally he said that his properties are already inspected by the insurance company and he does not like to re-register his properties every two years when there are no changes.

June Coon, Secretary of the Landlord Association, said evictions have increased exponentially over the past 5 years, tenants destroy properties to the tune of thousands of dollars, court and legal fees have become commonplace, and tenants have bad attitudes. She said she felt her property didn't need another inspection but the tenants needed to be educated. She said she was tired of landlords being blamed for tenant behavior.

Carl Manke, local landlord and business owner, said he felt the quality of the tenants in town had gone down and it was making renting difficult. He said the City needs to balance the rights of tenants and landlords and he feels that tenants should have a say in whether or not their residence is inspected.

Eddie Urban, 601 Glenwood Avenue, said he would never be a landlord as it was too much trouble. He asked that the notes from Ms. Warren-Riley's presentation be posted to the City's webpage and he thanked everyone for coming saying the discussion would benefit the community.

Daniel Harrow, 432 Mason Street, said that as a tenant he didn't feel he had a choice whether or not his home was inspected. He said he has a great relationship with his landlord and he doesn't believe that random inspections are the answer to the City's rental issues. He said he hoped Council would eventually allow tenants to opt out of inspections if they desired.

### **DISCUSSION**

Mayor Frederick noted that problem tenants was indeed an issue and asked if there was an established list of poor tenants that could be accessed by landlords. Mr. Moorehead indicated there was nothing available to the general public but there were lists a landlord could subscribe to and word-of-mouth was effective as well. Mayor Frederick went on to express his concern with the aid agencies practice of directing tenants to allow landlords to evict them so they could help them move to another place rather than paying back-rent. He said he would initiate some type of communication at the State level to look into that situation.

Councilperson Teich said is and has been a landlord for some time and recognized that it was a tough business. He said he was in favor of increasing the time period between registration, he was not in favor of random inspections, he liked the pamphlet idea and educating the tenant. He said he said he was unsure why the City took on the burden of inspecting houses to begin with and he was concerned that burdensome city regulations would drive business to the townships.

There was discussion regarding the MSHDA requirements for rental homes and potentially exempting those units that are subject to MSHDA's annual inspection. There was further discussion regarding which agencies conduct inspections and what type of inspections they conduct, extending the time period between registration, implementing the pamphlet/agreement idea, providing education, creating a list of good landlords, the merits of complaint based inspections vs. random inspections, making sure the tenant's perspective is represented in the review process, the role of human psychology in the landlord/tenant relationship, focusing on basic safety issues, making sure house numbers are on every house not just rentals, and incentivizing the inspection process.

Mayor Frederick summarized the discussion saying it was clear there was a desire for a longer registration period, not inspecting HUD inspected units, and providing an on-line registration option. He said there would need to be further discussion on continuing with random inspections or reverting back to complaint based inspections. He asked that staff provide an update at the February 18<sup>th</sup> meeting and be prepared to present a formal proposal at the meeting of March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

### **NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday, February 18, 2014

### **BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS OPENINGS**

None.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Mayor Pro-Tem Eveleth for adjournment at 9:01 p.m.

Motion supported by Councilperson Fox and concurred in by unanimous vote.

---

Benjamin R. Frederick, Mayor

---

Amy K. Kirkland, City Clerk