

(The following is Des Moines Neighborhood Housing Inspector's Ben Bishop's letter in response to our letter to the Mayor and Council. This letter was received to the Iowa Landlord Association on 12/11/02.)

December 5, 2002

Iowa Landlord(s) Association
P.O. Box 13246
Des Moines, Iowa 50310-0246

Dear Signatories,

I have been requested by the Mayor to respond to your communication dated November 25, 2002.

#1. "Des Moines' new inspection rates are an average of more than three times higher than the current rates of surrounding areas."

The cost of rental inspections in many if not most, cities is supplemented by general fund review (property tax income). That was the practice of Des Moines. It is no longer. The Council has chosen to make this function of city government self-supporting, billing the individuals and companies that receive the service.

#2. "using the number of units inspected each year provided to you by the NID and a calculator, figures indicate that each inspector will need to inspect an average of only 13.4 units per week under the new system".

As promised during the council presentation the figures will be re-evaluated every six months in an attempt to see that staffing is sufficient yet pared to a reasonable level. A financial analysis will be submitted to the council.

#3. On November 18th, you voted in a policy that will reduce the workload of the inspectors by 25-30%-yet no mention has been made of reducing the NID's budget".

It has been my experience that when major shifts occur in the way business is done the results can not always be anticipated. We anticipate a reduction in the workload, however, this Division has a history of not being current on inspections. I'm committed to change that but change can not occur without adequate staffing.

As mentioned at council we are committed to re-evaluate the data under the new system at six-month intervals to determine if our fees are appropriate. By state law we can not charge more than our costs. We are committed to that principal.

The NID budget has been and is being cut. NID has two fewer employees than 2001. One inspector position was just been eliminated and an additional position will be lost before July. That makes a total of four people in two years. That is a 12.30% reduction in staff from 32.5 people to 28.5.

#4. "you have allowed a small section of the new rental code to be taken out of context and passed on its own. The fee structure is part of a large re-write of the code that includes many new and different provisions that are inextricably connected".

The fee structure is truly but one piece of the whole. A management decision was made that it was best for the City to move forward with the fee increases and complete the balance of the re-write as soon as possible.

#5. "you have repeatedly been provided with inaccurate information from City officials".

a. Ben Bishop has stated the fee increase was approximately 3% per year for the last 11 years, but a calculator will prove otherwise;

The increases are a 20% increase for single family and duplex structures because the life of the certificate is increased by 20%, then essentially a 3 % increase in fees per year. For multiples the increase is a 33% increase because the life of the certificate is increased by 33% then a 3% per year increase. I believe I made it clear in my council presentation that the increase was more than a 3% per year cost of living increase for large multiples.

b. The original figures for rates in other communities did have errors in it.

The rates provided after the council request to confirm the rates had errors. I did the second survey myself and found that the answers received by phone was different when you got a different person on the other end of the line.

This survey was my best attempt, but I do not have total confidence in the numbers I received.

c. Mr. Grant was in error the re-write of the code does require a furnace inspection.

You are correct. I believe our error was corrected for the public record at the council table by Mr. Grant. This issue remains on the table and may or may not become a reality when the balance of the code is adopted. We value your opinions and want to have your input on as many of these technical issues as possible before decisions are made.

6#. "You have now passed a provision charging landlords for first re-inspections based on promises by the City to provide an unambiguous new Code and an easy to follow 'checklist' to go with it".

I agree we won't charge for the first re-inspection until all the pieces are in place.

I hope that this letter helps in explaining the issues you have brought to the attention of the Mayor and Council and look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Ben Bishop