

I'm probably going to tick some people off with this column.

I'm giving full disclosure right up front. I know this sounds harsh, but I hate rental property. I'm talking about single family homes and duplexes. These properties are ruining our traditional neighborhoods- including mine. Our house is literally surrounded by it, and I am fully aware of how it negatively affects property values, and the overall livability and beauty of a neighborhood. I want you all to know I have no sympathy for any whining landlords who complain that I am trying to destroy affordable housing in our community. What is happening is completely inverse to that. Rental property is systematically destroying the wonderful, traditional, middle-class neighborhoods we have here in Seguin. So there!

I also want to address some landlord remarks that have been made to me in reaction to the city's proposed rental property inspection ordinance. First, I want to say that the only thing the City has done so far is identified some horrific conditions at many rental properties, and we see a need to protect the health and safety of our citizens.

Our staff is crafting an ordinance, or a set of ordinances that will attempt to protect the tenants, and correct the deficiencies that in many cases are forced on them by their landlords. It's all a matter of health and safety. It has nothing to do with the city wanting to make money on the fees, as one landlord accuses. Heck, the fees won't even come close to covering the costs of the program, so forget about accusing us of trying to make money off this deal.

As the law stands now, unless there is a change in utility billing at a property, no inspection is triggered. Some landlords have continuously paid the utilities themselves, and charged the tenants accordingly. This keeps the utility billing information unchanged, and no inspection is triggered. Tenants can come and go for years without an inspection of the property. The new ordinance would require inspections at regular intervals, regardless of the utility billing. This would prevent landlords from allowing dangerous conditions to develop and continue unnoticed.

Any fees for regular inspections should be affordable and reasonable for the landlords, but the penalty for non-compliance should be large enough to encourage non-compliant landlords to bring their properties up to code.

About right now, I know I have ticked off a lot of you people in town who own rental property. However, what it boils down to is that if you maintain your property, you pay for a nominal regular inspection, and your costs are minimal... If you don't maintain your property, it will cost you in repairs and penalties, and maybe even render the property unusable.

Now I can hear the cries about us eliminating affordable housing. If "affordable" means a filthy, leaking, sewage contaminated, vermin-filled firetrap- you bet we are trying to eliminate it.

The main cause of the problem is too many people with no business sense and no real management abilities have gotten into the rental property business. You hear advertisements all day long about how you can earn "passive income" by investing in rental property. With interest rates so low, many people who otherwise would have their money in CD's or money market securities now are investing in rentals for income. They are living off the income from the rents, and not reserving anything for maintenance. When something breaks, they can't or won't fix it, because they need the money to pay their bills.

There are a lot of good people doing this. Most of them are retired, but the reality is that they have no business being a landlord. Heck, I have relatives with rental property. I don't think this situation will go away until interest rates on CD's and money market accounts rise to an acceptable level.

In the meantime, all we can do is try to make our housing as safe and healthy as we can.

And to all you landlords- I think you should make your properties safe, clean and attractive... or find some other place to invest your money.

I may hate rental property, but... Gosh, I love this town!