

OTTUMWA CITY COUNCIL MINUTES

SPECIALMEETING NO. 5
Council Chambers, City Hall

February 9, 2021
5:30 O'Clock P.M.

The meeting convened at 5:30 P.M.

Present were Council Member Stevens, Berg, Dalbey, Roe and Mayor Lazio.
Council Member Meyers was absent.

Also present were City Admin. Rath, PW Dir. Seals, Dir. of Code Enforcement Flanagan, Planner Simonson, Bldg. Inspectors Hamann and Rusch, Housing & Code Inspector Lipe.

Roe moved, seconded by Dalbey to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried 4-0 vote. Council Member Meyers was absent.

Mayor Lazio reported council directed staff to hold a wrk session for public input on the concerns of providing rental inspections during COVID-19 pandemic.

Dir. of Code Enforcement Flanagan reported the inspection process has been following the operational protocol aligned with public access to City Hall, while continued response to emergencies or complaints regarding the rental inspections. At this time, we are approx. 650 units behind our rental inspections operational programming. Rental units are mandated to be inspected once every three yrs. according to City Code. Upon checking with various Iowa communities on their rental inspection process; most have resumed inspections with the exception of Johnston and Urbandale which will resume April 12, 2021. Our concerns or potential negatives that could result from not doing inspections for an extended period of time are possible neglect by some landlords in meeting the safety burden of pending regulatory inspections and potential of falling further behind in scheduling. If decision is made to halt inspections, our dept. would still inspect unoccupied units, units for which there is a complaint, newly built units, and units that are being modified in some fashion that includes the issuance of permits of any sort.

Council member Roe stated we are looking at the public safety aspect of sending people into homes; Wapello County hasn't rec'd many vaccines and we have an aging and sensitive population that I hope everyone keeps in mind.

City Admin. Rath reminded council that our Code specifies rental inspections at least once every three yrs, to which we are currently behind schedule. Housing continues to be an issue; not with all landlords as some do a great service while others don't always care for their property in the best way. We want to make sure that properties are kept up to code. As a City we have a responsibility to make sure that our staff is also protected.

Public concerns:

Inez Hill, 13934 65th St. Ottumwa - Co-president of landlord's assoc. The spread of COVID-19 hasn't eased; inspectors can unknowingly spread the virus from one house to the next when doing inspections; some tenants have not revealed that they have tested positive for COVID-19; our landlords assoc. has not met since March, 2020 due to the virus; we would like to see the inspection process postponed for now; it would help if more people are able to get vaccinated.

John Conder, 806 Waugh St. Hedrick – has owned rental properties in Ottumwa for 30 yrs; I have tenants that work for JBS and have had COVID-19, they don't want anyone coming into their homes; I'm also very concerned about the labor rate and cost of materials if you do have repairs that need done as results of an inspection because everything has gone up.

Norman Higinbotham, 550 S. Ransom, Ottumwa – We have several tenants that work for JBS and we don't go into their homes unless they have problems we need to address or fix; we take care of our properties; the health dept. should focus on the bad landlords and not those that take care of things.

Council member Stevens agrees with what has been discussed and is concerned for staff and citizens; I would like to see at least 30 days.

Council member Berg stated she has concerns for our citizens living in rentals that may not be up to code; focus on accommodations, limit exposure as much as possible and educate the public on what they can do.

Council member Roe agrees that it would be best to wait until we have a better grasp on vaccinations, but do we know how long this may take; no such thing as business as usual anymore; what is a logical time frame to hold off on doing inspections?

Council member Dalbey stated as a board, public safety has always been top priority; first do not harm so if we look at this, what is the harm in holding off on doing inspections; I would rather error on the side of safety; 30 or 60 days and come back to see if we need to extend or if we can proceed.

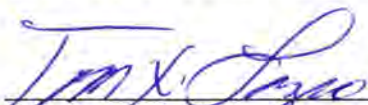
City Admin. Rath further stated that what we are really looking at is an admin. function; however council is in charge of the legislative aspect; hold off on rental inspections for a period of time unless you are looking at changing the code (by Ordinance) and what I'm hearing from council is to relax the code for a specified period of time. Staff will confer with legal counsel and then present on 2/16/2021.

Dir. of Code Enforcement Flanagan suggests a 3 month moratorium and reassess after.

There being no further business, Stevens moved, seconded by Berg that the meeting adjourn. Motion carried 4-0 vote. Council Member Meyers was absent.

Adjournment was at 6:05 P.M.

CITY OF OTTUMWA, IOWA


Tom X. Lazio, Mayor

ATTEST:


Christina Reinhard, City Clerk