July 30, 2013 address to Commission on Building and Standards

Lyn Galbreth
(Resident in proposed pilot area)

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The current lack of accountability for rental properties has a negative impact on not just tenants, but on the entire community, the city, and the county

I live in an area proposed for the pilot. DO IT!

My neighborhood is 80% or more rental, multifamily, single, and duplex, and a huge portion of these rentals are problem properties that owners do not maintain. We've been frustrated for decades about these properties bring down the entire neighborhood; it was a chronic theme in the community discussions while developing our neighborhood plan. We have at least 5 objectives in our council approved neighborhood plan on this. For years we've wanted an effective tool to address this.

We live the Broken Window Syndrome every day. Poorly maintained properties with resulting lower rents signal criminals that a neighborhood is uncared for, that nobody's paying attention, that there is no accountability for what happens there. They settle in, bring in more criminals, and over time take down an entire community. They entrench and then progressively take over the area. The poor condition of such a large number of rental properties in our area has a huge role in creating this.

This has happened to my neighborhood. When I moved there in 1982 it was slightly seedy, but you could safely raise a child there. Due to historical city under-funding code enforcement and choosing a "reactive" instead of "proactive" approach, we've become infested with deep, hard core crime such as adult gangs, drug dealers, prostitution rings, and organized burglary teams. Recent small steps, such as installing new Code leadership and adding officers last year especially focused on multifamily, are in the right direction. Now we're ready for the big steps a big city needs.

My home was robbed last Wednesday for the first time in 18 years. Trashed. See the pictures. That knife was found on my daughter's bed. My neighbor's home was robbed yesterday. But we aren't the only two **paying for landlords who won't voluntarily comply with existing code.**

This increases costs for everybody, both in my community and in Austin to pay:

- for dramatically increased need for more police tied up for more hours for criminal law enforcement,
- for the jail and court systems to deal with the criminals
- for higher insurance premiums in affected ZIP codes
- for graffiti cleanup, repairs to public property such as bridges, bus stop benches and covers, street and stream trash cleanup
- for depressed property values thus less county revenue from property taxes

The slumlords in my neighborhood are **directly contributing to the conditions that support crime**, by the chronically non-compliant condition of their properties and/or by renting to the resulting criminals who move into the neighborhood. The rest of us pay for their profit, including those landlords who maintain their properties and could get higher rent if the whole area was maintained and accountable to simply meet current code.

What Austin has been doing doesn't work. **Do this now**. Do it in my neighborhood. **Ensure a comprehensive tracking system is put in place with enough detail and update frequency that community members can easily, via the city website, query and track the addresses, resolutions, and actual property owners (including current contact information) for repeat offenders.**

Hire and train enough code officers to actually be able to address this, finally **create the capability to enforce the existing law proactively, pay for this from fines for violations and additional registration fees assessed on repeat offenders, as well as from the fees we already pay every month on our AE bills. If additional budget is needed, Council can figure out how to pay for it** the same way they figure out how to hand over chunks of our city budget to Formula 1.

Here is what it looks like:

The crime-supportive conditions that are created when landlords are left to their own voluntary choice of whether to comply with code or not, the de facto "reactive" system Austin has now.

Knife left on my child's bed during robbery last week

What I came home from work to last week-this is just one room. My whole house was torn apart.