

Property standard complaints in rental units increase

Council voted in favor of a motion proposed last week by Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland intended to have staff report back on the feasibility of proactive rental regulations, safety, and inspections.

The motion is a result of increasing property standard complaints throughout the years, according to Bylaw Services Alexander Wray, who said that the concerns relate mostly to property standards in rental units, specifically basement and apartment scenarios, due to a number of issues such as heat, appliances, or general standards in those units.

“While [rental units] are very welcomed and a very viable option for people, there also comes responsibility for fire safety codes, property standards. We really want to make sure that we have some proactive policies in place to help address these issues,” said Councillor Gilliland.

Rental properties would be required to go through residential rental unit licensing systems and a property inspection program. With respect to the safety inspections, staff would report back in collaboration with Central York Fire Services.

With Bill 23 coming into effect, Councillor Gilliland said it was “proactive” for the Council to consider this motion. Brampton, Waterloo, and Oshawa have already “successfully” enacted the inspection model and Councillor Gilliland said she expects to see more municipalities do the same.

In her conversations with residents, reporting to bylaw on an ongoing basis proved to be “tiring” and residents “feared those neighborly tensions.”

“Regardless, I believe it's extremely important to ensure [the] fire safety code should be kept up to date, and that property standards are followed, whether you rent or own. We all live in a neighborhood together, and I think that's something that we all need to reflect on,” she said.

Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner said the goal of the motion is to ensure safe living conditions for renters living in basement apartments. After speaking at length with staff, she said she believes that the most important thing is for Council to identify and follow up on complaints and track that there is compliance with safety standards, enforcing penalties if needed.

“I would say as the cost of housing increases, there will be not only a great need for this kind of affordable housing, but there will be a lot of basement apartments in Town, and we need to ensure their safety,” Councillor Gaertner said.

Noting the difference between standards and concerns in well-managed apartment buildings compared to basement apartments and secondary suites, Ward 4 Councillor Michael Thompson expressed his support for the program and said he would also be interested in receiving more data to understand the implications of the program.

“On top of it, I'd like to get a sense of how many apartment buildings there are, and what are those financial point locations, as well as the impacts of the bylaws as well, and whether more officers would need to be hired to be able to implement such a program,” he said.

He noted that it might be worthwhile focusing on what is the biggest safety concern and to have a report that would identify how many rentals are in Aurora and what their needs are.

“Doing a quick little search utilizing Canada Post? it claims there's 2,200 apartments in Aurora. And so that's a considerable amount of work to be able to identify, classify and or proactively reach out to them if that number is accurate,” said Councillor Thompson. “[A] report may be able to further identify how many departments we're talking to, because that would be a fair bit of work and or impact to the department. But maybe that's mitigated by focusing on those that we feel safety is the biggest concern.”

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he also sees the need for this program after conversations with people during the campaign; however, he said he is concerned about the feasibility and implications of the program.

?I think we have something like 343 registered secondary dwellings in this community and I'm quite sure that we have 143 secondary dwellings in each one of our wards. So, it's really underrepresented,? he said.

?The feasibility should really include the amount of capacity we have because it's imperative that we do this right. So, I'd really like to see a very fulsome look at this and see what the impact is financially on us. But it's one of those things that I think it's important for the safety of our community and the wellbeing of our community.

?And it's been said before that Bill 23 is likely going to exacerbate this so we ought to be prepared. So, I'm in support of this study and looking forward to seeing the report.?

Wray said that a report will come forward within the next six months after working internally to gather more data on the issue.

By Elisa Nguyen