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NEWS RELEASE

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City Recommends Reduction of Rental Property Inspection Fees

DUBUQUE, Iowa – The Dubuque City Council will consider a proposed ordinance amendment that includes a reduction in inspection fees paid by rental property owners in Dubuque.

Rental inspection fees and rental property licenses were increased in March 2015 as part of the City's budget process in an effort to eliminate the City's general fund subsidy of state-mandated rental property inspections. Since that time, the City's housing and community development department has conducted a review of its rental property licensing and inspections processes to identify opportunities for improvement to mitigate the substantial fee increases. Additionally, City staff worked with representatives of the Dubuque Area Landlords Association to develop a value-based approach in charging for services that ensures the cost of housing inspection services is accurately and fairly distributed. The amendments being recommended do not address all the concerns related to the fee increases expressed by rental property owners during the budget process, but represent an improvement from the previous fee schedule.

In recommending the amendment, Housing and Community Development Director Alvin Nash detailed six recommendations to amend the inspection fee schedule and inspection processes that will allow the City to provide high-quality inspections at the lowest possible cost while maintaining the City's five-year inspection cycle and allowing for a variable inspection cycle for marginal properties.

- The recommendation includes lowering rental unit inspection fees as follows: dwelling units from \$70 to \$50, rooming units from \$40 to \$30, Certification of Structural Compliance (CSC) dwelling units from \$110 to \$90.

- The proposal also calls for reduced fees and the reduced frequency of inspections for pre-approved rental units subject to independent, third-party inspections performed by another government agency.
- College dorm rooms identified and pre-approved for dormitory status would be inspected by the Dubuque Fire Department at a reduced rate (\$15 each instead of \$40).
- Several revisions to the inspections process are recommended to increase efficiencies.
- The proposal includes a general fund subsidy to replace approximately seven percent (\$34,480) of the housing inspections operating budget to more accurately recover costs of services provided from the appropriate source.
- To ensure fair and equitable inspections and code enforcement for all rental properties in the City, the City will conduct a campaign to encourage unlicensed rental properties to get licensed and comply with associated requirements. Unlicensed rental property owners would have until Aug. 1, 2015, to become licensed without facing a penalty.

If the recommended amendment is adopted by City Council, the changes would be effective retroactively to April 6, 2015. “Effective code enforcement is part of a balanced neighborhood revitalization plan that can prevent and reduce the number of problem properties while increasing awareness and access to community resources,” said Nash. “I am confident that these recommendations do not compromise our ability to effectively enforce the City’s Housing Code in a fair and equitable manner.”

The City Council meeting will be held on Monday, May 18, at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers on the second floor of the Historic Federal Building at 350 W. Sixth St. All meetings are broadcast on CityChannel Dubuque (channels 85.2 and 8 on the Mediacom cable system) and streamed live and archived at www.cityofdubuque.org/media. The complete City Council agenda is available at www.cityofdubuque.org/agendas.

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