

Re: Rental Licencing Bylaw

Jordan Raycroft
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Councilor John-Paul Danko, Chair and Members of the Planning Committee,

My name is Jordan Raycroft. I am a resident and homeowner in Ward 8, living on West 1st. St. I am writing in opposition of the proposed Rental Licensing Bylaw. As the City's own report on the proposed licensing bylaw states, there are already bylaws in place for enforcement of the common problems residents have with rental properties. Rather than increase costs to landlords (which will certainly trickle down to the tenants through rent increases), perhaps a better and more cost-effective solution might be a campaign making tenants in the areas of concern more aware of their rights, the living standards they should expect, and what they can do if they feel their living conditions are unsafe. I take issue with displacing current tenants while mandatory upgrades are being done, and requiring landlords (big and small) to make substantial upgrades to their homes and pay unnecessary licensing fees after many of them have not been receiving rent, or far less rent than they are owed, over the course of this pandemic.

With the state of Hamilton's housing market it is already extremely difficult for many renters to work toward buying a home of their own. My wife and I know first hand. After renting together for more than 5-years we were finally able to buy a home for our growing family. This bylaw will make it even more challenging for young people like us to get into the housing market as increases to rent take away from income tenants could be saving.

Furthermore, the proposed bylaw works in direct opposition of the city's growth plan, especially if we forego urban boundary expansion. If we are to welcome 236,000 more residents by 2051 within our current city boundaries we are going to need many more rental houses and secondary dwellings. This bylaw will add yet another unnecessary hoop for landlords and would-be landlords to provide much needed housing, adding fuel to the fire that is our out of control rental market. Did you know that there are currently [bidding wars on rental properties](#)? As opposed to penalizing landlords and tenants, the city should incentivize landlords (and non-landlord homeowners) to create safe and attractive living spaces for their renters through grants, tax breaks, and other helpful resources. Make it so that landlords would be missing out on significant benefits by not upgrading and taking proper care of their properties.

Before the committee takes a vote, I have a few questions I'd like for them to consider:

1. In my ward, I know of live-in landlords simply renting out basements so that they can afford their mortgages. These types of landlords are not the cause of the problems this by-law seeks to address, but they will be made to pay the price if this bylaw is enacted. Has the committee considered the impact this bylaw would have on live-in landlords renting secondary dwellings so that they can simply afford the grossly inflated price of their home?

2. Has the committee considered the indirect costs of this bylaw on the tenants themselves? The committee writes that landlords will pay for the program, not tenants. However, it will ultimately be tenants that pay the price. To cover extensive renovation costs and licensing fees, landlords will be required to increase their rents. At a time where there is a housing shortage driving bidding wars on rentals, does the committee feel that this is truly in the best interest of tenants living in our wards?
3. What does this bylaw do that current neighbourhood bylaws and tenant protections don't already do? Would an awareness campaign targeted at informing tenants of their rights and the standards they should expect not be a better use of city time and resources?
4. To my fellow homeowners in the wards in question: For better or worse, the investment/rental potential in our neighbourhoods has driven up the value of our properties significantly. Have you considered the impact this bylaw might have on the value of your homes if landlords are disincentivized from investing in homes in our wards?
5. Has the committee conducted a study on how many tenants would be displaced and how many rental units would be taken off the market as a result of this bylaw? If this bylaw is passed, existing units that meet fire and electrical code but fail on requirements under building code due to the age of the home will still be required to make extensive renovations. For example, low bulkheads (many of the houses in the Bonnington area are war-time, therefore, most existing basement-units would not meet these standards without extremely costly and lengthy renos), available parking (as many of these rentals target students, not all of the tenants require parking - we also have street parking bylaws that already govern overcrowded street parking), or having a water-shutoff for each unit in the home (this is required under Ontario Second Dwelling code) doing so would require entirely new plumbing throughout the entire home. For many landlords, it will simply not be worth it financially to upgrade their rental homes, pushing them to sell and permanently displace their tenants.

I am all for keeping housing safe and our neighbourhoods clean for the benefit of all. However, I do not believe this bylaw is the best way forward. I urge you to vote against this bylaw and develop a new strategy that incentivizes homeowners and landlords to create necessary housing to answer the incredible demand of the rental market in Hamilton.

Thanks,
Jordan Raycroft