



Introduction to Owning Rental Property

Code Enforcement & Neighborhood Conservation

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Basics About East Lansing Rental Property

- All rental property must have a rental license
- All rental property has a licensed occupancy
- All non owner occupied rental property must be inspected every year
- All property must be in compliance with the inspection prior to receiving a rental license
- Renting without a rental license is against the law

Inspections:

Owners are responsible for calling the office to schedule inspections, it is advisable to call 3 months prior to the license expiration date.

The inspectors use the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) when inspecting. A few local amendments have been made to this code, mostly in the electrical section. A copy of the IPMC is available for purchase for \$25.00 (our cost), and copies can be viewed at the CENC office or the East Lansing Public Library. Any local amendments to the IPMC can be obtained from the CENC office or the City web site.

The CENC office does have an inspection guideline that is available that explains what the inspectors are looking for when inspecting and is based on what is in the IPMC. The inspection guideline does not expand the code, it is simply to assist in explaining expectations in meeting the code. It may be beneficial to review this guideline document in order to prepare for the inspection. Another tip is to go through your property a day or so prior to the inspection to be sure all the smoke detectors are operational and you have no surprises since you your last at the property.

Code Compliance:

Approximately 60% of all rental property is found to be in compliance at the annual inspection. The remainder will require at least one reinspection. For properties that have code violations a letter will be sent to the owner/manager that lists what the violations are and a date and time for the reinspection. Owners are encouraged to have the violations corrected in time for the reinspection so that another inspection is not necessary. It is understandable that on occasion weather or contractors will

make it impossible to be compliant prior to the reinspection. For these situations owners/managers can write to the CENC director requesting an extension of time.

When requesting an extension, please write why the extension is needed, what items the extension is needed for and how much time is needed. The director will reply with a new inspection date or the reason the extension cannot be granted. Remember every time inspection takes place a fee is charged. Don't wait for the inspector to come to the property and then ask for the extension, it will cost you an inspection fee. Only one extension of time can be granted administratively.

If another extension is needed the request will have to be made to the Housing Commission.

Renewing the rental license:

Renewal reminders are sent out to owners/managers with a renewal form enclosed. They are typically sent at least 120 days prior to the expiration of the rental license. This is to allow adequate time to send back the renewal application, schedule the annual inspection and make any necessary corrections if needed.

PLEASE send back your renewal application as soon as you can. Late applications cost more time and money for everyone. A \$25.00 late fee is assessed for late renewal applications.

After the owner/manager sends in the renewal application and renewal fee, the owner/manager should call to schedule the inspection. I

f an owner/manager does not renew the rental license and continues to rent it is a violation of the City Code. The owner/manager can be ticketed for every day the violations occurs, the tickets can cost up to \$500 each. We very seldom are in position to issue tickets in this fashion. Most property owners are prompt in renewing the rental license.

Who is the Housing Commission?

The Housing Commission is a group of up to nine city residents that are appointed by the City Council. The Council tries to have a diverse group of residents on the commission that represent neighborhoods, landlords/property managers, and tenants. They develop and make recommendations to City Council regarding the city's housing issues, they review and make recommendation regarding the housing code and they have review authority over several issues in the rental licensing section of the housing code.

The Housing Commission meets twice a month, the 1st Thursday of the month is a worksession and the 3rd Thursday of the month is the regular meeting. The meeting on the 3rd Thursday is typically when extensions of time are reviewed, hearings are held for initial license applications, and the occasion license sanction hearing.

How are the fees determined:

The Code Enforcement Department is a full cost recovery department. The operations of the department are funded by the fees. This is the case for both the housing division and the building division of the department. All overhead and personnel costs are taken into consideration when determining the fees to be charged for each operation and type of fee.

HOUSING FEE SCHEDULE

Common Questions:

Can the occupancy at my rental property be increased?

No. The licensed occupancy of the rental property is based on what zoning would allow at the time the property is licensed. Some properties do have a number of bedrooms that exceeds the licensed occupancy. As an owner you have the responsibility to carefully and clearly explain to your tenants that they cannot add roommates just because they have a spare bedroom.

Can I add bedroom space in the basement or attic so tenants do not have to share a bedroom?

Maybe. The code is clear that you have to have adequate headroom, lighting, ventilation, and egress. The best way to find out is to call one of the building inspectors and ask. Remember you will have to obtain a building permit in most instances were a room is being created or finished. A building permit is always needed to put in an egress window, raise a ceiling, lower a floor, etc. when making a legal sleeping room.

Can I add parking or widen the driveway?

Maybe. The zoning department must approve all requests to add any parking or driveways. A permit must be obtained before work is started and the zoning department must approve any expansions of parking, driveways or sidewalks.

What difference does it make to me if my property is in a historical district?

East Lansing has several historical districts that are in areas that are predominately rental properties. Any exterior changes must be approved by the historical preservation officer. Examples are residing your property, changing the porch, adding a porch, installing new windows, removing or adding a garage or out building. Making these changes without prior approval can be costly. The city's historic preservation officer is happy to assist you in ways to improve your property that will still meet the requirement of the historic preservation code.

How do I know of a code change?

The CENC department publishes a newsletter, "CODEWORDS". This newsletter is published approximately 3-4 times a year and is mailed to all rental property owners/managers. It is specifically meant to keep owners up to date on changes that may impact them in operating rental property in the City.

