



Public Comments on Rental Registry and Inspection Ordinance as of February 20, 2024

This document contains all written comments for the proposed Rental Registry and Inspection program received by the Community Development Department between Jan. 8, 2024 (when the information postcards were first mailed out), and Feb. 20, 2024. These records are organized into four sections:

Section 1- Emails

- This section includes all email comments addressed to the Community Development Department, or where the department is copied. Additional comments submitted only to members of the City Council may not be reflected in this list.
- Community Development staff have attempted to respond to all of these emails separately, and to answer questions where possible.

Section 2- Posts on Front Porch Forum

- This section includes relevant comments from Front Porch Forum
- City staff does not consistently monitor and respond to content on social media platforms like Front Porch Forum

Section 3- Jan. 24 Public Hearing Comments

- The summarized comments were directly copied from the January 24 meeting minutes

Section 4- Facebook Comments

- Three discussion threads were posted by City residents on the "City of Essex Junction, VT (unofficial)" Facebook Group.
- As of February 20, these threads have attracted a total of 187 comments.
- A limited sample of these comments are included below. There were too many comments to conduct a full analysis.
- City staff does not consistently monitor and respond to content on social media platforms like Facebook.

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Comment 1.1 - Email from Evelyn Burns on Jan. 12, 2024:

Good morning. I will be out of town on Jan. 24th but would like to participate in this meeting.

I have many concerns about the long term impacts of this proposal for both landlords and tenants. There is a big enough housing shortage in Vermont without regional or Federal government getting involved in raising landlord expenses which in turn continues to raise already high rental amounts. Essex Junction does not have a big enough problem with slums, or poorly maintained apartments to warrant this program. This is a unnecessary step that just contributes to the rising cost of rents and a continued bloating of government spending. If you look at the fully burdened cost of this program (I e administration, physical space, inspection labor and expenses), it could easily morph into more taxpayer money . We are trying to treat a insignificant problem with an unnecessary program. This is not a win for anyone . There are already State laws in place that protect renters in Vermont that our tax payer dollars support. People should be referred to those programs if they experience problems with landlords . STOP waste and redundancy by creating another program.

How can I virtually attend this meeting?

Thank you.

Evelyn Burns

[follow-up message]

Could you also provide me with a list of renter complaints registered with Essex that prompted this proposal. I would also like to know how many tenants have been injured or died related to health and safety issues . What occurred to rationalize the need for this program?

Thank you

Evelyn

Comment 1.2 - Email from Brian French, on Jan. 15, 2024:

Dear, Christopher I would like to weigh in on the potential rental registry of units in Essex Jct. As a real estate Broker and someone who has 40 years of experience in this field, I would like to convey my feelings on this. Having owned units in Burlington for many years I know the advantages and disadvantages of many of the rules and regulations concerning rentals. In an area where the cost of owning rental real estate becomes more difficult every year due to the rising costs of taxes, insurance, supplies and maintenance I find another proposal to add cost to housing is not in the best interest of either the landlord or tenant.

Ultimately, Landlords try to provide affordable housing while being asked to absorb more and more increases in expenses it becomes unattainable. At the end of the day, it is a business and to run a good business you need to have your income be greater than your expenses. So, when all these expenses continue to go up, who do you think ultimately has to absorb the major brunt of them? It is the tenant. Otherwise, you cannot keep a property in good shape due to the wear and tear that it experiences. I have had taxes alone go up thousands of dollars on some properties and for those small time investors who purchased units hoping it can help provide income in retirement it is almost impossible. I find it sad because I deal with a lot of these Owners and they can no longer afford to try to hold onto what they thought was going to be a secure future for themselves. Adding another control and expense to these properties I find at this time will create more of a hardship than what a lot of people are aware of.

Thanks. Brian

Brian French
President/Owner
Brian French Real Estate

Comment 1.3 - Email from Brett Grabowski, on Jan. 18, 2024:

Chris

This is a completely unnecessary and an incredibly costly program. To add charges like this in a time when creating affordable housing is at its most difficult in 30 years just goes to show the City's shortsightedness. Large rental buildings are already subject to annual inspections in regards to life safety issues. Fire alarm, elevator, sprinkler systems are already inspected on an annual basis. The objectives of the program you have listed below are simply a cover of creating another revenue generating program by the city. It is also at odds with the City's goal to promote high density housing in the City center. If you would like to discuss these issues and my thoughts further I can be available anytime.

Thank you

Brett Grabowski

[Follow-up message]

Chris

Thank you for the reply. I feel very strongly about this. According to your email inspections would be very infrequent and more frequent visits would only be deemed necessary due to past infractions at select properties. Isn't that the current policy today. You have a current health inspector and I know he responds to complaints concerning rental issues. Not sure a different system needs to exist. \$120/unit is excessive and only subtracts from the revenue in a buildings operation that allows us to maintain buildings to the current code requirements. In today's inflation plagued economy we do not need unnecessary and expensive programs that only make it harder for us to maintain buildings to the existing regulations.

Sorry if I sound repetitive and sorry if my previous email came across a little harsh.

I look forward to discussing this further with you and the City Council.

Brett

Comment 1.4 - Email from Cora Delucia, on Jan. 19, 2024:

Hi Christopher,

My name is Cora. I recently started renting an apartment in Essex junction and just received notice about the public hearing for the rental housing registry. In general I agree with the concept and would like to see it implemented; however, I am worried that the cost of the inspection will just be passed on to renters. I, as well as many other people are on yearly leases with monthly rent costs that are already high and that have a tendency to increase year after year. I am worried that a per unit inspection cost will make renting in Essex more expensive, deter renters, and push out long time residents that can no longer afford increasing rent. I was wondering if there were any measurements in place to help prevent the cost being put back on renters or to help reduce rental cost in general so that Essex junction can become an affordable and desirable place to live/rent.

Thank you for your time.

Best,
Cora Delucia

Comment 1.5 - Email with attached letter, by Cindy Reid, Cathedral Square, on Jan. 23, 2024:

To: Christopher Yuen, Community Development Director, City of Essex Junction

From: Cindy Reid, Director of Real Estate Development, Cathedral Square Lauren Marino, Project Manager, Cathedral Square

Re: Proposed Rental Registry & Inspection Program

Date: 1/23/2024

Cathedral Square supports a rental registry and inspection ordinance in Essex Junction for many reasons: it will identify and quantify rental housing, ensure life safety, inform property owners and tenants of housing and community development policies, help regulate the rental market, identify community health and safety concerns, and identify households at risk of displacement.

We also offer two recommendations for you to consider (in bold below) as you work to formalize a Rental Registry and Inspection Ordinance.

We encourage you to exempt permanently affordable units (permanently rent restricted) from the registration fee. Cathedral Square's mission includes keeping rents as affordable as possible, keeping people housed, and preventing homelessness. Operating costs increase each year due to property taxes, property insurance, employee health insurance, contract costs, and utilities. 93% of our residents are low income or very low income as defined by HUD; 19.7% of our residents experienced homelessness before coming to Cathedral Square. Adding administrative fees to our operating costs adds stress to our portfolio, all of which operates on a thin margin. In the City of Essex Junction Cathedral Square owns and manages Whitcomb Woods and Whitcomb Terrace, together totaling 84 permanently affordable housing units.

Last, we understand the need for and support City inspections to ensure compliance with building and fire safety codes. That being said, the apartments in our portfolio that are subsidized are regularly inspected by a number of agencies including: Burlington Housing Authority, Vermont State Housing Authority, Vermont Housing Finance Agency, and HUD REAC (Real Estate Assessment Center). Our residents experience inspection fatigue. **We request limiting inspections for properties already covered by an inspection regimen, or at a minimum, to coordinate with the inspection schedule that we already have in place.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important public policy, and for your support for health, safety and accountability in the rental housing market.

Comment 1.6 - Email from Bob Paroline , on Jan. 23, 2024:

Chris,

I am just now reading this email about the Rental Registry.

It maybe too late to give my opinion to this Rental Registry and Inspection.

But if this passes it maybe a deal breaker for my planned development and continued ownership of real estate ownership is Essex Junction. I am not a slum lord and my properties are not a health threat and I feel this is an added burden to landlords that will only make rentals more scarce and costly to the tenants.

Please kill this proposal before more landlords get out of the business.

Regards,

Bob Paroline

[follow-up message]

Thank you for listening to my concerns and sharing the request the city has made to the state to expand the neighborhood development zone.

I have just spent thousands of dollars and many hours tolling over the ACT 250 permit and will be spending a lot more unless this request is granted. Since getting your emails and learning about the possibility of health inspections I have put several phases of my development efforts on hold. Please keep me in the loop on both of these issues for they have significant impacts on my project.

Regards,

Bob Paroline

Comment 1.7 - Email from Christine Montgomery, on Jan. 26, 2024:

Consider that if such a registry occurs, costs will be passed on to renters who are already, in some cases, trying to make ends meet, and at times struggle.

1. It appears that Essex Junction is trying to mimic its municipal neighbors- Burlington, etc., and it is transparent to me that the registry is just an added fee foisted on landlords, most of whom manage their properties well and do not subscribe to taking advantage of tenants.

2. Whose brainchild is this registry? Is it because our community is now a city and administration feels this is the proper politically acceptable practice?

What about inspection logistics in our community? Where did the \$120 per unit come from? Isn't this just another way to generate money to cover expenses in our community? How many of our hired officials are landlords? Has the staff in Essex Junction really examined the ramifications of such fees (other than the \$\$\$ angle)?

This reminds me of those education impact fees that were oh so important when in fact there weren't that many students flooding our schools as originally feared.

Where will increasing costs end? It's deplorable enough that our legislature in Montpelier wants to increase property taxes in Vermont by nearly 20%. Now our community officials want to burden property owners with this added registry expense.

Please reconsider/abandon this proposal.

Thank you.

A concerned citizen, taxpayer, and bonafide property owner.

Comment 1.8 - Email from Chris Vaughn, on Jan. 26, 2024:

Hi, Christopher -

I was unable to attend the public meeting so I shared my thoughts on the proposed rental registry and inspections on Front Porch Forum. I'm realizing it may still be possible to have them captured in the public record. If so, I've included them below.

Thank you,

Chris Vaughn - Main Street

MESSAGE POSTED TO FPF:

My wife and I were unable to attend the hearing but would like to voice our enthusiastic support for a rental housing registry and inspection program.

Common sense laws protect the most vulnerable members of a society from experiencing the worst outcomes. In an ideal world, a rental registry and regular inspections would be unnecessary because all landlords would be as motivated to maintain safe and healthy conditions for their tenants as they are to generate revenue from the property they own. But unfortunately, that is not the reality. The proposed registry and inspections would help ensure a much-needed higher level of accountability for landlords with imbalanced priorities. There are many out there.

We have been Essex Junction residents for 15 years. From 2008 to 2021, we lived in four different rental units throughout the city before purchasing our own home here. The quality of apartments (and the quality of landlords) in our city varies drastically, but the commonality is that landlords hold the vast majority of the power. Some landlords take meticulous care of their properties, respond quickly, and even conduct their own annual inspections. On the other end of the spectrum there are landlords who knowingly ignore health and safety issues, violate codes, and/or only respond when there is a threat of legal action or involving the Dept. of Health. Because we were privileged enough to have the time to research and understand our rights, and navigate a complicated legal system designed for people who speak English as their primary language, we were able to force an irresponsible landlord's hand to make some marginal safety improvements and ultimately terminate a lease at an unsafe property.

Unless they are currently neglecting their rental property, why would a landlord be opposed to a low-cost, minimally-invasive program that would increase the quality of housing in our community? The fee for an inspection will become an operating expense and will, for better or worse, inevitably be passed through to tenants. So it's surely not about the fee. The long-term effect of a rising standard of housing conditions in Essex Junction will be an increased desirability of renting here. This will make the rental market more competitive and justify increasing rental rates over time. Taking the long view, this actually seems like a win for (responsible) landlords.

It sounds like those complaining that the proposed system would impose unnecessary municipal overreach are fortunate enough to have never lived as a tenant in a rental where landlords abuse their power and health and safety issues are ignored. It's not the landlords who need more power in this dynamic. This program would empower renters to better understand their rights and simultaneously hold landlords

responsible for basic upkeep that should be -- but is NOT currently -- a given. Opposition based on principle alone (not wanting the city to have oversight here for fear of future oversight elsewhere) is fear-based and not grounded in reality. Instead, please consider how this program would improve the quality of housing for many of your neighbors who deserve a safe and healthy space to call home.

Comment 1.9 - Email from Mike Hopwood, on Jan. 26, 2024:

Chris

To follow up on the comments I made during the meeting, could you please answer these questions:

- Is this program going to go ahead or is it just being considered?
- What steps have to happen for this to become law?
- Do you have any data to support problems with rental housing in Essex Junction, if so please provide it to me.

At a time when inflation is such a problem and a big driver of poverty why is the town considering adding to inflation? The true cost of this program is not just the \$120 / year but the labor cost of inspections, the clerical cost of noticing entry to apartments, tenants may need to take vacation to be in the apartment when the inspection happens. At a time when labor is incredibly tight the town hiring for more positions adds further to inflation.

- Why do you consider the state mechanism for complaints & follow up by a fire marshal to be inadequate?
- What consideration have you given to stopping tenants weaponizing this potential law?
- What do you plan to do when you enter an apartment that meets all codes but is filthy & packed with the tenants stuff to the point it is a health hazard especially if children are living there?

As I said at the meeting I believe this program is not only not needed, there is not a problem, but extremely reckless, it will trigger a round of rent raising. I really hope the council reconsiders this issue & does not move forward with the program. To start something like this because one person asked for it, makes me think someone on the council or within the town staff has a personal agenda to make it happen.

I look forward to your answers.

Thank you

[follow-up comments]

Chris

Thanks for the response. Will a notice be sent out when they plan to discuss again?

I understand that the Vermont Fire Safety system is complaints driven and that we do have some safety critical things like automobiles but:

1. Do we really want to fill Essex Jct (and the country for that matter) with people that want everything done for them. Where is the personal responsibility and accountability? There is nothing to stop someone moving out. The focus should be on helping reduce the cost of housing, making it quicker, easier & cheaper to build more housing. This law would do the exact opposite. My suspicion is that smaller Landlords who view this as a retirement investment will become less common. Having just a handful of larger landlords will not help housing costs.

2. Comparing housing with Automobile safety is really a fair comparison. If there wasn't a VSI the owner operator of the vehicle would be the decider of when & what maintenance & repair gets done. Plus a dangerous vehicle affects 1000's of other people around the roads everyday. In the landlord / tenant situation first of all you are trying to attract the best tenants you can, so you want to present a nice well maintained apartment plus the will voice concern if there are issues or possibly call VT Fire Safety or the town.

If you feel you absolutely have to do something you could make Landlords post notice of the VT Fire safety Program in the apt or lease. This would cost very little if anything and allow a program already in place to catch any of the minimal issues.

I could go on & on about how Landlords are at a huge disadvantage already and how the number of tenants that don't pay rent, or smash up apartments (we're back to no accountability again) is on the increase but I know this will just make me sound like an arrogant landlord. But the reality is that it is true & it just drives up the cost for everyone else. We do not need more expenses that make expensive housing even more expensive when it is not absolutely necessary, it is just plain irresponsible.

Mike Hopwood

Comment 1.10 - Email from Bud Brow to Cllr. Thibeault, and forwarded to Staff on Jan. 26, 2024:

Hello,

I live at an apartment complex on pearl street in Essex Junction.

This is regarding the Rental inspection registry program as linked below:

[https://www.essexjunction.org/departments/community-development/rental-registry\](https://www.essexjunction.org/departments/community-development/rental-registry)

I don't believe we need a registry at this time. Ive had next to zero issues with my landlord and the functions of my apartment, and I don't need the city inspecting it at a cost to us all.

Thank you for accepting my feedback.

regards,

Comment 1.11 - Email from Brad Rubman on Jan. 25, 2024:

Regina & Chris,

At last night's meeting I was prepared to share my list of reasons why I'm opposed to Rental Registry proposal. Unfortunately, I said little because I was too disappointed and frustrated with the City's leadership silence to the antisemitic Zoom caller. The leadership's silence confirms my suspicion that the proposed Rental Registry has little to do with 'protecting the life and safety of all residents' as advertised but is a guise to boost the City's coffers. If the City's true concern is about protecting the life and safety of all residents someone in a leadership role would have immediately denounced the antisemitic remarks as we all know blatant racism is a much greater life and safety risk than if a landlord has a handrail that installed 2 inches out of code.

Respectfully,

Bradd Rubman

Appletree Bay Property Management

Comment 1.12 - Email from Jere Streeter to Cllr. Thibeault, and forwarded to Staff on Feb. 6, 2024

Hi Amber,

I am a home owner in the town of Essex [address redacted for privacy], but am also currently a temporary tenant at [Apartment in Essex Junction- address redacted for privacy]

The landlord here for the [Apartment in Essex Junction- address redacted for privacy] building recently released a statement to tenants, indicating and inferring that they would pass the cost of rental registration fees and potentially subsequent violations to their tenants.

I am happy to share the message from the property manager, representative of the [Apartment in Essex Junction- address redacted for privacy].

I was curious whether the rental registry proposal code can perhaps take this into account, and make it an additional code or enforcement violation for passing on the cost of the rental registration fee onto tenants or potential tenants. It seems highly unethical for them as property owners to do so.

Thanks!

Jeremy

[follow-up comments]

Hi Amber,

I do have some thoughts, but mostly around the municipality taking the angle of protecting the tenants a bit more through legal language. The Vermont statutes around security deposits can be additionally legislated by local towns and municipalities, and I feel like work could be done to at least have this be a part of the initial security deposit only, limiting the ability for land lords to legally retain the deposit. The registry makes sense to me, but it also potentially imposes a good amount of money on someone paying rent, (I pay 1500 a month, so 120 fee once a year seems like a slippery slope for something that really should lean into the habitability of Vermont statutes around rental properties).

I feel like some creative thinking can be applied here, (I have spent a lot of time in my career looking at legal language and contracts), and there seems to me that there could always be "a way." It could also serve to be a fee that applies primarily to short term rentals, which I feel is the main point here, (getting a handle on and creating some degree of enforcement for AirBnB's, etc).

For my part, I am in support of the general idea of the registry, but see potential for it causing issues for people who may already have some difficulty with making rent, paying for groceries, etc. I am fortunate that this is not an issue for me, but feel like there is a different way to approach it.

Below my signature here is the message sent to tenants here via the app the property manager uses. I reformatted it from html to plain text, but otherwise changed no language or otherwise.

Thanks!

Jeremy

Alexis Brown
Author
Rental Inspection Program
Feb 06, 2024 1:17 PM
Dear Tenants,

We hope this letter finds you well. As your Property Manager, I am reaching out to you regarding an important matter that directly affects you as a valued tenant in our community.

As some of you may have noticed, you received a postcard from the City of Essex about wanting to create a Rental Registry and Inspection Program. The City of Essex is considering the implementation of a Rental Registry and Inspection Program that would allow them to conduct regular inspections of your unit as many times as they deem fit but no less than once every 5 years. They are using criteria such as the Rental Company itself to determine how often they would like to inspect. While the intention behind the program may be well-meaning, we believe it is unnecessary, burdensome, and an infringement of your privacy.

We strongly encourage you to consider the negative implications of such a program. Here are a few reasons why we believe it is not in your best interests as tenants:

Unnecessary Intrusion: As responsible tenants, you have maintained your living spaces in compliance with the terms of your Lease Agreement. We have one annual inspection a year - fire/sprinkler alarm inspection. A mandatory inspection program would be an unnecessary intrusion into your private living space and could cause unnecessary stress and inconvenience.

Additional Cost: Implementing a Rental Inspection Program would likely result in additional costs being passed on to you, through increased rent or direct fees. The City is proposing \$120 per unit annually and \$120 per re-inspection for violation. This an unnecessary financial burden on top of the expenses you already bear as responsible renters. Together that is roughly \$250,000 and up to the City of Essex per year. They have not released a budget on where those funds would be used.

Lack of Need: Our community has not experienced any significant issues related to rental property maintenance or tenant-landlord disputes that would warrant the implementation of such a program. The City has confirmed this program is based on one suggestion and no factual evidence of it being needed. As a result, the program would be a solution in search of a problem. We feel that our tenants have good communication with us and if they feel necessary can already reach out to multiple agencies if for some reason their needs are not met. We have welcomed calls to the Health inspector for Essex in the past when a tenant feels they need more support.

In light of these concerns, we kindly ask for your support in opposing the implementation of the Rental Inspection Program. Your voice matters, and your opposition can make a difference in protecting your rights as a tenant.

I encourage you to reach out to the City Council at athibeault@essexjunction.org or attend the final meeting on Feb. 14th (Valentines day) from 6:30 pm-8:30 pm located at Town Hall or Zoom to express your concerns. This is the final meeting to make their decision based on the public, I will be there to support you. Together, we can work to ensure that our rights as tenants are respected and that unnecessary and intrusive measures are not imposed upon us.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your input is important, and I am here to support you in this effort.

If you would like to attend by Zoom, please reach out to me and I will send you the information for the Zoom meeting as soon as it is posted.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I appreciate your consideration of the impact of this program in our community.

Sincerely,

Alexis Brown

https://www.essexjunction.org/fileadmin/files/Planning_Zoning/Draft_EJ_Rental_Building_Registry_Ordinance_20240110.pdf

Comment 1.13 - Email from Justin Belisle on Feb. 6, 2024

Good Afternoon,

I know that I might be a little late in responding, but I wanted to make some brief comments on the Rental Housing Registry & Inspection program. I was not able to attend the Jan. 24 meeting in person, but I did catch some of it online. As a resident of Essex Junction rental housing, I am extremely opposed to the proposed program.

The primary reason is that it imposes additional cost on tenants, but doesn't appear to give tenants anything in return. The landlords aren't being helped, the tenants aren't being helped; the only people that benefit from the program are people that might be looking for a job as a rental housing inspector.

I seem to recall someone in the meeting mentioned an issue of an elevator being out of service for 60 days, and if I'm not mistaken, they were using that as a justification to SUPPORT the proposed program. I feel strongly that this type of issue exactly the sort of reason to be AGAINST the proposed program. Elevator repair is something where you definitely need a qualified professional, which you probably don't have in-house, and you are subject to their schedule (normal contractors are bad enough to deal with). So, basically what you are proposing is that the tenant gets screwed over twice: once from being without the use of an elevator for 60 days, and once from having to pay an annual inspection fee, and potentially penalties for non-compliance. How is the tenant benefiting from this? Fining the landlord does not make the elevator contractor finish the job faster. This particular situation would require imposing a fine on elevator contractors, not landlords, which is probably out-of-scope for what the City of Essex Junction can provide.

I also think that many tenants are confused by the idea of landlord paying the annual fee, and how that impacts their rent. I think that ethically it should be made clear that tenants will ultimately bear the burden of payment (at least in the long run). Generally speaking, I think it would make more sense for tenants to pay for inspections out of their own pockets, but not require them to do so annually. If this is intended to help tenants, then tenants should be given more control as to when and how to incur the cost, and to avoid incurring the cost when they don't need it at all (which is likely most of the time).

Sincerely,

Justin Belisle

Comment 1.14 - Email from Sue McEwing to Cllr. Thibeault, and forwarded to Staff on Feb. 7, 2024

Hi Ms. Thibault,

I am a long time resident of Essex Junction who is currently renting in the Junction. I am concerned about the implications of the Rental Inspection Program that is currently being discussed. As a renter, I am concerned that it is an unnecessary doubling of inspections that are already being done with an additional unnecessary fee that will be passed on to renters.

If there are individual landlords that you as a city are concerned about, I would suggest working with them directly rather than trying to create a new program that is not necessary for all renters and landlords to deal with. I don't believe anyone in the Junction is looking for more overseeing in regards to our rental units.

I hope you and the board will reconsider or table this discussion until more information can be gathered as to the need for such a program. I for one believe there are a lot of other things we could be using our time and resources on in the Junction.

Sincerely,

Sue McEwing

Comment 1.15 - Email from David Sweeney to Cllr. Thibeault, and forwarded to Staff on Feb. 11, 2024

Greetings Amber,

This is the first time I've included myself in anything like this so bear with me if I'm a bit inarticulate.

I received a notice in the mail awhile back about the above subject. After mulling it over I decided to write and say something in that I hope everyone has the heart (!) to do away with this program.

There are good property rental owners and bad property rental owners. And with this proposal you've included both the good and bad instead of going after the bad. This why it should be dropped all together.

Leave the good ones alone who maintain their properties properly, react when there is a problem brought to their attention and are "proactive" in keeping their properties being safe for all who live there. These owners stand out.

You need to accent on the bad ones only and leave the others alone.

I also do not need an increase in my rent to possibly cover this expense. I believe that will happen. I am paying 2/3 more for rent than I've ever paid for rent in my life now and I'm right on the edge. And this state we live in will definitely kick everyone in the a-- this year with additional taxes and expenses after this legislature comes to a close, I also believe. Never mind the fact that this former town is a new city I live in now. Unknown additional expenses most likely.

Please take aim at who needs to be dealt with property deficiencies.

That is all. Thank you for your time.

The Best To You,

Dave O. Sweeney

Comment 1.16 - Email from Bridget Meyer to City Council, and forwarded to Staff on Feb. 12, 2024

Rental Registry - Maybe we're approaching this slightly incorrectly? What if we built consensus by posing the question, " Do we agree that all EJ renters deserve/need safe and healthy housing?" Wouldn't everyone answer yes? Then we could ask how we guarantee that. That would provide an opportunity to refute the "duplication" argument and diffuse the heated rhetoric. In other words, we'd be building an accountability/compliance discussion which could easily result in a rental registry!

Best,

Bridget

Comment 2.1 - FPF Post by Cecilia Polansky on Jan 22, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4440](#)

Just heard about the proposed health inspection and registry for all EJ rentals, short or long term.

Does the city not realize that the Fire Marshall already holds us super-accountable and forces us to put in new regress windows if they are not even an inch out of compliance; new railings and sheetrock and smoke alarms in ridiculous places; and any other extreme measure they are allowed to enforce? What other faults is the city going to look for when they come into our homes? who had this idea -- is it simply another money-gathering scheme? or is there a real reason to charge this money every year, for every unit? What will the money be used for?

If any landlord wants to have a say in the decision then maybe Wednesday at 6:30PM is our chance to say it. We should hear the justification for the proposal before it is proposed and approved.

Comment 2.2 - FPF Post by Bridget Downey-Meyer on Jan 24, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4442](#)

I will attend the City Council meeting on Wednesday evening and will advocate strongly for a rental registry. I own a duplex in Winooski which I purchased in 1978. Winooski established a rental registry about a decade ago and the quality of rental housing in Winooski has improved 10 fold since then. I pay \$120/yr per unit and the units are inspected by professionals from the fire department every 4 years. There is substandard housing in Essex Junction. A rental registry will improve housing quality and is good for everyone! This is a public health and safety issue and deserves to be implemented for the common/community good. Please educate yourselves by reading Planning Comm. and City Council minutes or by attending the meeting. I'm happy to answer any questions you have about my experience with the Winooski registry. I do have questions about WHO will inspect. I believe the fire department is well equipped to handle the inspections while the city seems to want to make another dept. to inspect. Stay tuned!

Comment 2.3 - FPF Post by Douglas Riley on Jan 25, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4443](#)

I practiced real estate law in Burlington for more than 30 years. I've been on both sides of landlord-tenant disputes. I can see both sides of the argument.

I'm one of those who are disappointed at our little village having morphed into a city. I voted against the change. However, arguing against the proposed rental registration-inspection system on the ground that "It's my property and I should be able to do whatever I want" is unconvincing.

Once you offer your property to the public for residential rental, your actions on "your" property no longer affect only you. You're also controlling the quality of life for other people (your tenants). Especially given the area's severe housing shortage, the landlord holds most of the cards in the relationship. It's simply a fact of life that some landlords take advantage of their superior position to run substandard housing. I name no names. but I've seen plenty of this, in rural as well as urban towns.

What's more, the current Fire Marshal inspection system does not address all property safety issues -- it addresses those related to fire safety. Issues such as vermin infestations are outside the Fire Marshal's formal purview.

Ideally, every landlord would be a decent, upstanding member of the community, and would do the right thing without a government inspector forcing the issue. Regrettably, that's just not the case in this time and place.

So, while I dislike government intrusion as much as anyone, I reluctantly think that the time may have come for a licensing-inspection system.

Incidentally, a town-level inspection system CAN qualify to replace the state Fire Marshal inspection. The fire inspection can be rolled into the overall town inspection if the town program qualifies.

Comment 2.4 - FPF Post by Andy Lawrence on Jan 25, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4443](#)

The first rental registry meeting is now behind us. (Link at the bottom of this post if you don't have it)

Public opinion, including mine, was overwhelmingly opposed to adding the registry, inspection fees, and periodic inspections (i.e., the whole proposal).

It sounds like another hearing will occur. I'm not sure why; it was very definitive feedback which would seem to indicate the proposal should just be dropped, but since it is not being dropped yet, I thought I'd add my opinion to the subject here.

Here are my thoughts on it. Essex Junction is known for many things. One of them is high housing costs and low housing availability. NOT one of them is large swaths of slums. Not once was a reason for the need for this proposal mentioned. The best I can guess is that we have the word "city" in our town name now, and we want to do what "cities" do, and that's have regular inspections?

We need ideas for bringing housing costs down, not ways to make costs higher. It's really kind of surprising to me that the ink is still drying on the separation, which we did to bring our costs down, and one of the first things we try to do is bring costs up.

Tenants, please understand: this is about you. Like any business, landlords cover their expenses by charging rent. There is no such thing as costs of any business not being passed to the customer and housing rental is no exception. If you are selling ice cream for \$1.10 with costs of \$1.00, and then your cost goes to \$1.00, you have to at least go up to \$1.20 or find another profession, that's just how it works. So, tenants, if you prefer your rent costs to not increase unnecessarily, put in your voice to put this proposal down. Please know that if your apartment has an issue that the landlord refuses to address, there is already a complaint system in place. If for some reason that complaint system is not working, an inspection in 5 years isn't going to fix that.

Some of the "pro" proposal arguments I heard (there weren't many):

--"We've heard of problem such as an elevator that was down for 60 days". So you think an inspection in 5 years will help this? Nope. You need that fixed ASAP, not in 5 years. (Now, working on ways to encourage more people to become elevator technicians might be good! I wouldn't be surprised if the lead time to get a tech is closer to 90 days)

--"Burlington and Winooski have had inspections for years". Anecdotally, I've heard maybe a couple horror stories in 20 years in Essex Junction, but far far more in Winooski and Burlington. We have not been given any non-anecdotal information.

--That's about all I can remember for "pro" arguments from last night's meeting.

<https://www.essexjunction.org/departments/community-development/rental-registry>

Comment 2.5 - FPF Post by Tammy Charbonneau on Jan 26, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4444](#)

So I am a little confused. in one of the prior discussions someone who is there stated that

"was overwhelmingly opposed to adding the registry, inspection fees, and periodic inspections (i.e., the whole proposal).

It sounds like another hearing will occur. I'm not sure why; it was very definitive feedback which would seem to indicate the proposal should just be dropped"

So my question is why isn't it being dropped? Why is there another meeting? After the next meeting, will there be a vote and then another meeting?? Exactly what is the process?

Comment 2.6 - FPF Post by Andy Lawrence on Jan 26, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4444](#)

Someone on facebook playfully noticed my "freudian slip" with my ice cream analogy (now corrected there). I did intend to say \$1.10 for the new cost (the shop owners price increased). NOT that he raised the price without his costs going up! It is definitely the rep of landlords to raise rent without their costs going up, but this can only be hypothetical... landlord's costs always go up just like everyone else. For landlords already charging market value, they can probably absorb the cost (they'll either have to, or get out of the rental business) but the overall market value will still rise and their's with it.

A few folks have said they have not passed on the extra costs to their tenants in these situations. Maybe not line by line, but unless you're operating at a loss, the rent is covering your costs. There is no other revenue stream for a landlord besides rent. This just means you were already charging at least \$1.20 for your ice cream.

It will be interesting to see where this goes! Safety is important for sure. Do we need this cost to get there? My main point is for renters to weigh in on that. You're the ones covering all rental property costs.

Comment 2.7 - FPF Post by Emily Smyth on Jan 26, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4444](#)

As a tenant, I appreciate this balanced view. While I can imagine having more government oversight as a landlord could be frustrating, we do not live in an ideal world where every landlord is looking out for the best interests of their tenants. Kudos to you, if you are. But unfortunately, that is not the case a lot of the time.

A lot of landlords are also commenting on how this fee will end up "hurting the renter." It only will hurt the renter if you, the landlord, decides that it will. Rent is already ridiculously high as it is, so tacking that responsibility on the renter seems far beyond reason.

Comment 2.8 - FPF Post by Chris Vaughn on Jan 26, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4444](#)

My wife and I were unable to attend the hearing but would like to voice our enthusiastic support for a rental housing registry and inspection program.

Common sense laws protect the most vulnerable members of a society from experiencing the worst outcomes. In an ideal world, a rental registry and regular inspections would be unnecessary because all landlords would be as motivated to maintain safe and healthy conditions for their tenants as they are to generate revenue from the property they own. But unfortunately, that is not the reality. The proposed registry and inspections would help ensure a much-needed higher level of accountability for landlords with imbalanced priorities. There are many out there.

We have been Essex Junction residents for 15 years. From 2008 to 2021, we lived in four different rental units throughout the city before purchasing our own home here. The quality of apartments (and the quality of landlords) in our city varies drastically, but the commonality is that landlords hold the vast majority of the power. Some landlords take meticulous care of their properties, respond quickly, and even conduct their own annual inspections. On the other end of the spectrum there are landlords who knowingly ignore health and safety issues, violate codes, and/or only respond when there is a threat of legal action or involving the Dept. of Health. Because we were privileged enough to have the time to research and understand our rights, and navigate a complicated legal system designed for people who speak English as their primary language, we were able to force an irresponsible landlord's hand to make some marginal safety improvements and ultimately terminate a lease at an unsafe property.

Unless they are currently neglecting their rental property, why would a landlord be opposed to a low-cost, minimally-invasive program that would increase the quality of housing in our community? The fee for an inspection will become an operating expense and will, for better or worse, inevitably be passed through to tenants. So it's surely not about the fee. The long-term effect of a rising standard of housing conditions in Essex Junction will be an increased desirability of renting here. This will make the rental market more competitive and justify increasing rental rates over time. Taking the long view, this actually seems like a win for (responsible) landlords.

It sounds like those complaining that the proposed system would impose unnecessary municipal overreach are fortunate enough to have never lived as a tenant in a rental where landlords abuse their power and health and safety issues are ignored. It's not the landlords who need more power in this dynamic. This program would empower renters to better understand their rights and simultaneously hold landlords responsible for basic upkeep that should be -- but is NOT currently -- a given. Opposition based on principle alone (not wanting the city to have oversight here for fear of future oversight elsewhere) is fear-based and not grounded in reality. Instead, please consider how this program would improve the quality of housing for many of your neighbors who deserve a safe and healthy space to call home.

Comment 2.9 - FPF Post by Sandy Dahl on Jan 26, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4444](#)

An unusual burden will be placed on people who have just a few units. Maybe even just a small unit in their own house, such as I have. Any expensive repairs/requirements, will hit Seniors, hard. If I were to be required to put in a second egress, I'd have to take out a home improvement loan. And, on Social Security, would I even qualify? The alternative? Close the apartment to rental.

Comment 2.10 - FPF Post by Edward Cibula on Jan 27, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4445](#)

Andy I agree, 100% with your assessment, there is no need for a rental registry in Essex Junction.

Comment 2.11 - FPF Post by Carla Jenkins on Jan 27, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4445](#)

Maybe I'm missing something. Is all the outrage about a fee of basically \$10 per month per unit on units that rent for at least hundreds of dollars per month? Or is it about more accountability? Are folks afraid they'd be required to make unnecessary improvements? Do we know what criteria would be used to require landlords to make improvements?

Comment 2.12 - FPF Post by Bob Howard on Jan 27, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4445](#)

I totally agree with Andy. I voted against turning this quaint village ; that I have lived for over 30 years into a city; knowing taxes and cost of living will rise for the working class.

Putting more expense on landlords will only get passed on to renters and if landlords get pushed enough they may sell or stop renting, which would make even less housing available.

Comment 2.13 - FPF Post by Rolenda & George Corrow on Jan 29, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4446](#)

Thank you Bob, Andy, Sandy and Tammy. You are all Right! Why aren't they listening?

Bob and Sandy both stated something that is SO possible if the City pushes this. Landlords "May Sell or Stop Renting" . The worst would be they stop renting, then the unit sits vacant sending a message to all.

People did you NOT learn from the Daycare/Preschool shortage. All caused by one fee and regulation after another. What? Are you thinking that doesn't effect you because your kids are grown or you had none. Well think again! Check out the new tax everyone is sharing to help burden daycare cost.

Sandy hit the nail on the head when she said "it might be just one unit in a Seniors home which helps to mitigate burgeoning property tax burdens" She also nailed it when she stated Do NOT Assume!

I see a lot of assuming and or their clueless on the landlords cost and what it entails to be a landlord. To the comment that "rent is already ridiculously high" It always has been! That's because it is Chittenden County. Everything in Vermont is ridiculously high, Why because VT provides so many free services. Check out what number Vermont is for taxes and cost of food and living out of all of the United States.

The comment "tacking the responsibility on the renter seems far beyond reason". It boils down to this "if that cost increases the Landlords cost into a loss than the landlord has no choice but close it down". How many people out there would go to work and pay the company there? For people to expect the landlord to absorb the cost, well you are asking them to pay for someone to live there.

Andy's ice cream analogy was an Excellent Example. It is straight common sense. (something we see very little of) It clearly said "this cost will be past on" People don't blame the landlords put the blame where it really belong. On the handful of landlords that don't maintain their apartments OF which The State of VT has covered and has been for decades, so to the tenants who were in a bad situation it was either not here in Vermont or you didn't check out Vermont resources. They have it covered.

Let those tax dollars take care of those landlords , NOT once again having the law abiding citizen (in this case Landlord) pays for their actions! (bad landlords) As for the comment "Never lived as a tenant". Think again, we weren't born with a silver spoon in our mouths, Sandy said it in her statement best "seniors homes". Keep in mind many of landlords Parents were from the depression we were brought up recycling back than, although it was called "reusing". Our parents recycled before the word was out.

Tammy asked a question that I to want to know the answer to. Why isn't this being dropped"? What part of NO do you NOT understand? The N or the O? It was overwhelmingly opposed" Why another meeting?

Speaking of these meetings, Are they free? City of Essex please put on FPF the entire cost that is entailed in these meetings. From the rental of the buildings or is that free? to anyone who is being paid to be their right down to clean up and parking.

Are refreshments being brought in for the council? Or worst yet supper? The only free part I know of from government meetings is the people who attend on their time. Your not paying the public and at this point it looks like your not listening to Public either.

Do you all remember the merge votes, one after another. I asked this question back than still no answer. That is "The majority said NO! Why are you having another vote. I was corrected that those votes were not from our tax dollars. Maybe not the Village property tax. I never did get a straight answer. I have a real hard

time believing all those votes were free to us. Unless postage, paper, peoples time for those votes were all free. If that is the case educate us. Please don't tell me it is Federal or a Grant. That still cost us unless you don't pay Federal or State income tax. Nothing in this world is free!

Is this the beginning of one meeting after another until you wear people down, or until that handful of people gets their way?

Finally for the person who wants to point out any "freudian slip" in my post.

I'd like to meet you. Last I knew there is no Perfect person on this earth other than Jesus and look what they did to him.

Comment 2.14 - FPF Post by Jacob Smyth on Jan 30, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4447](#)

As I've been catching up on the local drama of the rental registry debate, I couldn't help but crack a chuckle at something a local landlord said... it read

"How many people out there would go to work and pay the company there? For people to expect the landlord to absorb the cost, well you are asking them to pay for someone to live there."

To that I say...my friend YOU are the company. And a tenant is NOT your worker. The tenant is your customer. And unless you run a shady business, then the customer should get exactly what they pay for. In this scenario it's livable housing. You should turn a profit when you supply the service you advertise in entirety. If a rental unit is up to code and deemed safe to live in, perfect! You're all set. And if you have to tack on an extra \$10 a month to the rent to make up for the dreaded \$120 annual fee....well as a renter myself I know paying an extra \$10 a month to ensure where I live won't harm me is A-OK with me.

If your rental unit isn't up to code and is not safe to live in, then why are you renting it? If you can't afford to fix up a property to a livable level before renting it out for other people to live in, then you can't afford to have that property. Simple as that. I don't own two cars. And if I did own two cars, but I couldn't afford to put brakes in the second one...then I probably shouldn't own the second car. ESPECIALLY if the only person using that second car is someone other than myself. I think the same goes for properties.

If you can't afford to upkeep two, then don't own two. Especially if you're putting other peoples lives in the center of the second. It's very concerning the lack of care some landlords show towards their tenants the way talk in some of these posts. Please remember tenants are people, not monthly wire transfers.

Comment 2.15 - FPF Post by Sandy Dahl on Jan 30, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4448](#)

Apparently you don't understand economics and supply and demand. Essex Junction has a lot, a LOT of older housing stock. Probably quite a few of these homes have second units. I fix the things that my tenant asks for. But if some inspector comes in and tells me that I'm going to have to rip out and replace a staircase or replace windows or a door that will cost me several thousands of dollars, I'm going to have to think very hard about how I'm going to come up with that payment. Ultimately it will be reflected in a monthly rent. That's how monthly rents are determined. Expenses, depreciation, maybe something to set aside for future repairs, and a reasonable return on investment. What if all these inspections call for repairs that require a tenant to move out? What then? Where are they going? It will fall on the landlord to find alternative housing, and pay for that alternate housing. I am not a non-profit business, nor a state entity which puts people up for free in motels and hotels. Nor am I one of those four landlords that own close to 50% of Essex Junction's rental housing. I'm just trying to ease the burden of property taxes on my retirement income. Don't make it harder.

Comment 2.16 - FPF Post by Rolenda & George Corrow on Feb 2, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4451](#)

We the people of the City are STILL waiting on you to answer the questions that have been asked repeatedly by many .

Why are you not answering them? Are you hiding something? Do you not know the answers?

Are you hoping people will drop the issue and you can once again slip in something the majority of the City does not want without us knowing? Than you can say "to late, it is a done deal?"

The Rental Registry questions still unanswered by you the City Council are listed below. Please answer them to us the Public on FPF. Where they were asked and were all still waiting.

Questions:

Is there another meeting regarding the Rental Registry. If yes, When is it?

If yes, Why are you having another meeting when clearly the Majority said NO to it at the first meeting.

How much does it cost to have a meeting? Who is getting paid to be there? From the beginning to the very end including clean up.

Is the City budget paying for the Council to have refreshments or worst yet supper prior to the meeting?

This additional cost per unit are you including the owners part of the house charging a permanent resident \$120 a year to live in their home. They aren't renting from themselves they are carrying a mortgage on their home that happens to have an apartment in it. So their landlord would be their mortgage company. You should be charging the mortgage company for their residents.

Some people may think the above statement are way off base, well what you have presented for the rental registry is way off base. It looks like you took pieces of Burlington & Winooski's registry and threw one together for the City of Essex.

These questions are just a few we are waiting answers for and we want them before you have another meeting on the Rental Registry.

The City Council is supposed to be there for the People of the City, You work for the people. You don't dictate how the City will be run. The City is all the Peoples. Why are you not listening?

Comment 2.17 - FPF Post by Bob Howard on Feb 3, 2024

[Essex Junction – No. 4452](#)

Yes we do need questions for rental registry answers by the city council.

[City Council President Raj Chawla posted a response on FPF to the above questions on Feb. 5, 2024]

Comment 3.1 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Bridget Myer

Bridget Myer spoke in support of a rental registry, noting that she owns a rental registry in Winooski. She said that they have established a rental registry in Winooski and that the quality of rental housing in Winooski has improved tenfold since then. She said that there is substandard housing in Essex Junction and that a rental registry would improve housing quality for everyone. She said that the Fire Department seems the best-equipped to handle inspections, which is how it occurs in Winooski. She said that she hopes this program is self-supporting.

Comment 3.2 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Andy Lawrence

Andy Lawrence said that one of the City's biggest problems is the cost of living for renters and non-renters and said that this would be an extra cost and that he is a landlord of one unit attached to his house. He said that there could be value for larger landlords with more units, but said that he does not support it.

Comment 3.3 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Jess Wislowski

Jess Wislowski said that small-time landlords will be the most impacted financially and that many of them are near retirement age and that income from a unit is potentially what is allowing them to be able to retire. She said that these units are also some of the most affordable units on the market. She asked what types of code changes will trigger an inspection, since State code requirements change often.

Comment 3.4 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Taylor Wessels

Taylor Wessels said that all people deserve safe housing and that people don't rely on complaint-driven enforcement for cars or licenses and shouldn't rely on it for something as important as housing. He said that proactive enforcement is the most equitable way to ensure safe housing.

Comment 3.5 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Jeff Rubman

Jeff Rubman spoke as the owner of the Autumn Pond development. He spoke about the various inspections that the development must go through every year already, including a sprinkler system inspection, fire alarm inspection, fire extinguisher inspections, boiler room inspections, and elevator inspections. He said that this addition inspection would add \$50,000 to their cost per year, which they would pass on to their tenants. He spoke about the difficulty of implementing this inspection system for a development with units. Brad Rubman also noted that the revenues from this are estimated to be more than what it would cost to implement, so that should be looked at.

Comment 3.6 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Lydia Kenney

Lydia Kenney expressed concern that this fee would be passed on to renters, and said that it should be prevented from being passed on to renters.

Comment 3.7 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Lee Barnett

Lee Barnett spoke against this proposal, citing the massive gentrification that has occurred in Winooski, and said that this is a power grab by the government. He expressed concerns about the hidden costs of this, saying that they will likely be passed on to renters.

Comment 3.8 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Buddy Gammal

Buddy Gammal agreed with Lee, saying that there are mechanisms in place to ensure safety already. He said that landlords who agree with this will register but those who don't agree with this won't, therefore making the inventory inaccurate, and noted that this seems like an extra level of bureaucracy with no added benefit. He noted that he did not receive a postcard or notice of this, despite being a landlord in the Junction.

Comment 3.9 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Meg Armstrong

Meg Armstrong spoke as the owner of two units at Whitcomb Farm and spoke against this proposal, given that there are regulations in place at the state level. She said there is no reason to implement additional regulations at the Village level, and that the costs will ultimately be passed on to the tenants and will lead to higher rental costs. She said that there could be a situation where property is bought and rental units within it won't be available to rent for the first three months after the sale, given the time that would be needed for the inspection and processing.

Comment 3.10 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Michael Meehan

Michael Meehan spoke in opposition to this proposed ordinance. He said that while he agrees with improving rental quality, this is already in place at the state level. He said he has issues with a complaint-based system, given that he has had neighbors who make false claims about what he has done to his home. He said that renters have all sorts of mechanisms of protections from the state. He expressed concern about implementing a system with opportunities for corruption and that wouldn't solve the City's housing problems and would ultimately be a waste of taxpayer resources.

Comment 3.11 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Cindy Provost

Cindy Provost said that she owns two properties in Essex and used to own property in Burlington (where they have had a rental registry for some time). She said that she is opposed to this and that it will only increase costs for tenants and for landlords. She said that landlords have a difficult time as it is, both ensuring that buildings are up to code and dealing with all of the tenant issues that they have. She said that landlords have no recourse because tenants have all of the rights.

Comment 3.12 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Mike Hopwood

Mike Hopwood spoke as a landlord in Essex Junction. He said that there is a lot of data around how many rental units exist in Essex Junction but that there is no data on how many complaints have been made to the City by renters. He said that this will be a serious cost to landlords that will be passed on.

Comment 3.13 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Cecilia Polansky

Cecilia Polansky and John Herman spoke against this proposed new regulation, as landlords in Essex Junction. Mr. Herman urged the Council not to add this regulation and expressed concern that it could also open the door for corruption.

Comment 3.14 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Richard Smith

Richard Smith expressed concern about how this would be staffed and spoke as a resident and landlord. He noted that there is already a state-based complaint system up and running, but that this would create an additional system at the local level at an additional cost, which will be felt by landlords and passed on to tenants. He also said that if this is housed in the Fire Department, it would create a safer community for all residents (not just renters), because it would allow for a position that is there 24/7 instead of there on an on-call basis.

Comment 3.15 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Diane Stevens

Diane Stevens said she is not in favor of this proposed program. She said that the ordinance has too many grey areas and that it doesn't make sense to put so much pressure on the landlords, as they can only absorb so much.

Comment 3.16 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Skip Lamore

Skip Lamore spoke as the owner of a small duplex in Essex Junction, saying that they have a young family of tenants and that they keep costs down in order to try and help them out. He said that this regulation will only push costs on to tenants. He said that increasing these costs will only decrease the supply of housing. He also asked for more information on the criteria for inspection. He said he opposes this proposal.

Comment 3.17 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Al Parrella

Al Parrella spoke in opposition to this proposal, saying that it is purely financial. He said that many Section 8 tenants have an extensive inspection program already. He said that he previously owned units in Burlington but sold them to avoid their rental registry regulation. He said that this is in direct opposition to affordable housing.

Comment 3.18 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Brett Grabowski

Brett Grabowski spoke as a property-owner in Essex Junction. He spoke in opposition to this proposal, saying that it will increase costs for landlords that will be passed on to tenants. He said that this proposal also duplicates what is occurring at the state level. He said that many units are already subject to extensive inspections. He asked why the City would develop a rental inventory and for what purpose.

Comment 3.19 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Elton Ernest

Elton Ernest spoke as a resident and in opposition to this proposal. He said that this feels like an attack on homeowners by the government, and that they are being accused of having poor-quality properties. He also spoke about stigma around short-term rentals. He noted that this proposal would be inflationary.

Comment 3.20 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Kris McEwing

Kris McEwing spoke as a property manager in Essex Junction, and spoke in opposition to this. He said it is attempting to solve an issue that doesn't exist, and would duplicate activities already performed at the state level. He said that this will increase the cost of housing.

Comment 3.21 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Sean Handy

Sean Handy spoke about a situation in which he had a tenant with hoarding tendencies who couldn't close their windows and ended up with frozen pipes, which ultimately led to him being fined as the landlord. He said that this proposal could ultimately lead to more evictions and increased cost of housing, since landlords will be penalized for tenant-driven unsafe situations and that is their only recourse. He said that tenants already have a number of mechanisms to lodge complaints about the condition of their housing.

Comment 3.22 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by John Provoncher

John Provoncher spoke as a former landlord, current renter, and resident, as well as a plumber. He said that Essex Junction seems like it has high-quality rentals already, and that it doesn't seem like there is a good reason for this proposal other than for financial reasons.

Comment 3.23 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Darryl Montague

Darryl Montague spoke as a property-manager in Essex Junction and said that this is a solution looking for a problem. He asked how many actual issues there have been related to rentals in Essex Junction. He said that this inspection activity is already covered by the state and asked why duplicate it at the local level.

Comment 3.24 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Joan Williamson

Joan Williamson spoke against this proposal, as the owner of an accessory apartment. She said that she will pass the costs associated with this on to renters if this is passed. She also expressed concern about being fined for non-compliance if contractor work is needed, given that there is a lack of contractors and long wait times for contractor work as it is.

Comment 3.25 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Rick Knapp

Rick Knapp spoke as a landlord in Essex Junction, and spoke in opposition to this proposal. He said that the costs will be passed down to the tenants. He said that he would not buy rentals in Burlington or Winooski due to the regulations.

Comment 3.26 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Deb Billado

Deb Billado spoke as a landlord in Essex Junction. She said that she had previously owned property in Burlington but spoke against their rental registry, saying that it felt like it was just another way for the City to make money, and that this proposed ordinance feels similar to her. She said that this would only pass on costs to the people who can least afford it, especially given the housing shortage and affordability issues throughout the state.

Comment 3.27 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Steve Eustis

Steve Eustis spoke against the proposed ordinance, advising the Council not to create a bureaucracy if it is not needed. He asked how many complaints about rentals have been lodged with the City that haven't been resolved in a timely manner through the state process. He said that if the data doesn't show that there is a problem, it's difficult to support.

Comment 3.28 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Jeff Goodrich

Jeff Goodrich agreed with those who have spoken prior to him, in opposition to this proposal. He said he does not agree with those who have spoken who hold a monopoly of rentals in the area. He asked whether potentially increasing impact fees has been a consideration, if the City is looking for more revenue. He also said that this does not seem like good timing, given potentially significant increases in property taxes coming from Montpelier. He said that this proposal is trying to fix something that isn't broken.

Comment 3.29 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Kevin Collins

Kevin Collins said that any proposal that makes things more complicated for the landlord ultimately makes them more complicated for the tenant. He said that he does not think many tenants would support this, given that these costs would be passed on to them.

Comment 3.30 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by John Giroux

John Giroux spoke against this proposal, saying that it will lead to more regulation, higher cost, and duplicated effort. He said that often, tenants are the ones who cause the problems and destroy the property, and that landlords have no recourse other than to evict. He said that this proposal is wrong.

Comment 3.31 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Bruce Wisinski

Bruce Wisinski said he owns units in Burlington and spoke about his experience with inspections in that City. He said that the inspections are not consistent and are a hassle, which is frustrating for landlords, and seems like a waste of time. He said that there are already avenues for tenants to lodge complaints. He said that Vermont is a renter state rather than a landlord state in terms of rights, and that many small-time landlords are one mortgage payment away from losing their properties.

Comment 3.32 - Jan 24 2024 Public Hearing Comment by Harlan Smith

Harlan Smith spoke as a renter in Essex Junction. He said that he is not for or against this proposal, but expressed concern about costs being passed on to him as a renter. He asked how many complaints have been made in the City of Essex Junction. He noted that many renters do not know how to fix issues in their apartments, and that this added cost could almost be like insurance, in that they know that their apartments are safe and have been inspected. He said that the rental registry may be good from a safety standpoint, but that he has questions about the fees and the process around inspection.

Comment 4.1 - Sample comment from Facebook by Beth Abustan

I suppose I could wait for the meeting on Jan 24 , HoweverI need to voice my thoughts when the mood strikes , concerning the proposed plan on rental housing and inspection program needs addressing , I live in a 4 plex and there is also a 6 plex, our former landlord whom passed away last year (now in a trust by his son)rented my unit on a handshake , some of the renters here have been here for over 30 years , our on-site handy man is very helpful and doesn't charge for changing a lightbulb . My rent is very low compared to adverage rent (non section 8)and for 13 of my 15 years has never been raised. I understand the lofty goals of having a registry, ie taxation , and the inspection, but if you are already in section 8 they come once a year to inspect, if there is a problem about an apt there is the Vermont information handbook for tenants and landlord , the fee for a one time resistry i can understand but yearly it would only trickle down to the tenant who is already hard pressed.

Comment 4.2 - Sample comment from Facebook by Tim Miller

Every landlord I've talked with about this, is just passing the fees on to their tenants. So, yeah. Great!

Comment 4.3 - Sample comment from Facebook by Colin Camisa

Tim Miller as a landlord myself I will be forced to do the same to my tenants who are struggling already. If the city is trying to generate tax dollars how about we start by stripping CVEXPO of their non profit status. Imagine the tax revenue the city is losing out on that could be used for infrastructure and schooling etc...

Comment 4.4 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jacey Fountain

Colin Camisa \$120 per year, you will have to pass that on to your struggling tenants?

I'm trying to tread lightly here and not make assumptions, but \$120 seems like a pretty low cost of doing business, no?

If you have a 4-unit apt, that's \$480. For a struggling person/family renting, that's probably about 1/4 of a months rent. For a property owner, seems like that should be a bit easier to cover?

Again, I'm sorry if I'm making incorrect assumptions. I haven't had the opportunity to get to own property.

Comment 4.5 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jacey Fountain

I have conflicting opinions of this.

On the one hand, having a registry and regular inspections would mean that the shady slumlords would be found out, and it would be harder for them to get away with not maintaining their units.

On the other hand, as a renter, I really don't need/want somebody coming into my house "regularly" to inspect. I have pets, and don't work from home, so that would be a huge inconvenience to have to coordinate a day to have them somewhere else while someone inspects my apartment when I am not home! Or if I had to be home, would I have to take time off work to fit their schedule??

I am fortunate to have a good landlord who is communicative and maintains my unit. So this would just be an annoyance to me when I could just easily message him if there's something needing repair.

However, I do understand that everyone is not as fortunate as me and they might have been trying to get their landlord to fix basic necessities for months to no avail.

A tricky topic. I might actually attend my first city meeting for this one.

Comment 4.6 - Sample comment from Facebook by Susan Ficklin

Would be interested to hear more about the rationale. I don't believe it is to make money. Given the number of complaints I've seen here about rental units, I suspect it is to provide some protection for renters.

Comment 4.7 - Sample comment from Facebook by Tiffany Wayne Martin

Susan Ficklin same. To me on the surface it sounds like it will not be to the renter's benefit but I am sure the intent behind this was probably for the benefit of the tenants.

Perhaps there are factors I am not aware of

Comment 4.8 - Sample comment from Facebook by Drew Perry

As someone who currently has a landlord that genuinely cares about the property and it's tenants I'm worried this is going to drive those landlords out and open those houses to big companies who don't care into owning those units and jack the rent even higher. I'm very opposed to this personally and think the city should look into alternate methods to ensure renter safety and promote safer living conditions like maybe making the inspection a requirement before the signing of a new lease and every 5 years for long term leases

Comment 4.9 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jillian Rouleau

I read this as I myself as the tenant will have to take the \$120 fee as a rent increase for landlords to do what they already should be doing. No thank you.

Comment 4.10 - Sample comment from Facebook by Nikki Pickle

First off that's an enormous invasion of a renters rights to have some rando come survey your house "inspecting it" telling your landlord potentially to do hundreds of not thousands in repairs to your apartment that will stress everyone out... Who comes up with this

Comment 4.14 - Sample comment from Facebook by Brian Letourneau

Essex junction city council yet again ruining the city. The state already programs in place. Just another money grab from the crooked city. The fee will just get passed on to the tenants.

Comment 4.15 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jess Lloyd

I agree. I was on the call where the person who concocted this idea presented it. It felt like a grad-school project or something. It was .. an idea. Then the council asked a TON of question, and it was like they just kept poking hole after hole after hole in this proposal.. the registry requires the city of essex junction to hire a FT Inspector for 94K - 120K a year, a benefits-carrying skilled engineer type person, so like NOT CHEAP, and the cost per year for that and their all-day door to door work for what amounts to less than 5000 units .. seems silly. The asking fee far dwarfs the costs of other city registries in VT (like Brattleboro's which is \$75 for 3 years) and there is zero 'incentive' for landlords to do it (in Brattleboro it makes them eligible for low-interest loans and ability to make affordable housing ADUs and stuff) and it terribly invades the space and rights of the renters (renters, every year, would need to coordinate with a door-knocking inspector and let them inside and let them poke around all the outside areas). I don't understand all this money-spending/new initiatives we're doing in Essex Junction right now! I thought we wanted cost savings?! I do not see how given how tiny our rental base is (it really is not huge) this could possibly be a "net win!" for Essex Junction. It feels like a make-work task that someone did to justify their own job.

Comment 4.16 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jolita Brilliant Sakmanaite

I'm not opposed to inspection but opposed to extra cost which won't help with keeping rents lower, we already pay tax, 120 per unit is unjustified

Comment 4.17 - Sample comment from Facebook by Richard Smith

Next Wednesday, the 24th, is the meeting for the Rental Registry, and I have some concerns about the poor planning of this registry.

This is long; I ask for the best info. Please read all of it, but the TLDR version is the City's current rental registry plans to buy duplicate software and vehicles because of poor planning. This could be avoided if they followed the path of other local Cities that have moved this registry and Health enforcement to their Fire Departments.

As a community member, I am tired of the amount of waste within our departments, and in this current plan, there are tens of thousands of dollars of waste. I am speaking as a private citizen on my personal account but have a deeper understanding of some systems I will discuss due to my role as a volunteer. These words are my own and are intended to drive a conversation about waste and budgeting. I agree with the need for better inspection and believe the City could be more responsive to concerns than the State can be. As a landlord who owns two rental units, the City will charge \$120 per unit; I am fine with additional inspections, just the additional financial waste caused by the large government without due diligence.

I would like everyone to read through the City Council Meeting minutes from 08 Nov 23 and 10 Dec 23 to get more background. While I took the time to read through the stated meeting minutes and the pending budget, I found that the Community Development Director Yuen discussed the need for \$30k software and an additional city vehicle to conduct the program. When asked about the vehicle, the Meeting Minutes from 11/08/23 line 301 has his answer as "...It will be important for the safety and professionalism 301 of this staff person to have an official municipal vehicle that can clearly be identified as such." When Councilor Chawla was worried about software cost the Meeting Minutes from 11/08/23 starting on line 303, "Community Development Director Yuen said that there are less costly alternatives, but that the most expensive option is more automated and would save on staff time (being mindful that the position would only be working half time in code enforcement and would have other duties). Again, due to where I volunteer, there are cost savings in both of these areas.

When this plan was built, much of its structure appears to have been taken from how the City of Winooski runs its program. The one item the City plans to do differently is to run the program outside the Fire Department. Guess which agency has officially marked safety vehicles, has a software system that allows for planning, scheduling, and completing building inspections, and also has building and code enforcement as part of it? If your guess was the Community Development Department, sadly, and currently, you were wrong. It is your Fire Department. Suppose this plan goes through as drawn up by the City Staff and Community Development Director Chris Yuen. In that case, they will have \$30K in software and another vehicle, plus maintenance and other associated costs.

In an earlier quote you will read this position will have additional duties. One is the Health Officer role for the City of Essex Junction. In South Burlington and Winooski, the fire chiefs who run the code enforcement are their city's respective health officers.

Why would a fire department have software that manages the properties within their Jurisdiction? The department has to do NFIR incident reports, manage training hours, manage members' certifications, manage maintenance schedules on their equipment, and also be able to run analytics on call history. Additionally, the system allows the department to maintain a record history of addresses within the community. Allowing them to track past calls, track and identify hazards at the property, document fire protection systems and their locations, and maintain contact information for building owners/managers to call when they interact with their buildings. Using a single system makes the chances of data getting outside of the system less likely, and during emergency response, responding Officers and Firefighters have this information available to them. This could assist them in understanding building occupancies and hazards during an emergency response. That is likely why other cities and towns have left these responsibilities under their fire departments.

Comment 4.18 - Sample comment from Facebook by Tim Miller

Richard, since I'm sure you've read through it. Is there anything in the proposal to inspect residential units that are owner occupied?

Like a single family house where rooms are rented out.

I'm not even sure there's a way for the city to know about these types of rentals. But since there's a push for a registry from city government, in my opinion, they should absolutely be included

Comment 4.19 - Sample comment from Facebook by Andy Lawrence

The only thing I want to add... we keep talking about how landlords need to go to this meeting. Landlords are not the ones who are going to pay for the fee or any resulting mandated renovations. Tenants are the ones who need to go to this meeting and vote it down, unless they really think meaningful violations are in place in their buildings, but even then they need to realize this will mean higher rent.... it can't be otherwise, so tenants, you've got a lot to think about here and your vote is critical. Just as an example, I have just one unit. Let's say an inspection shows that a \$20,000 reno is required We keep it clean and we keep it safe but that doesn't mean they won't dig up something that's out of spec. My tenant will have to pay for this... we don't have this sort of thing built into the rent (we are below market value to make it possible for people who aren't rich to live here). Maybe we can pass this along to the tenant over 5 years to soften the blow, but that would be about the best we could do. So, \$333 per month increase in that case for the rent. For a landlord already charging as much as the market can bear, there might not be much room to increase, but even then the overall market will go up. Now, no question if a place is genuinely unsafe something needs to be done.

Comment 4.20 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jess Lloyd

You were great at the hearing and I very much hope you keep being heard. I can see how this might be a good program but - as you were the only one to mention this - if Yuen says Priority 1 is safety of residential renters - why aren't we also worried about safety of non-renters? We are one of a few states of majority over-65 and their oldest in the nation. If this is about care and safety and well being - about a town that puts wellness and health first - where does that apply to our solo-dwelling elderly?

Comment 4.21 - Sample comment from Facebook by Richard Smith

After reading through all of the Planning Commission Meeting minutes on the rental registry you get a much clearer understanding of the work that was done. But it also becomes clear that Community Development Director had a belief that because this was a health officer position first it couldn't be with the Fire Department. The Health Officer for Winooski, Colchester, South Burlington, Barre City, St. Johnsbury and St Albans City who each have a rental registry are the Fire Chiefs or a fire Marshal all part of

the Fire Department. Of note Winooski and St Albans are paid on call volunteer fire departments like our city.

Comment 4.22 - Sample comment from Facebook by Andy Lawrence

The first rental registry meeting is now behind us.

Public opinion, including mine, was overwhelmingly opposed to adding the registry, inspection fees, and periodic inspections (i.e., the whole proposal).

It sounds like another hearing will occur. I'm not sure why; it was very definitive feedback which would seem to indicate the proposal should just be dropped, but since it is not being dropped yet, I thought I'd add my opinion to the subject here.

Here are my thoughts on it. Essex Junction is known for many things. One of them is high housing costs and low housing availability. NOT one of them is large swaths of slums. Not once was a data-based reason for the need for this proposal mentioned. The best I can guess is that we have the word "city" in our town name now, and we want to do what "cities" do, and that's have regular inspections?

We need ideas for bringing housing costs down, not ways to make costs higher. Its really kind of surprising to me that the ink is still drying on the separation, which we did to bring our costs down, and one of the first things we try to do is bring costs up.

Tenants, please understand: this is about you. Like any business, landlords cover their expenses by charging rent. There is no such thing as costs of any business not being passed to the customer and housing rental is no exception. If you are selling ice cream for \$1.10 with costs of \$1.00, and then your cost goes to \$1.10, you have to at least go up to \$1.20 or find another profession, that's just how it works. So, tenants, if you prefer your rent costs to not increase unnecessarily, put in your voice to put this proposal down. Please know that if your apartment has an issue that the landlord refuses to address, there is already a complaint system in place. If for some reason that complaint system is not working, an inspection in 5 years isn't going to fix that.

Some of the "pro" proposal arguments I heard (there weren't many):

--"We've heard of problem such as an elevator that was down for 60 days". So you think an inspection in 5 years will help this? Nope. You need that fixed ASAP, not in 5 years. (Now, working on ways to encourage more people to become elevator technicians might be good! I wouldn't be surprised if the lead time to get a tech is closer to 90 days)

--"Burlington and Winooski have had inspections for years". Anecdotally, I've heard maybe a couple horror stories in 20 years in Essex Junction, but far far more in Winooski and Burlington. We have not been given any non-anecdotal information.

--That's about all I can remember for "pro" arguments from last night's meeting.

Comment 4.23 - Sample comment from Facebook by Jen Ellis

When I owned a rental property in Winooski, the “inspections” were a joke. We paid every year, but only got inspected once every 4 years. The things they asked me to fix were often not necessary and they overlooked major things every time. It was total nonsense. I had to pass the cost on to my tenants because I was always just trying to make ends meet and I kept the rent generally low- but the added expense of the registry was a deterrent to renting the property. Im so glad I don’t own that property any more. I can think of far better ways the city could be using it’s time and resources than creating this useless inspection.

Comment 4.24 - Sample comment from Facebook by Ethan Goodkind

Mold, CO leaks and inefficient rentals can be health hazards and cost more money to the landlord and tenant. This is something I experience 1st hand on a regular basis. Documenting these and holding landlords (and tenants) accountable is a step in the right direction. Maybe this fee (\$250-500) could be paid directly by the tenant so there is no up charge. The city could offer income based assistance. Efficiency Vermont also has incentives and tax rebates that may apply.

Comment 4.25 - Sample comment from Facebook by Kris Smith

As someone who owns a home that’s located next to a rental that’s been in absolute disrepair for years (and should be condemned) and which has been reported to the city by multiple neighbors with no improvement made, I’d be in favor of some sort of formal way to make landlords more accountable.

Comment 4.26 - Sample comment from Facebook by Christine Patterson

So landlords showed up in droves to the council meeting to oppose accountability. I’m glad the council understands the volume of voices isn’t representative of the renter’s experience.

If you are making money off of someone else’s livelihood then there should be accountability measures in place. Every job dealing with the human condition has one. Landlords should be no different.

There are people I know in this city renting abysmal spaces having to contact VT legal aid, etc. Especially now during housing crisis, renters face homelessness. It’s a complete imbalance of power that one human should not have over another. Accountability is overdue. Perhaps there are areas it needs to be tweaked but just not wanting oversight is pretty one sided.