

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2009

Good News for Renters!

Yesterday the City Council unanimously passes MLGW rental ordinance. Today's CA has a nice write up, which I've pasted below. But first, here are a few details from the City Council meeting that the story didn't cover:

Landlords will be given five days notice when an inspection is done because a computer determined high energy usage in the apartment complex. MLGW will then meet with the landlord to go through any units to determine if there is an issue.

The owner would be notified in the computer generated high energy usage notification. (Multiple units, not just one, trigger the high energy usage notification.) The owner can contact the tenant in order to get into a particular unit. However, tenants can also call MLGW directly for an inspection.

After the landlords are notified, they are given a period of time to make repairs. They are only cited if the Environmental Court determines that they are in violation of the ordinance.

New Memphis law requires rental properties be more energy-efficient

By Daniel Connolly, Amos Maki

Landlords must now protect tenants against major energy-wasting defects such as leaky pipes and holes in walls, according to new ordinance passed unanimously by the Memphis City Council on Tuesday.

The ordinance, proposed by Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division president Jerry Collins won praise from council members and community activists.

"I see this ordinance as an extremely positive step," said Webb Brewer of Memphis Area Legal Services, a nonprofit law firm providing help to the poor.

Some landlords had criticized the ordinance at a meeting last year, but there was no opposition Tuesday. The two sides had reached agreement on the language of the ordinance.

"I think it shows the way government is supposed to work," said Dexter Muller, senior vice president for community development at the Greater Memphis Chamber, which represented some of the city's landlords.

He said he had been meeting with Collins on the issue since January

2008.

Collins, who pushed the ordinance as part of a broader effort to encourage Memphians to save energy, said MLGW had made several changes to the ordinance after talks with landlords and that the result was a better law.

"I'm very encouraged," he said. "It looks like hope is on the way for people that live in rental properties that have very high utility bills."

Some Memphians live in rented housing that lacks basic amenities such as a working furnace, Collins has said. The result is that they sometimes resort to methods such as using a gas stove to heat a building.

This wastes energy and leaves the tenant stuck with a big utility bill.

Emily Trenholm, executive director of the Community Development Council of Greater Memphis, said she had seen clients with rent as low as \$200 with a utility bill as high as \$700.

"I think it's great that MLGW met with community-based organizations as well as the landlords to reach a consensus on this," she said.

Collins said the new rules would focus on "the most egregious problems you would find in rental housing."

Here's how the new rules will be implemented starting later this month:

MLGW will start advertising the new rules through mailings to customers and other methods and tenants will start filing complaints.

Based on these complaints, three or more MLGW inspectors will check problem properties. The inspectors might check some properties for other reasons.

Collins said he believes the inspectors will carry out "thousands" of inspections per year.

In most cases, the inspectors will aim to tour the property when the landlord is there.

The landlord will have time to correct the problem. If he or she doesn't correct it, MLGW will take the matter to environmental

court. The court can fine the landlord \$50 per day until the matter is resolved.

MLGW would also charge a \$25 inspection fee.

Following discussion with with landlords, MLGW agreed that it would only levee this fee if the property owner was found liable in environmental court.

Maintenance list

Here's a partial list of the energy-saving items required under the new city ordinance:

- Windows must be properly glazed.
- Pipes and wire entries into the building must be sealed properly from the outside.
- Attics must be insulated.
- Heating and cooling equipment (if the landlord provided it) must be working.
- Plumbing must be free of leaks.

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