

Mandatory Rent Registry

Establish an annual reporting requirement for property owners or managers regarding rents and other information during the annual business license renewal process



The Impact

This registry informs the city council about the rental market, housing trends and housing stock throughout the city, allowing transparency within the housing market to increase.

Description

A rent registry requires property owners/managers or landlords to annually report data regarding residential rents and other relevant information to a citywide database. All residential rental properties, including single-family homes and accessory dwelling units, are required to report. This information will allow the city to collect, monitor and analyze actual rents throughout the city in order to make fair and well-informed decisions regarding affordable housing.

In El Cerrito, Calif., property owners are required to join the registry when their business license renewal forms are due, ensuring that there is one clear deadline for all landlords. Failure to comply with the policy will result in legal enforcement and fines.

Once a city council approves an ordinance requiring a registry, all landlords will be required to keep an up-to-date and accurate account of their properties and tenants. This information will be compiled by the city, and a community development manager will report on it every year to the city council.

Where It's Been Implemented

The El Cerrito City Council adopted an ordinance in May 2019 that requires an up-to-date rent registry. Cities such as Los Angeles and San Jose have adopted similar ordinances, but no jurisdictions in San Mateo County have taken this step.

Key Drivers

Wrongful eviction, although illegal, is still a significant problem in California, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area. Landlords are often eager to get rid of tenants with reduced rents due to rent stabilization so they can increase profits. One of the fraudulent methods to wrongfully evict tenants is the "owner move-in eviction." In this case, landlords can evict tenants if they, or a close relative, plan to move into the property and stay for at least three years. However, after evicting the current tenant, the landlords often rent to a new tenant at a much higher price.

Oakland, Calif., is one city that has tried to combat this practice. In 2017 city officials noticed a strong spike in owner move-in evictions. They amended their housing laws to require the signing of paperwork confirming the move-in. However, in 2019, an investigative team at the NBC Bay Area obtained Oakland's eviction records under the California Public Records Act and found that only 16 landlords submitted the required paperwork following an owner move-in eviction, despite 71 owner move-in evictions occurring. The city's lack of cohesive enforcement did not provide enough data to make the rent registry useful.

Key Factors for Success

In order for a city council to support an ordinance requiring a registry, there should be strong renter support. Automated processing systems that are integrated across government branches make the rent registry process easier and require fewer staff hours. In addition, there must be good communication between program administrators and developers of the tracking system.

Key Obstacles

Landlords and owners of rental properties are likely to argue against a registry because of the program fees. There also is added expense for staff who compile the information, monitor the registry and report it to the city council each year. Enforcing the ordinance requires labor, too. In a large city like San Francisco, establishing and maintaining a rent registry is estimated to cost \$1.7 million to \$3.6 million annually, according to a 2019 report from the city's budget and legislative analyst.

Timeline to Implementation

In El Cerrito, the rent-registry ordinance was adopted in May 2019. One month later, the policy went into effect. By July 1, 2022, the City of El Cerrito launched an online portal where all documents must be submitted, removing the paper burden. Ideally, the rent registry should be developed months ahead of time and then rolled out to be on the same schedule as the business license renewal program.

References and Resources

- Aissia Ashoori, Affordable Housing Analyst for the City of El Cerrito, aashoori@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us, 510-215-4361
- [El Cerrito Ordinance No. 2019-03](#)
- [Alameda Rent Ordinance Regulation 20-01](#)
- [Los Angeles Rent Registry](#)

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