

Two landlords face hefty city fines

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GREENSBORO — Two Greensboro property owners are facing hefty fines for renting properties without a city rental certification and other code violations.

The fines are among the first six issued for violations of Greensboro's rental unit law, which requires apartments and rental houses to be certified by a city inspector before a tenant moves in.

The law was passed five years ago, but landlords had until Jan. 1, 2009, to get units inspected.

The sizes of the fines — \$7,250 for a house in Glenwood and \$4,325 for a property off Randleman Road — shocked the property owners and the rental unit certificate of occupancy board.

The board was scheduled to hear appeals from the property owners Thursday but delayed the hearings until October after learning Thursday morning the owners had not been informed about the size of the fines.

Board members said they were unaware that the fines would be so steep and asked that they be reduced.

The law has been promoted by housing advocates as a way to ensure that there is safe rental housing in the city.

Since the law went into effect in January, the city has revoked certificates on four properties that were found in bad condition — a fine of \$250. Three other properties are being investigated for violating city housing codes.

Only two property owners have been fined for renting housing that has not been certified — Reno LLC, owner of the home 800 Hertford St. in Glenwood, and Virgil Spaulding, trustee of the property at 705 W. Terrell St. off Randleman Road.

In mid-July, city inspectors found the house on Terrell Street in violation for improperly installed and maintained electrical wiring and a water heater that did not function properly, among other code violations noted on the inspection report.

The house was repaired by late August, but the city still fined the owners \$200 for renting it without a certificate plus \$75 a day for every day before the problems were fixed — \$4,325.

"It was hefty," Vernon Spaulding, of Spaulding properties, said of the fine. "It was off the chain."

The house on Hertford Street was rented May 1 without a certification, according to the inspector's report. The inspector found windows painted shut, electrical issues and other violations, according to a city report.

The problems were fixed, but Reno LLC owner Andy Clark was fined \$7,250 by the city.

Spaulding and Clark appealed the inspectors' decisions. The board members agreed to delay the hearings.

The appeals will be the first that the rental unit board, appointed by the City Council, hears under the law.

Board members were surprised at the fines.

"These fines are going to be between 10 to 25 percent of the value of these houses," board member Bryon Nelson said.

"We'd rather that money go toward fixing that property," board member Todd Rotruck said.

The board asked city staff to re-evaluate the way they calculate the fines. City Attorney James Dickens said the city could give the property owners 45 days to get the problems fixed.

Under that policy, the fine on the Terrell Street property would be \$950 and the fine for the Hertford Street property would be \$3,875.

Board members said they would consider asking the City Council to reduce the daily fines.

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