



Hinojosa doesn't want new apartments in Hammond

Hammond rental registration hike passes

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HAMMOND | The Hammond City Council has adopted a controversial increase in the annual amount landlords pay to register rental units.

The ordinance, which drew the owners of some of the city's largest apartment complexes to the meeting, bumps the \$10 annual fee to \$80 per unit for owners not residing in Hammond and \$20 for Hammond residents with rental properties.

"We have a crisis with uninhabitable buildings," said 1st District Councilman Mark Kalwinski, who sponsored the ordinance, which was adopted on a 6-3 vote. "We have people living in a bad way in the city of Hammond."

The ordinance will provide the city with an estimated \$800,000 in revenue when it's applied to registrations next year, City Controller Bob Lendi said. While not specifically called for in the ordinance, the additional dollars are intended to be directed toward the budget of the city's Inspections Department.

City Attorney Kris Kantar said the ordinance makes fairer the responsibility of funding the department. Currently, rental registration pays for 6 percent of the department's budget, but rentals take up 80 percent of employees' daily duties, Kantar said, adding that dollars also are lost when police have to spend additional time controlling problems at apartment complexes, rather than patrolling residential streets.

Fourth District Councilwoman Kim Poland said last year she directed \$500,000 in casino-generated revenue for extra police patrols in South Hammond, which she said was necessitated by the residents of rental homes.

"Single family rental units have been the demise of the Fourth District. You can trace these thugs back to these homes. A lot of our blocks are totally unsafe," Poland said. "The good people of Hammond have to pay for your trash that lives there."

Rental unit owners, though, said instead of forcing all landlords to pay more up-front, the city should do more to penalize derelict landlords.

While the new \$80 fee goes into effect next year, a \$250 annual fee for all new apartments in the city, floated by 6th District Councilman Homero "Chico" Hinojosa, took effect immediately. Hinojosa said that fee could unofficially cap the number of apartments in the city.

"If you want to build apartments, go to another city," Hinojosa said. "We have enough apartments in Hammond, especially in Hessville."

Peter O'Brien, vice president of Arnel Inc., which owns some of the city's largest complexes, said having two separate fees could do exactly what Hinojosa suggested and more.

"If the intent was to prevent outside investment in the city of Hammond, I think you may have been very successful," O'Brien said.

Lesser increases fail

Fearing legal retribution for having different fees for the same service depending on residency, Councilman at-large Robert Markovich unsuccessfully proposed a flat \$30 fee, then a flat \$40 fee. Only Markovich, 6th District Councilman Homero "Chico" Hinojosa and Council President Anthony Higgs supported the lesser fee.