

## Nuisance ordinances may return to Surprise City Council again

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Two controversial ordinances meant to crack down on crime and blight at residential rental properties in Surprise could reappear on a council agenda within a month.

Surprise City Council has postponed a vote on the ordinances three times since they were first introduced in October.

Officials have made updates to address concerns raised by housing-industry advocates who criticized the city for failing to consult them as they worked on the ordinances.

One of the proposed ordinances would toughen a 2007 measure by increasing the city's ability to penalize property owners whose tenants commit crimes or repeated code violations. It would also make it easier for owners to evict problem renters. The second item would increase the cost of annual business-license fees for residential rental properties in Surprise.

Consultants representing groups such as the Arizona Multihousing Association and the West Maricopa County Regional Association of Realtors immediately took issue with two items: a proposed increase in fees to \$400 from \$100 and discounts for rental property managers willing to allow police inspections of their properties once every three years.

Both items have since been changed, said Jeff Mihelich, who oversees the city's newly combined departments of Economic Development and Community Development.

If the ordinances are approved by council, rental property owners would pay \$200 for a business license beginning in January and receive a \$100 reduction if they use lease addendums that bar criminal activity and attend a crime-free housing seminar once every three years, Mihelich wrote in an e-mail response to questions from *The Republic*.

The changes came after months of meetings with homeowners association leaders and consultants.

Amanda Wright, who represented the West Maricopa County Regional Association of Realtors during recent gatherings with Surprise officials, said the West Valley realty group will no longer formally oppose the ordinances but won't support them either.

Unclear language related to potential violations remains a sticking point for the group, Wright said.

But consultant Courtney LeVinus who represents the Arizona Multihousing Association, the Arizona Real Estate Investors Association and the Arizona Rental Property Owners & Landlords Association said she's not sure where her groups stand on the ordinances.

LeVinus said Surprise officials have not provided her with new information in months despite her efforts to reach out.

Mihelich, who would only respond to questions from *The Republic* via e-mail, said he plans to share updated information with LeVinus before the ordinances appear on a Surprise City Council agenda.

Paul Briningstool, president of the Ashton Ranch Homeowners Association, said he is glad to hear the ordinances may be up for a vote once again.

Briningstool said he contacted District 3 Councilman John Williams months ago to discuss his concerns about tenants in his neighborhood.

"Having such a high number of rentals in my association, we find that they don't have a vested interest in the property and they are the ones that are tearing up the amenities in the association," he said.

He believes renters have damaged furniture at Ashton Ranch pools, scattered trash and kicked in doors.

"The majority of renters are really good people," he said. "But just like life in general, there are one or two bad apples who ruin it for everybody," he said.

If the proposed ordinances are approved by

council, Mihelich said he is confident residents such as Briningstool would benefit.

"Ultimately, the Enhanced Rental Accountability Program should lead to more educated community, increased property values and safer neighborhoods," he wrote.