



PRIORITY: HOUSING STABILITY

25% of Syracuse residents move at least once a year. Frequent forced moves have damaging financial and health impacts on residents and neighborhoods, especially on school-aged children. Over the past year, various City departments have developed initiatives to start to achieve three specific housing stability goals:

Improve Housing Quality



Bureau of Administrative Adjudication (BAA)

The BAA was established by local law in 2017 to adjudicate property code violations. It allows the City to improve compliance with property codes by issuing tickets and levying fines and penalties against property owners that have unresolved property code violations. The BAA is launching in April 2019.

Proactive Rental Registry Inspections

It is estimated that only 30% of rental properties are registered with the City, and may not be up to code. The city has started proactively reaching out to rental property owners to register them. Property owners and tenants are notified of their scheduled inspection at least one month in advance. If the owner cannot make their assigned inspection time, they can reschedule. During its pilot phase, this program resulted in interior inspections of 67% of properties contacted. Of those, 67.5% passed their inspections on the first try.



Property Improvement Project Recognition

The City of Syracuse plans to recognize landlords who take on substantial renovations and upgrades to their properties, and invest in their neighborhoods. Property owners are nominated by code inspectors, and receive a letter from the Mayor and are featured on the City's social media channels.



Rent Escrow Account Program (REAP)

The City is undertaking a feasibility study for a Rent Escrow Account Program. In the program, if a property has a code violation beyond its compliance date, the tenant has the option to pay their rent to an escrow account at the City rather than their landlord until the violation is corrected. The escrow account can be withdrawn from to make property repairs. After violations have been addressed, the rent balance is returned to the property owner.



Reduce Evictions



Eviction Prevention Case Management

The Department of Neighborhood and Business Development conducted a pilot program with the Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) and Clinton Plaza Apartments, in which proactive intervention is conducted when tenants are within days of falling behind on their rent. Case workers initiate contact with tenants and coordinate with the landlord to get them back on track and avoid eviction. In the pilot, eviction petitions have been reduced by 75% at SHA, and Clinton Plaza Apartments has saved over \$100,000 in eviction and turnover costs. The City is working to expand this program to other complexes.

Startup in Residence (STIR): Crowdfunding for Emergency Housing Expenses

The City is working with Vite Labs, a blockchain startup company, to create a crowdfunding platform that allows community members with financial means to contribute money to a pool, that residents-in-need can access to cover emergency housing expenses. Donors receive SyraCoins for contributing, which can be redeemed at participating local businesses as coupons.



Rental Registry and Eviction

The city and local stakeholders are identifying and developing mechanisms to require that landlords have a valid rental registration before filing for an eviction. Some ways to potentially accomplish this include developing a local court rule, or making a change to Syracuse's rental registry legislation.



Connect Residents with Resources



Healthy Housing 101

In partnership with the Greater Syracuse Land Bank, the Division of Code Enforcement has started hosting annual Healthy Housing 101 events, in which inspectors lead tours through a house and point out common health and safety issues. These open house style events target service providers, tenants, and landlords, and aim to educate them on housing quality. The first event was hosted in 2018 and had over eighty attendees with a 100% satisfaction rate. The next event will be June 7, 2019 from 11am - 2pm.

SCSD Healthy Housing Information Campaign

The City conducted a campaign to connect parents to housing information and resources. Housing packets were sent home with almost 11,000 SCSD elementary students. They included safe and healthy housing handouts, free smoke detector information, and Code Enforcement resources.



Rental Property Grading

The City is working with Syracuse University iSchool students to try to develop an online property grading system for Syracuse properties. The grade would be point in time and based on code violation history. This tool allows renters to access housing information and make informed decisions about where to move and rent.



Tenant Advocacy

The City is supporting local partners in the development of a tenants' union that can help tenants understand their rights, connect them to legal representation, file small claims for security deposits, advocate for "just cause eviction," and pursue housing quality lawsuits against property owners.



Many of these initiatives are complete, while others are still in progress. The Innovation Team is looking forward to continuing to work with City Departments and community partners to drive these initiatives forward.