

Revamp Plan for the City of Frostburg Rental Housing Program

1. Program Evaluation & Assessment (January-February 2025)

Objective: Understand current challenges in greater detail, identify areas for improvement, and create a foundation for future changes.

Action Items:

- **Conduct an Audit:** Perform a full program audit to assess the current state of compliance, housing quality, and service delivery.
 - Focus on identifying unlicensed properties and understanding why owners are not complying.
 - Review the inspection process and identify bottlenecks or inefficiencies, such as inconsistent reporting or the reliance on third-party inspectors.
- **Collect Tenant & Landlord Feedback:** Hold structured feedback sessions (surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one meetings) with landlords, property managers, and tenants. This will help gather more qualitative insights on program challenges, such as understanding maintenance responsibilities, licensing concerns, or lead certification issues.

Key Metrics for Audit:

- Number of unlicensed units
 - Inspection compliance rates (e.g., property conditions)
 - Number of temporarily vacant units (1 year or less)
 - Number of permanently vacant units (1 year or more)
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2. Streamline Operations with Technology (January-February-March 2025)

Objective: Improve efficiency, transparency, and user experience for both tenants and landlords while reducing administrative burden.

Staff Recommendations:

- **Switch to the Rental Housing Module in iWorQ:** Transition from the Licensing module to the full Rental Housing Module in iWorQ, ensuring that all aspects of the rental process, from licensing to inspection tracking, are integrated into one system.
- **Cost:** Additional \$1,500 per FY (pro-rated for FY25)
- **Current Expense:** \$11,700

- **Implementation Steps:**
 - Train staff and inspector(s) on the new module.
 - Ensure the system supports online payments, electronic submission of licensing renewals, and submission of inspection reports.
- **Introduce Online Payment & License Renewal Systems:**
 - Enable online payments for rental licenses via the iWorQ platform to enhance convenience for landlords and ensure faster processing.
 - Create an automated renewal system that sends reminders to landlords before their licenses expire, reducing non-compliance.
- **Centralize Inspection Reporting:** Bring inspections in-house by transitioning the part-time Code Enforcement Officer to be full time and conduct rental housing inspections after completing necessary training and obtaining the appropriate certifications. This will help improve consistency in reports and ensure that all inspection data is recorded digitally in iWorQ.

3. Rental Housing Ordinance Updates

Objective: Update the Rental Housing Ordinance to improve the program's effectiveness, strengthen compliance, and ensure the ordinance aligns with best practices and community needs.

Staff Recommendations:

- **Review and Update the Ordinance:**
 - Revise the existing Rental Housing Ordinance to address gaps and incorporate new policies that reflect current housing challenges and program goals.
 - Key updates may include stricter enforcement measures, clearer guidelines for rental property inspections, and updates related to lead certification compliance.
- **Review Process:**
 - **First Reading:** Present the proposed updates to the Mayor and Council for the first reading and initial discussion. The Council will review the changes, make recommendations, and potentially suggest modifications.
 - **Second Reading:** After reviewing any changes from the first reading, the Mayor and Council will conduct a second reading for approval. Any final adjustments or clarifications will be made during this phase.
 - The Ordinance will become effective **20 days after adoption**, allowing time for public notice and compliance preparations by landlords and tenants.
- **Public Engagement:**
 - Inform the public about the proposed updates through public meetings and outreach materials to ensure that landlords, tenants, and other stakeholders are aware of the upcoming changes and have an opportunity to provide feedback before the final approval.
- **Key Changes in the Ordinance:**
 - Introduce stricter penalties for landlords who fail to comply with registration or inspection requirements.

- Ensure all rental properties are held to consistent safety and maintenance standards, with stricter timelines for compliance.
- Update the lead certification requirements, ensuring alignment with state regulations and reinforcing the importance of tenant safety.
- Bring the rental housing inspector position in-house.

Timeline for Updates:

- **February 2025:** Review and finalize proposed ordinance updates.
 - **March 2025:** Present updates for first reading to the Mayor and Council.
 - **April 2025:** Present updates for second reading and adoption.
 - **May 2025:** Ordinance goes into effect 20 days after adoption.
 - [Please note that this timeline is flexible and can be adjusted, so long as the new regulations can legally be in effect no later than July 1, 2025.]
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Phase II Goals & Opportunities:

Please note that all items listed below are optional and open for discussion. Staff is seeking guidance on which options the Mayor & Council wish us to pursue in FY26 and beyond. Items listed as "High Importance" will be prioritized.

1. Strengthen Program Compliance

Objective: Increase program compliance among landlords while improving the overall quality of rental housing in the City.

Opportunities:

- **Increase Licensing Enforcement:**
 - **High Importance:** Implement a more robust system for tracking and following up with landlords who fail to license their properties by the April 1 deadline.
 - Use the iWorQ platform's reporting capabilities to send automated reminders and track the status of each property.
 - Establish penalties for non-compliance, but also create an appeal mechanism for landlords who believe they are exempt (e.g., family members occupying units).
 - **Improve Housing Quality Inspections:**
 - **High Importance: Incorporate Consistent Inspection Standards:** Update Rental Housing Inspection Checklist to ensure consistency, particularly for issues like deferred maintenance and property upkeep.
 - **Enhance Code Enforcement Officer Training:** As the Code Enforcement Officer position expands to handling inspections, ensure that they are properly trained and certified in rental housing inspection standards and lead certification requirements.
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2. Education & Outreach Campaign

Objective: Improve understanding of the program's requirements and benefits, and encourage greater participation among landlords and tenants.

Opportunities:

- **Create Educational Materials:**
 - High Importance: Update existing materials and develop easy-to-understand resources (brochures, website content, FAQs) for landlords and tenants that outline their rights and responsibilities.
 - Focus on tenant education about property maintenance, including common responsibilities (e.g., cleaning, reporting maintenance issues) and how to protect their security deposit.
 - Inform landlords about the licensing process, how inspections work, and the benefits of complying with the program.
 - **Host Workshops &/or Webinars:**
 - Offer in-person or virtual workshops for landlords to learn more about property maintenance, lead certification, and the inspection process. This can also be an opportunity to address any concerns or questions about the licensing process.
 - Host tenant workshops that cover their rights, maintenance responsibilities, and how to interact with landlords effectively.
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3. Improve Housing Quality

Objective: Address the aging housing stock and ensure that properties are well-maintained, safe, and habitable for tenants.

Opportunities:

- **Incentivize Property Improvements:**
 - Work with landlords to encourage property upgrades. Consider offering small financial incentives or linking improvements to tax rebates.
 - Explore potential funding sources (e.g., state or federal grants) to provide low-interest loans or grants for property improvements, especially for landlords of aging rental properties.
- **Introduce Quality Standards:** Implement a tiered system for rental properties based on their quality. Landlords whose properties are deemed to be of higher quality (e.g., based on inspection results) could receive certain incentives or recognition.

- Properties that consistently fail inspections should be flagged for more frequent inspections and may face penalties or additional fees until improvements are made.
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4. Develop a Performance Evaluation System

Objective: Measure the success of the program and make data-driven decisions to continuously improve.

Opportunities:

- **Define KPIs (Key Performance Indicators):** Establish key performance indicators to track the success of the revamped program.
 - **Compliance Rate:** Percentage of licensed properties vs. total rental properties.
 - **Inspection Compliance Rate:** Percentage of units that pass inspection on the first visit.
 - **Landlord Participation Rate:** Percentage of landlords who attend educational workshops or engage in outreach efforts.
 - **Annual Program Reviews:** Set an annual review of the program's progress to evaluate KPIs, adjust strategies, and incorporate feedback from tenants and landlords.
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5. Funding & Resource Mobilization

Objective: Secure additional resources and funding to support program improvements.

Opportunities:

- **Explore Grant Opportunities:** Research state and federal housing grants to support property improvement programs, tenant education, and housing quality enhancements.
 - Considerations: Grant program areas would need to be highly specific, and project criteria would need to be well defined.
 - **Consider Fee Adjustments:** Evaluate whether slight adjustments to rental license fees could provide additional resources for program enhancements, such as offering discounts for early payment or larger fees for repeat non-compliance.
 - **Partner with Local Organizations:** Collaborate with housing-focused nonprofits, local banks, and developers to explore funding or partnership opportunities aimed at improving housing stock or offering rental subsidies.
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6. Staff Capacity Building

Objective: Ensure that your staff is well-equipped to handle the expanded scope and responsibilities of the revamped program.

Opportunities:

- **High Priority: Training for Existing Staff:** Provide additional training to the team, especially the Code Enforcement Officer, on topics such as rental housing inspection standards, lead certification tracking, and customer service in dealing with landlords and tenants.
 - **Role Definition:** As the part-time officer transitions into full-time housing inspections, clearly define their role, responsibilities, and expectations.
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Timeline & Phases

- **Phase 1 (0-6 months):** Program audit, staff training, iWorQ platform transition, Ordinance updates, educational materials creation, and outreach campaign launch.
- **Phase 2 (6-12 months):** Full implementation of in-house inspections, compliance enforcement, and online payment system. Begin tracking KPIs.
- **Phase 3 (12+ months):** Continuous improvement based on KPI results, expanded outreach, and development of property improvement incentives.