



Council Agenda Item

Meeting Date: January 20, 2026

Agenda Item: Rental Housing Update

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Introduction (Brief Introduction)

As of June 2025, the City of Whitewater had 2,464 parcels or 1,110.36 acres of land designated as residential properties. Owner occupied residential properties make up 1,544 parcels or 608.95 acres of land within the City. The City has 920 parcels that include rentals units 507 of which are owned by residents within the City. Of the parcels that include rental units 647 parcels are single family homes and 273 are multifamily homes that include three or more units. Of all residential properties within the City 2,051 are owned by residents of the City of Whitewater, while 413 have a mailing address for the owner outside of the City of Whitewater. 304 of rental unit owners only own one rental parcel. 74 rental unit owners own two rental parcels. 104 rental unit owners own between 3 – 9 rental parcels. 6 rental unit owners own more than 15 parcels with the largest rental unit owner having 59 parcels.

Discussion (Enter the who, what, when, where, why)

On average approximately 418 parcels were transferred each of the last five years within the City of Whitewater. Due to the constant change of ownership of parcels and the number of parcels, even with the City's efforts to have a rental registration program, we have not been able to obtain 100% accurate information of the residential status of each property within the City as any information obtained will become outdated by the time a presentation on that information is able to be provided. Therefore, in order to provide as accurate information as possible the City obtained GIS data from the State of Wisconsin which is updated annually in June in order to provide a snapshot of accurate information.

In addition, this report is based on the following assumptions.

1. Parcels were sorted into owner occupied or rental. This was based on if the owners mailing address matched the physical property address as listed in GIS. If they matched the property was designated as owner occupied if they did not match it was designated as rental.
2. Properties were verified within the rental list by comparison to the City's rental registration list.
3. Properties were defined as multi-family if they are comprised of a single parcel with 3 or more residential units in one parcel.

Based upon this review of records, approximately 54.6% of the parcels identified as potential rental properties have been verified to be on the rental registration list. Some of the properties that are not on the rental registration list are owned by individuals who have registered other properties.

While this information can place some information into perspective, should the City want more accurate information regarding the parcels in the property, we will need to download the updated data in June 2026. Using that data, we can update our records and then complete a search to determine if any properties have been transferred since the data was forwarded to the state of Wisconsin. Once we have an accurate database of the parcels within the City, letters could be sent to the properties that are believed to be rentals, but that do not have rental registration notice on file. The letters could warn about the ordinance violation and fine of not

less than \$100 nor more than \$200 for each day the property is rented without being registered. Hopefully the letters would provide information about the missing rental registrations. If the property owner does not respond to the letter, a review of the parcels would need to be completed, likely by Community Development Department, to verify that the property is a rental. Once we have sufficient information about the parcel that it is in fact a rental a citation could be issued should the property owner not complete the rental registration. If the City issues a citation it would be for 1 day of violation meaning the fine amount would be \$100 - \$200.00. Alternatively the City could utilize a long form complaint, which would issue a new fine from at least the date of service through the property owner registering their property, or the court issuing judgment. It should be noted that while courts will issue forfeitures when the law is clear and authorizes such a forfeiture, with most property maintenance, zoning, and registration codes courts are more likely to seek compliance with the law, instead of issuing substantial fines.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS – COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

(Dates, committees, action taken)

On August 5, 2025 Common Council requested additional information about the City's efforts and options to reduce or prevent conversion of single-family homes in the City to rental units. A report was provided to the Common Council on September 16, 2025 identifying actions the City has taken towards this project and City Staff was asked to evaluate the accuracy of the Rental Registration ordinance as well as to determine accurate information about the status of owner occupied versus rental properties within the City of Whitewater.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

To better monitor and update the rental registration records, a review of the June 2026 State records should be completed in June and compared to all rental registration records the City currently has. From those records, we should attempt to update the presumed rental parcels by reviewing real estate transaction records for recent sales. Once the presumed rental parcel list is completed any property that is listed and not registered would need to receive a notice advising them of the City ordinance, and requesting they comply with the requirements of the ordinance. The notice should also advise them of the fine for failing to comply. For any property that has not complied by July 1, 2026, Community Development Department would need to conduct an investigation of the parcel to try and determine if it is owner occupied or rented. If Council decides to proceed with this process, it should be noted that this will take a substantial amount of staff time as some residents may refuse to provide information about the owner of their house or may not know who the owner is. For those properties that are rented, and fail to register a citation could be issued, which may assist the City in obtaining the registration information during court proceedings. Alternatively, a citations could be issued each day until the property owner is in compliance with the ordinance.

While this process would ensure that the City's rental registration list is accurate and updated, that list is only able to provide the City with the name and contact information for either the owner of the parcel or a property manager for the parcel. The other option would be for the City to use social media to request tenants of properties report if their rental unit does not appear on the City's rental registrations list. This would require making the rental registration list or portions of it public, and would be dependent on how well known the site becomes.

ATTACHMENT(S) INCLUDED

(If none, state N/A)

1. Map of Residential Properties in Whitewater.