

Terrace: Regulating Housing Dignity Is Far Easier Than You'd Think

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Monday, July 08, 2013

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How to Research a Slumlord!

In this era of hyper neoliberalism, we are so used to tax-cutting governments chopping regulations off the books to allow the Blessed Free Market to guide human existence.

This caveat emptor mentality, however, means lots of vulnerable, marginalized and economically precarious people are hung out to dry.

In BC, the neoLiberal government has spent a dozen years stacking the deck in favour of landlords and undermining supports for tenants.

Add in inadequate welfare rates and disability pension rates, and a minimum wage far below the living wage and you get hundreds of thousands of people in the province suffering from sometimes grossly inadequate housing.

But wouldn't it be nice if some city decided that things like building codes shouldn't just ensure things like plumbing and electrical standards are achieved in constructing buildings.

Wouldn't it be nice if a city passed by-laws that would ensure that renters wouldn't be victimized by their economic precariousness and a slum lords' desire to make a buck from tenants living with mould, vermin, and other critical elements that are required for people to live in dignity.

You'd think, in this neoliberal era of getting the government out of EVERYthing, that it would be a herculean task for a city to enforce basic standards for living with dignity.

But it turns out, it's really quite simple. [Terrace](#), not the dehumanizing bustling Gotham of Vancouver,

has decided to do just that.

High-fives all around Terrace! You are lighting the way. And any municipality or regional district that doesn't follow should fear the righteous wrath of newly empowered citizens who can see how incredibly easy it actually is to ensure vulnerable people are one step closer to living with dignity.

After all, the gross juxtaposition of wealth and poverty in the [gentrifying downtown east side of Vancouver](#) is already making people feel uncomfortable, [to say the least](#). Now that we see that Terrace has embraced solutions, it's time for the rest of us to follow that leader!

City of Terrace gets power to fine landlords

By [Josh Massey - Terrace Standard](#)

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The City of Terrace has taken on the authority to check on the living conditions of rented dwellings without first informing the landlord and to punish with fines.

"We want to ensure that nobody's in mould, in the cold, without lights," councillor Bruce Bidgood said as city council formally adopted its Standards of Maintenance for Residential Rental Premises bylaw June 24.

"In February a person shouldn't have to wait weeks to get heat."

The bylaw contains provisions regarding light, heat, refrigeration, ventilation, water supply, as well as services and utilities.

Most of the provisions follow a template provided by the province, however one is uniquely tailored to Terrace, enforcing ventilation standards to reduce mould—a rule to “maintain the building envelope to prevent the accumulation of moisture in the walls or drafts through the wall system.”

Heat must be maintained at a minimum temperature of 22 degrees Celsius, and hot water in a rental unit at a minimum temperature of 45 degrees Celsius, and taps and toilets must always have running water. A second bylaw passed first, second and third readings on June 24 and will change several city ticketing rules, giving both the city bylaw officer and building inspectors the power to fine landlords for not maintaining proper living standards. The bylaw raises city fine limits from \$25 to \$100. In the case of maintenance standards violations, landlords can be penalized for up to \$2,000, with a maximum of \$100 maximum per day, per problem.

Councillor Stacey Tyers said she was excited to see the bylaw passed. “It gives tenants another avenue if the landlord is grossly ignoring the quality and conditions of the unit,” said Tyers, a poverty law advocate for Terrace and District Community Services Society.

“What is really shocking is how few cities have standard housing bylaws,” she said. While most

council members supported the recommended bylaw, there was discussion over the rights of landlords to know when their buildings are being inspected.

“I’m suggesting that a simple phone call to the landlord or the landlord’s representative would avoid some confusion down the road ... there should be some contact with the landlord because they have rights too,” said councillor Brian Downie.

City development services director David Block said there would be communication before a fine or strongly worded letter was issued to a landlord.

“I don’t believe the city of Terrace has ever been accused of over-applying its bylaws. It won’t become a witch hunt for landlords,” Bidgood added in an interview later.

There are many aspects of housing maintenance that are not covered by the new bylaw.

Other complaints, like major structural problems, are regulated according to the city’s building bylaw.

The city does not have the power to force a building owner to fix a structural problem, it can only restrict habitation.

During discussion of the new bylaw, Tyers noted that having a rental dispute heard by the provincial residential tenancy branch could take up to six weeks which another councillor, James Cordeiro, said would be too long if dealing with a malfunctioning furnace in the middle of winter.

[- City of Terrace gets power to fine landlords - Terrace Standard.](#)