

# Healthy Rental Housing Action Plan

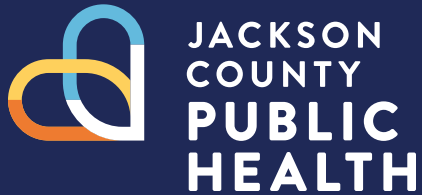
FOR EASTERN JACKSON COUNTY

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POWERED BY



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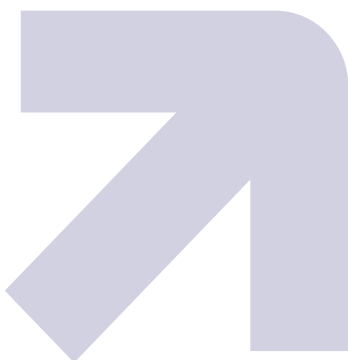
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# Background

**In June 2023**, Jackson County Public Health hosted its first-ever Community Health Summit, bringing together local stakeholders to review community health data, discuss issues facing their community, and vote on the community health challenge that should be prioritized over the next five years. At the summit, participants identified affordable housing and economic stability as one of the most pressing community health concerns in eastern Jackson County. Following that convening, stakeholders, community members, and other partners have met regularly as part of InCoLab (Innovation + Community + Lab), a collaborative coalition that works to address poor health outcomes through collective action. Over the past two years, the Housing and Economic Stability Lab has explored healthy rental housing policies as a key strategy to ensure access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing in eastern Jackson County. This document presents an action plan outlining both evidence-based and emerging policies aimed at improving the health and safety of rental housing.

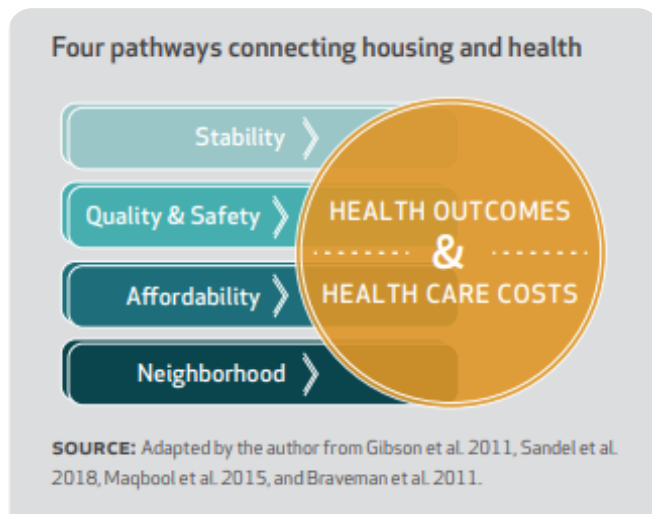


## PART I

# Introduction to Safe and Healthy Rental Housing

### Housing and Health

Housing is one of the most critical social determinants of health. Research identifies four primary pathways through which housing affects health: stability, quality and safety, affordability, and neighborhood (Braveman et al., 2011; Taylor, 2018). While these pathways are deeply interconnected, this document focuses primarily on the quality and safety pathway. This pathway encompasses the environmental and structural conditions within a home that contribute to health outcomes.



**Figure 1.** Image showing the four pathways from Taylor, 2018.

Common housing quality issues include water leaks, pest infestations, mold or mildew, and poor ventilation, the latter of which can lead to respiratory problems, most notably asthma. Exposure to extreme high or low temperatures can also trigger adverse health events such as cardiovascular incidents among older adults. In addition, lead exposure in the home remains a serious risk for young children, causing irreversible damage to the brain and nervous system (Braveman et al., 2011; Taylor, 2018).

Beyond these health effects, many homes present physical safety risks such as exposed electrical

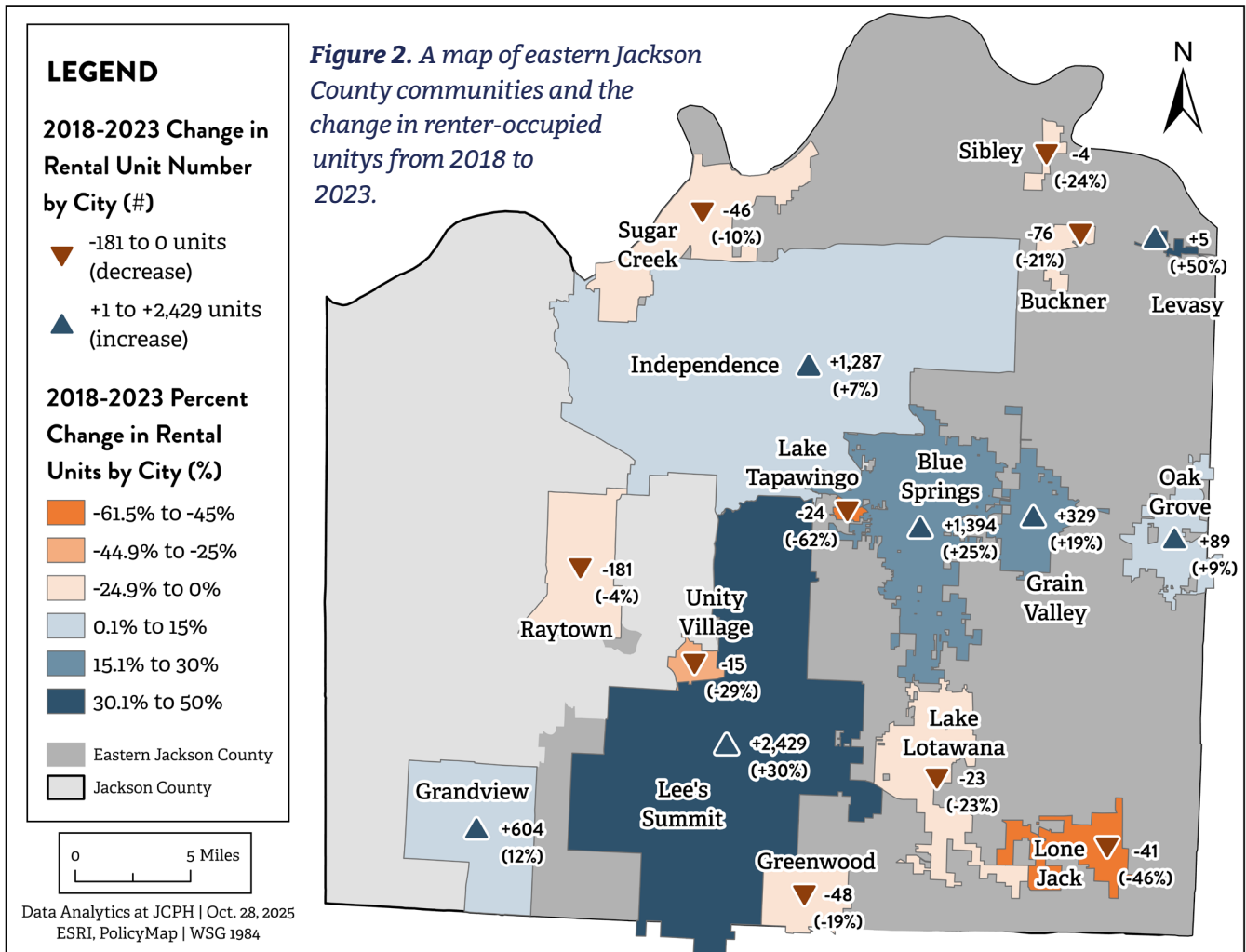
wiring, missing or nonfunctional smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and stairs without hand railings or other fall hazards (Braveman et al., 2011).

Although health and safety hazards can occur in any home, they are often more prevalent in rental housing. Renters are more likely to live in older units that require more maintenance, face financial constraints that limit housing choices, and have less control over addressing conditions within their homes (CityHealth, 2021).

### Rental Housing in Eastern Jackson County

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the Kansas City metro has seen an increase in renting households, as home prices continue to climb. Conversations with local city staff indicate that some new single-family developments originally intended for owner-occupied housing will instead be offered for rent, as high interest rates and housing costs place homeownership out of reach for many would-be first time homeowners (various city staff, personal communication, August 2025).

Eastern Jackson County, in particular, sits at an interesting crossroads. Two of its more central communities, Raytown and Grandview, are largely “landlocked” and must pursue upward or infill development. Historically considered more affordable than the broader metro area, both cities have seen significant property acquisition by corporate owners, including both single- and multi-family units. City staff noted that because of their limited space and older housing stock, both elected officials and residents are eager to see new, denser multi-family developments. Staff also emphasized the importance of attracting new business and economic growth, viewing market-rate and luxury residential projects as one strategy to achieve that goal (R. Knisley, personal communication, August 15, 2025; R. Dunn, personal communication, August 21, 2025).



By contrast, the more outlying communities of Blue Springs and Lee’s Summit continue to grow rapidly with some room to expand outward. While large multi-family developments often face public opposition, city officials recognize the need for more diverse housing options, including higher-density developments (various city staff, personal communication, August 2025), and even push back against the negative stereotypes surrounding rental housing (Baird, 2024). Notably, Blue Springs and Lee’s Summit are experiencing increases in renting households, while Grandview and Raytown have remained relatively stable (see Figure 2).

Altogether, these trends point to a strong and evolving rental housing market across the Kansas City metro, including in eastern Jackson County suburbs. This mirrors patterns seen nationwide, particularly in Midwestern regions once considered affordable. A strong rental market, however, also amplifies the power imbalance between tenants and landlords – leaving tenants with less leverage over their rent prices and housing conditions (Center for Community Progress, 2024). As a result, effective code enforcement and tenant protections become even more critical to ensuring safe and healthy housing for all residents.

## Code Enforcement and Rental Housing

Jurisdictions have long used building and residential code enforcement to address substandard housing. “Code enforcement” generally refers to local governments’ enforcement of property maintenance standards on existing buildings and properties (Center for Community Progress, 2024). These could include International Code Council’s (ICC) International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), other locally adopted codes, or state laws. Typically, residential buildings pass a series of inspections to receive a certificate of occupancy after initial construction or renovation, but are only inspected again if someone submits a complaint. An inspector then investigates the complaint, and issues a citation to the property owner, with the threat of a civil or criminal penalty if the violation is not addressed within a set time period.

This traditional approach to code enforcement is often ineffective, failing to account for:

- low-income homeowners who lack the resources for repairs
- out-of-state property owners or LLCs that are difficult to contact
- the tendency for complaint-based systems to allow already disinvested communities to deteriorate further
- tenants’ hesitation to report violations due to fear of retaliation or displacement

Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, cities such as Los Angeles, CA, and Rochester, NY, began adopting stronger, more proactive code enforcement strategies. Over the past two decades, systematic approaches to addressing substandard rental housing have spread across the United States. At the heart of this shift is the growing recognition that housing conditions can negatively impact resident health outcomes – and that local governments share responsibility for ensuring all rental units meet minimum health and safety standards (Center for Community Progress, 2024).

In Jackson County, Independence led the way with its Rental Ready program in 2017, becoming the first city in the metro area to adopt such an approach. Kansas City followed with its Healthy Homes program in 2018, and smaller surrounding cities soon joined – Buckner in 2018, Grandview and Raytown in 2019, and Sugar Creek in 2020. These efforts show a growing regional commitment to improving housing quality and protecting tenant health, and mark an important shift from reactive enforcement towards preventative action. The following sections outline how these policies have taken shape locally – and across the country – highlighting best practices, key lessons learned, and opportunities to build on this momentum going forward.

**Note:** All cities mentioned in the following sections refer to cities in Jackson County, Missouri, unless otherwise specified.

# The Basics of Healthy Rental Housing Policies

AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLICIES DESCRIBED IN DETAIL IN THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS

## Rental Property Registration

The foundation of any healthy rental housing program.

Requires property owners to register their rental units with the city on a regular basis.

### Impact

Establishes a baseline for understanding the city's rental housing stock. Registration data allows cities to see patterns, identifying problem areas and planning for future inspection or enforcement efforts.

### Limitations

Registration alone does not ensure housing quality or compliance with health and safety standards. Without an accompanying inspection component, cities may have limited ability to verify the accuracy of registration data or to act on identified problem areas. Ensuring compliance also requires ongoing administrative capacity and clear penalties for non-registration.

## Complaint-Based Inspection Programs

A starting point for cities growing their rental inspection capacity.

Allows tenants to file formal complaints with the city if their rental unit fails to meet health or safety standards. Inspections occur only after a complaint is submitted.

### Impact

Enables cities to address problem properties as resources allow and to collect valuable data about where and what types of issues are occurring.

### Limitations

Places the burden of reporting on tenants, which can exacerbate housing inequities since lower-income or otherwise vulnerable renters may hesitate to file complaints due to fear of retaliation or distrust of the system.

## Proactive Rental Inspection Programs

The gold standard for ensuring safe and healthy rental housing.

All—or most—rental properties are inspected on a regular schedule. Cities may exempt certain properties (e.g., based on age or other criteria) or adopt a tiered system where consistently compliant properties are inspected less frequently, pay reduced fees, or receive other incentives. Complaints are still received and addressed, but no longer exclusively drive inspections. The overall goal is a decrease in complaints, code violations, and enforcement activity over time.

### Impact

Shifts responsibility for maintaining healthy housing from tenants to property owners and promotes equity by ensuring all units are routinely inspected. Results in fewer complaints and better housing quality over time.

### Limitations

Requires more city resources and staff capacity (though demand may decrease over time as more properties are consistently in compliance).

## PART II

# Getting Started: Rental Registration

Establishing and maintaining a database of rental properties is the foundation for any healthy rental housing policy. Rental registries can serve as a first step towards a more comprehensive rental license and inspection program (Mallach, 2015; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022; CityHealth, 2024). Rental registries provide essential data to the city, like how many rental units are in the city, the location of those units, the age of the unit or building, and a contact person for the unit or building. Once cities have this information, they can start to consider what type of units might be included in a more comprehensive rental inspection program. For example, cities may start by enrolling their oldest housing units in an inspection program, or might decide to exempt property owners who only rent one or two units. The data provided by a rental registry can be invaluable for cities considering a more comprehensive program (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

### ***The difference between licensing and registration:***

*Registration systems typically only require property owners to submit information to the municipality.*

*Licensing systems are more formal, and require properties to meet a basic set of standards before they can be occupied.*

### **Community Engagement**

The first crucial step for any city considering a healthy rental housing policy is meaningful community engagement. Because effective programs rely on cooperation from both tenants and landlords, their input is essential during the program design phase (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022; CityHealth, 2024). Focus groups or informational interviews are a strong starting point, particularly with key stakeholders such as small “mom-and-pop” landlords, larger landlords or property management companies, real estate associations, tenant organizations, and neighborhood associations (Mallach, 2015).

This early engagement not only helps shape a more responsive and workable policy, but also lays the groundwork for trust and buy-in among landlords and tenants. As the program is implemented, continued outreach such as workshops, trainings, or informational sessions for property owners can further support compliance, clarify expectations, and ease the transition for all parties (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

### **Registration**

For most cities in eastern Jackson County, rental registration is housed under the city’s community development department. Some cities, like Buckner, have even combined a rental registry with their existing business license or other administrative processes.

Cities should give landlords appropriate lead time to become familiar with the new requirements and submit their registration. Outreach and education materials should go out to all landlords at least six months in advance of any deadline to register (Mallach, 2015). Programs may even ask landlords to voluntarily register with the city as a starting point. This may encourage compliance and reduce resistance to a new requirement.

### **Fees**

Cities may need to fund a registry with either a small fee to register, issuing fines for failing to register, or both. Overall, one benefit of a simple rental registry is its low operative costs, so fees or fines can be kept to a nominal amount, such as \$15-50 per unit. Property owners with large buildings could be charged a discounted fee per unit, or cities could set a maximum amount for large buildings over a certain number of units. Grandview, for example, has a \$12 fee per unit in buildings with 1 – 50 units, decreasing to a \$8 fee per unit in buildings with 201 or more units, and a maximum fee of \$1800.

## Frequency

CityHealth (2024) recommends an annual registration as the gold standard for rental inspection policies, noting that either an annual or biannual frequency is considered best practice. ChangeLab Solutions (2022) notes that the frequency can be at the discretion of the municipality, and could be required only when there is a change in property ownership or management. Grandview and Buckner require annual registration of rental properties. Raytown and Sugar Creek both require updated registration every two years.

## Information Provided

At minimum, cities should require:

- Property name
- Property address
- Number of rental units
- Year built
- Owner's full name
- Telephone (daytime and after hours)
- Mailing address
- E-mail address
- Date of birth
- Driver's license number and state
- Property manager or local point of contact (if out-of-town landlord) + contact information

In the event that a property is owned by a corporation, partnership, or limited liability company (LLC), cities should require owners to provide the name and contact information of an individual representative for contact in case of emergencies or other government business. The city of Syracuse, New York, has resolved the issue of trying to confirm ownership of problem properties by requiring the business entity to provide the name, position, address, and phone number of

every officer, shareholder, partner, and member of the property ownership group, in addition to listing property managers or local points of contact (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

In addition, cities could ask for additional information such as the monthly rent, the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, the square footage of the unit, and whether the unit is currently occupied. This kind of data can help municipalities anticipate future housing needs by getting an idea of rent affordability in the area, the vacancy rate, the average age of its rental housing stock, and more (CityHealth, 2024; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). In order to preserve privacy, cities should not ask for tenant information such as their name, household size, or other identifying information (Phillips, 2020).

## Penalties

Most jurisdictions with a rental registry issue fines for landlords who fail to register. These fines range from \$25 to \$500 per day, for each day after the deadline (Aiken et al., 2024). Grandview issues a \$50 fine for the first violation, with increasing fines for subsequent violations. Raytown issues a municipal court summons, where the court can issue fines upon conviction. Some cities prohibit a landlord from listing a vacant unit until they are registered, and some prevent landlords from filing an eviction in court unless they are registered (Aiken et al., 2024; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

## Incentives

Some cities, such as Fort Collins, Colorado, have included incentives to encourage property owners to register. Incentives included eligibility for grant funding usable for rental unit repairs and, monthly prize drawings, scholarships, and access to free legal consultations (Powell, 2024). Other cities waive the first registration fee for landlords who register by the initial deadline (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

## **Compliance**

Compliance with rental registration programs varies widely across jurisdictions. A study of ten U.S. cities found compliance rates ranging from as low as 10% in Indianapolis, Indiana to as high as 70% in Trenton, New Jersey. Smaller rental properties, such as single-family homes and duplexes, were less likely to be in compliance than larger multi-unit buildings (Aiken et al., 2024). Similarly, Mallach (2015) estimated that only about one-third of landlords voluntarily comply with registration requirements without proactive outreach or enforcement by the city. While achieving full compliance is unlikely, Mallach notes that cities reaching 80–90% compliance can still operate highly effective programs.

## **Outreach**

Outreach should be systematic and proactive. Mallach (2015) recommends beginning with a mass mailing campaign to all property owners whose mailing address do not match the property address – a likely indicator of rental status. The mailing should include a clear explanation of registration requirements, deadlines, fees, and penalties for noncompliance, along with a registration form and an affidavit of non-rental status the owner can return if the property is not rented. Follow up letters should be sent to those who do not respond. Research from Newark, New Jersey, shows that this type of mailing campaign increased registration rates twentyfold (Aiken et al., 2024).

After the initial registration deadline passes, cities can create an online, publicly searchable database of all registered rental properties (Mallach, 2015). This tool allows tenants and residents to verify whether a property is registered and promotes transparency. Grandview has such a tool available on their website, providing a model for other jurisdictions. Cities can move closer to full compliance by allowing residents to report unregistered properties. When these reports are received, cities can follow up with an informational packet similar to the initial mailing, or issue fines in accordance with their local ordinance.

### Exemptions and Unit Minimums

Some localities limit the scope of their rental registration programs to properties with a minimum number of units (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022; Aiken et al., 2024). A common threshold is three or more units – CityHealth, for example, recommends this as a minimum standard for basic program implementation (CityHealth, 2024). However, cities should consider the makeup of their rental housing stock before setting these limits. In communities where single-family homes make up a significant share of the rental market, establishing a minimum unit threshold may exclude a large portion of the rental inventory and undermine the program’s effectiveness.

For jurisdictions seeking to reduce the burden on smaller “mom-and-pop” landlords, exemptions can be based on the total number of units an owner holds rather than on the size of individual properties (CityHealth, 2024). For instance, instead of exempting all single-family homes or duplexes, cities might exempt only landlords who own one or two total units, regardless of property type. This approach ensures that smaller, local owners are not overburdened while maintaining accountability for larger or corporate landlords.

Cities should consider exempting these smaller properties or landlords from registration fees, but not from the registration requirement itself. Maintaining up-to-date contact information for every rental property is essential for emergency response and code enforcement. Additionally, comprehensive registration data provides cities with a more accurate understanding of their local rental market.

Most jurisdictions also exempt certain categories of properties, including owner-occupied buildings of six or fewer units, government regulated or subsidized housing that is inspected under a local housing authority, new construction built within the last five years, mobile homes, and rentals to family members (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

***Note:** Short-term rentals, such as those listed on Airbnb or VRBO, generally fall outside the scope of these policies, though many cities have developed separate regulations to address them.*

PART III

# The Gold Standard: Proactive Rental Inspection Programs

## Rental Inspection Options

The ultimate goal of a rental inspection program is to increase the frequency and consistency of inspections on rental homes. More frequent inspections create safer, healthier housing conditions for tenants (CityHealth, 2024). Most cities currently rely on complaint-based code enforcement, in which inspections occur only after a tenant files a complaint – whether or not a formal process exists.

An alternative approach is a systematic, periodic inspection program, which evaluates rental property conditions on a set schedule before issues escalate into health or safety hazards. This type of program, often called a Proactive Rental Inspection Program, prioritizes prevention rather than reaction (CityHealth, 2024; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022; Abdelazim, 2024).

## Proactive Rental Inspections

Proactive rental inspection programs are considered the gold standard when it comes to improving the safety and quality of rental housing (CityHealth, 2024; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Because inspections occur routinely rather than

only after complaints, code violations are caught earlier – before they become costly or dangerous. Importantly, proactive programs remove the burden from tenants, who may otherwise face retaliation or fear losing their housing under complaint-based systems.

Research shows that complaint-based inspections are less effective at addressing code violations and ensuring compliance (Schilling et al., 2022; Way et al., 2013). For example, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, operates a complaint-based program and found that only 7% of its rental units are inspected annually (Schilling et al., 2022). On the other hand, cities that adopted proactive inspection programs in the early 2000s have seen substantial improvements in code enforcement activities:

- Sacramento, California – From 2008 to 2013, the city’s dangerous building cases decreased by 22% (Schilling et al., 2022).
- North Carolina – A statewide study found that cities with proactive rental inspections saw landlords bring their properties into compliance more quickly, a decrease in residential fires, and a reduction in code complaints.
  - For example, Greensboro, North Carolina saw a 61% decrease in housing code complaints within two years of implementation, and a 77% decline eight years after implementation (Way et al., 2013).
- Los Angeles, California – From 1998 to 2005, the city inspected more than 90% of the city’s multifamily housing stock and brought over 1.5 million code violations into compliance (Schilling et al., 2022).

### 3 components that make a program a “Proactive Rental Inspection” (PRI) Program:

- Registration or licensing
- Routine inspections
- Enforcement of code violations

### **Starting with a Complaint-Based System**

Cities who do not have the resources to take on a more comprehensive, proactive inspection system can consider starting with a rental registration program in conjunction with a complaint-based inspection program. Under a complaint-based system, cities will need to provide tenants with a formal process for filing a complaint, often through an online form or a dedicated contact person whose name, email, and phone number are publicly accessible. Even if cities feel they are not ready to handle a high number of complaints, they can start with a triage approach, prioritizing the complaints that include the highest risk to health or safety.

In addition, city staff should start tracking data and looking for patterns in submitted complaints. They may find that a high number of complaints are coming from a single property, a single landlord, or a specific neighborhood. This is important data to collect for when the city is ready to design and implement a more comprehensive, proactive inspection system.

**Note:** *Complaint-based systems are generally less effective at ensuring healthy rental housing than proactive systems (Way et al., 2013). Complaint-based systems will only serve tenants who are both willing and able to submit a complaint. Research shows that wealthier and white tenants are often the primary beneficiaries of complaint-based systems. Tenants who have lower incomes, people of color, immigrants, or other vulnerable populations may hesitate to report issues due to fear of landlord retaliation, distrust of government involvement, concerns about displacement, or lack of awareness of their rights (House, 2021). Cities should ensure all tenants receive information about how to file a complaint and their rights, and should be prepared to connect tenants to resources such as legal aid when needed. Additionally, cities should work toward more comprehensive, proactive systems that shift the responsibility for identifying and addressing code violations from tenants to landlords.*

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR A PROACTIVE RENTAL INSPECTION PROGRAM

### Program Rollout

Cities will need to determine the appropriate scope for their rental inspection program. Many begin with a smaller subset of their rental housing stock and expand coverage as staffing and resources grow. A common approach is to start with neighborhoods that have older buildings or known problem properties, areas that often overlap. Another option is to start with areas predominantly made up of rental units. For example, Kansas City launched its program in neighborhoods with documented deterioration and where residents had expressed strong interest in housing inspections before eventually expanding to a citywide program. Likewise, Sacramento, California, began a pilot program in 2008 focused on properties with a high incidence of dangerous building or code enforcement cases, as well as frequent police and fire calls. Both Kansas City and Sacramento then expanded the program citywide after their pilots were successful (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

### Exemptions

As mentioned in Part II, cities might exempt housing stock less than five years old and phase those buildings in at the five-year mark. Additionally, cities often exempt properties with owner-occupied units, presuming that landlords who reside in the building are more likely to maintain them. Another common exemption is housing already inspected under a local housing authority (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

In addition, cities often reduce the inspection burden for large multifamily buildings by inspecting only a sample of units. Sacramento, California, for example, inspects a random sample of 10% of a property's rental units. If there are violations found, the inspector has the authority to inspect additional or all units in the building. Seattle, Washington, similarly inspects 15% of all units in buildings with more than 20 units (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

### Inspectors

Cities can structure a proactive rental inspection program in different ways and under various departments. Most cities in Jackson County house these programs within their community development departments, while Kansas City operates its Healthy Homes program through the health department. Another key design choice is whether inspections are performed by municipal employees or by licensed third-party inspectors. In eastern Jackson County, Grandview and Raytown rely on municipal staff – Grandview employs two inspectors and Raytown employs one (R. Knisley, personal communication, August 15, 2025; R. Dunn, personal communication, August 21, 2025). Sugar Creek, Buckner, and Independence instead use third-party inspection companies. In those cities, landlords hire an approved inspector on the required schedule and submit the completed inspection to the city to receive a rental license.

Both approaches can be effective depending on a city's goals and capacity. Cities that employ their own inspectors maintain greater control over inspection quality, follow-up inspections, and enforcement actions; however, this model typically requires more funding. Cities seeking a more cost-effective alternative may consider the third-party model, though this approach may result in less detailed data on housing conditions across rental properties (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

If a city adopts a third-party inspection model, best practices recommend that it:

- provide a standardized fee schedule
- maintain a list of licensed inspectors landlords may hire
- conduct periodic spot checks to verify inspection quality (Mallach, 2018)

### Fees

Many cities charge a separate inspection fee in addition to the rental registration fee. In addition, some cities will encourage timely compliance by increasing fees for each reinspection. Grandview, for example, issues a \$20 fee for the initial inspection, and the first reinspection after. If violations remain unresolved, the second reinspection and any subsequent inspections cost \$100 each. In a survey of sample cities, CityHealth (2024) found inspection fees ranged from \$35 to \$175. Cities often use a combination of registration and inspection fees to sustain the program. See the Budget section for more information.

### Frequency

Proactive rental inspection programs should require inspections on a routine basis, usually every three to five years (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). CityHealth (2024) notes that requiring an inspection at least every five years is considered best practice. Some cities will inspect units before a tenancy begins and again at each change in occupancy, making inspections and repairs less disruptive for tenants (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Cities in eastern Jackson County have taken a mix of both these approaches. Grandview conducts inspections whenever there is a change of occupancy. Raytown, Independence, and Sugar Creek conduct inspections every two years, or when there is a change of occupancy – whichever occurs later. Buckner requires an inspection every two years.

### Performance-Based Systems

Another option that cities might consider is a performance-based inspection schedule, which adjusts inspection frequency based on past compliance. Under this model, properties or landlords are placed into different tiers according to their inspection history. Landlords who consistently pass inspections or promptly correct violations may be moved to a less frequent schedule, such as every four to six years. In contrast, chronically noncompliant landlords, or properties with repeated or serious violations, are subject to more frequent inspections.

Brooklyn Center, Minnesota operates a highly effective performance-based program (See Figure 3). Systems like this can increase buy-in by rewarding responsible landlords, who are essential partners in maintaining safe housing, while allowing cities to focus inspection resources on problem properties and bad actors. Some experts would even recommend this type of program over a more traditional approach to proactive rental inspections where all properties are inspected on the same schedule (Center for Community Progress, 2024; Mallach, 2015). Additional incentives for responsible landlords, such as lower fees, could be considered.

**Figure 3.** Brooklyn Center, MN operates an inspection schedule with four tiers depending on the number of violations found during the previous inspection. Source: <https://www.brooklyncentermn.gov>

Figure 3. Property Code and Nuisance Violations Criteria		
License Category (Based on Property Code Only)	Number of Units	Property Code Violations per Inspected Unit
Type I – 3 Year	1-2 units	0-2
	3-4 units	0-0.75
Type II – 2 Year	1-2 units	Greater than 2 but not more than 5
	3-4 units	Greater than .75 but not not more than 1.5
Type III – 1 Year	1-2 units	Greater than 5 but not more than 9
	3-4 units	Greater than 1.5 but not more than 3
Type IV – 6 Months	1-2 units	Greater than 9
	3-4 units	Greater than 3

## Inspection Criteria

When determining which housing conditions to inspect, cities should draw from a variety of sources, including local building and housing codes, state laws, and model codes from the International Code Council (ICC), or the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), both of which update their codes every three years. Cities often choose to tailor these standards to reflect local preferences and needs (Housing Solutions Lab, 2021). Grandview, for example, cites both the ICC and their own municipal code in its inspection checklist. The city also posts its checklist online so that all parties are aware of what will be inspected, helping ensure transparency and avoid surprises. For example inspection checklists, see the Appendix.

Some cities go beyond basic housing code requirements and include lead testing and abatement as part of their inspection process. Rochester, New York, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, incorporate lead hazard testing and abatement in their proactive inspection programs. This practice can prevent childhood lead poisoning from occurring in the home (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Ultimately, cities should consider their current resources and capacity when designing the scope of their rental inspections.

## Violations

Inspectors should provide landlords with a reasonable timeframe to correct any violations before scheduling a reinspection. While some discretion can be left to inspectors, landlords should generally be given no more than 30 days to address identified issues. Violations that pose an immediate threat to tenant health or safety (i.e. nonworking smoke or carbon monoxide detector, no heat) should be given a shorter correction timeline.

If an inspector determines that a property is in such poor condition that it cannot reasonably be brought into compliance within 30 days, best practice is to require the landlord to submit a written compliance plan to the city. This plan should outline the steps and timeline for achieving compliance, including any arrangements for tenant relocation, if necessary (Way et al., 2013; CityHealth, 2022).

## ENFORCEMENT

### Administrative Enforcement

The most common type of enforcement used in proactive rental inspection programs is administrative enforcement. Cities may issue fines for failing to comply with any portion of the policy, including failure to register, refusal to allow an inspection, falsifying documents, or failing to correct violations. Penalties should be tiered, allowing less punitive measures for an initial violation and escalating consequences for repeated or more serious violations. For example, Grandview issues a \$50 fine for a first violation, with fines increasing up to \$500 for subsequent violations.

Cities may also revoke or suspend a landlord's business or rental license for ongoing noncompliance. Once a license is suspended or revoked, the owner is prohibited from renting units that are currently vacant—or that become vacant—until the license is reinstated. Landlords typically have the opportunity to appeal these enforcement actions through an administrative hearing.

Administrative enforcement is the most common approach because it is less costly and more efficient than pursuing civil enforcement (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

## Civil Enforcement

Some cities may rely on civil enforcement to bring landlords into compliance. One option is seeking an injunction, which is a court order requiring a party to take or refrain from a specific action. For example, in Sacramento, California, if a landlord fails to bring their property up to code, the city may sue to get a court order compelling compliance. Cities may also seek court orders to prohibit property owners from renting units until repairs are completed (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

Other cities rely on civil penalties, which involve the courts in order to collect fines. Raytown uses this approach: the building official issues a court summons, and upon conviction in municipal court, the court imposes fines according to city ordinance.

Civil enforcement actions can be equally as effective as administrative enforcement, but are often slower, more expensive to execute, and may also require more resources and follow-up from city officials (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Some experts recommend reserving civil enforcement actions for more serious violations or landlords with a large portfolio (Center for Community Progress, 2024).

## Emerging Practices

**Rent escrow:** Some cities allow tenants to withhold rent or participate in a rent escrow program. A rent escrow account is a city-managed account where tenants deposit rent payments until violations are corrected or a rental license is reinstated. Funds can then be released to the landlord once they are in compliance. Additionally, in Los Angeles, California, escrowed funds may be used to cover the cost of certain repairs or to provide tenant relocation assistance (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

*Missouri law permits tenants to withhold rent in limited circumstances, specifically when a city has documented a code violation and the tenant has provided written notice to the landlord requesting repairs (Missouri Attorney General's Office, 2025).*

**Inability to evict:** Seattle, Washington prohibits unlicensed property owners from evicting tenants, providing further incentive for landlords to comply with licensing and registration requirements. This type of restriction can be established either through a local ordinance or incorporated into court procedures governing eviction filings (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022; Center for Community Progress, 2024).

## Tenant Protections

The ultimate goal of a proactive rental inspection program is to protect tenant health and safety, which makes it essential to anticipate and plan for unintended consequences. One key consideration is tenant displacement. When an inspector determines a unit is unfit for habitation, the city must have a plan in place to ensure tenants have safe temporary housing. In Grandview, landlords are required to cover the cost of tenant relocation until repairs are made and units are brought back in compliance (R. Dunn, personal communication, August 21, 2025). Cities should also plan for situations in which landlords refuse or are unable to pay for relocation, and establish clear procedures or backup supports; examples include city-managed relocation funds or partnerships with community organizations, both of which can help prevent tenant homelessness (Abdelazim et al, 2024).

All tenants should be given the opportunity to consent to an inspection. Best practice is to provide both the tenant and the landlord advance notice – at least 14 days – of an upcoming inspection (CityHealth, 2021; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Inspectors should help tenants understand that

the purpose of the inspection is to protect their health and safety. If tenants refuse entry, inspectors should leave them information on how they can request an inspection if they change their mind (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

Occasionally, inspectors may find health and safety violations that are the result of tenant actions or negligence. Programs should establish clear guidance on how such violations are documented and addressed, while ensuring that enforcement strategies do not disproportionately penalize or displace tenants. Cities should also consider procedures for obtaining an administrative inspection warrant when there is reasonable evidence of a serious health or safety violation but a tenant refuses entry, such as when an exterior violation is clearly visible (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

Finally, programs should include safeguards to prevent retaliation against tenants – both through the pass-through of repair costs and through retaliatory eviction proceedings. Boston, Massachusetts, for example, requires landlords to file a copy of eviction notices with the city, allowing city officials to monitor and identify potential retaliatory actions following code violations (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Independence has also recently updated its Rental Ready program, strengthening protections by explicitly prohibiting retaliation and requiring property owners to obtain a business license before tenants are permitted to activate utility services (Watkins, 2025). Preventing the pass-through of repair costs is more challenging in Missouri, where rent control ordinances are preempted. However, two strategies can help: cooperative enforcement models and repair assistance programs. Both are discussed in Part IV: Strategies for Success.

## **Budget**

Due to the wide variability in the scope and structure of proactive rental inspection programs it's difficult to pinpoint a precise budget estimate. Larger cities with long-established programs, such as Seattle or Houston, budget more than \$1 million annually, with most costs allocated to staff salaries and equipment (Way et al., 2013). At the local level, cities in Jackson County primarily fund these programs through fees collected from inspections and registrations. However, both Raytown and Grandview report that the fees and fines do not fully cover the cost of operating their programs (R. Knisley, personal communication, August 15, 2025; R. Dunn, personal communication, August 21, 2025).

Given that the annual budget for the entire community development division, which houses these programs, is approximately \$1 million both in Grandview and in Raytown, it is reasonable to assume their proactive rental inspection programs operate at a significantly lower cost than those in larger metropolitan areas (City of Grandview, 2025; City of Raytown, 2024). Independence provides an additional point of comparison: its Community Development budget is broken down by unit, and the Regulated Industries team, responsible for conducting inspections and issuing business and rental licenses, has an annual operations budget of roughly \$340,000, which supports four full-time equivalents (FTEs) (City of Independence, 2025).

### Budget Estimate Exercise

Way et al. (2013) provides a basic formula to help cities estimate staffing and budget needs for a proactive rental inspection program. For this exercise Lee's Summit is used as an example, as it is the next largest city in Jackson County without a proactive rental inspection program.

Using conservative assumptions, one inspector can complete:

- 4 inspections per day
  - 4 days per week
  - 48 weeks per year
- = ~800 inspections per inspector per year

Lee's Summit has an estimated 10,400 total rental units, a subset of which would likely be exempt from a proactive rental inspection program. For example, the most recently available Census data indicate that Lee's Summit added approximately 2,429 housing units between 2018 and 2023. For the purposes of this estimate, it is assumed that all rental units constructed within the last five years would be exempt from the program.

- 10,400 total units – 2,400 assumed exemption  
= 8,000 units requiring routine inspection

If the city adopts a five-year inspection cycle (the minimum to meet CityHealth's gold standard), then:

- 8,000 units ÷ 5 years  
= 1,600 inspections per year

Assuming an initial 50% reinspection rate (reasonable for the early years of a program):

- 1,600 initial inspections + 800 reinspections  
= 2,400 total inspections per year

Using the above rate of 800 inspections per inspector per year:

- 2,400 total inspections ÷ 800 per inspector  
= 3 FTE inspectors

This estimate aligns well with nearby eastern Jackson County cities: Grandview has 2 inspectors, Raytown has 1 inspector, and Independence has 4 FTEs in its Regulated Industries division.

Assuming approximately \$100,000 annually per inspector (salary, benefits, equipment, mileage/vehicle cost):

- 3 inspectors x \$100,000  
= \$300,000 annual program cost

If Lee's Summit chose to fund the program fully through fees, one possible fee structure could look like:

- \$25 annual registration fee x 8,000 units  
= \$200,000
- \$50 inspection/reinspection fee x 2,400 inspection  
= \$120,000

This structure would generate \$320,000 total revenue, which would be sufficient to cover the estimated \$300,000 program cost with a modest buffer.

Ultimately, each city must determine the scope of its program, evaluate existing infrastructure, determine inspection capacity, decide whether general revenue will support the effort, and design a fee structure that sustainably covers program costs without overburdening property owners.

## Evaluation

All effective policies should include an evaluation plan, ideally developed prior to program implementation. Both ChangeLab Solutions and CityHealth identify evaluation and reporting metrics as best practices for proactive rental inspection programs. These metrics can be reported regularly to a city council or governing body, while public reporting can further promote transparency, accountability, and trust in the program. In Jackson County, Grandview reports key performance indicators to the city's Board of Aldermen on a monthly basis. Publicly available data may also help demonstrate the program's public health and safety benefits and build broader acceptance over time.

Recommended evaluation metrics include (CityHealth, 2024; ChangeLab Solutions, 2022):

### Process Metrics

- Total number of rental homes
- Total number of registered rental homes
- Number of new registrations each year
- Number of inspections conducted
  - Passed inspections
  - Failed inspections
- Number of reinspections conducted
  - Passed reinspections
  - Failed reinspections
- Number of inspections initiated in response to complaints
- Number and type of additional enforcement actions (i.e. fees levied, licenses revoked, civil penalties)
- Tenant and landlord satisfaction with the program

### Outcome Metrics

- Number of violations identified, and what type
- Percent of landlords in compliance with housing code
- Percent of rental units in compliance with housing code
- Timeliness of violation correction
- Clearance rates
- Total revenue collected from fees or fines
- Monitoring of enforcement actions leading to tenant move outs

### Impact Metrics

- Rates of childhood lead poisoning rates and blood lead levels
- Child and adult asthma rates
- Trends in heat-related illness

Together, these metrics allow cities to assess whether their programs are operating as intended and achieving their desired outcomes. When combined with regular feedback from tenants and landlords, evaluation data can also inform ongoing program improvements.



## PART IV

# Strategies for Success

### **Cooperative Compliance Models**

A strong proactive rental inspection program should work in partnership with landlords toward the shared goal of safe and healthy rental housing. When designed well, these programs benefit tenants, responsible landlords, and the broader community. The purpose is not punitive, but to encourage responsible rental property management while holding bad actors accountable. To achieve this balance, effective programs emphasize cooperative compliance, supporting landlords in bringing properties up to code while reserving enforcement tools for those who repeatedly fail to meet standards (Center for Community Progress, 2024).

This approach often requires flexibility and a focus on education and collaboration. Some landlords may be unaware of violations on their properties – tenants may not recognize issues or be hesitant to report them, and updates to building or housing codes can introduce new requirements. To support compliance, some cities emphasize corrective opportunities before punitive action. For example, Santa Cruz, California, gives landlords a warning before issuing a formal citation. Lansing, Michigan, waives noncompliance fines when landlords can demonstrate they are making progress toward correcting violations (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022).

Conversations with Grandview officials indicate that their program effectively models this cooperative approach, with their inspectors often taking the time to educate and even help correct code violations (R. Dunn, personal communication, August 21, 2025). An inspector from Independence described a similar practice in a recent news interview, saying: “I carry faceplates, batteries, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide [detectors]. I carry everything, so if something’s wrong, I can fix it right there and then they don’t fail, but it’s all for the tenants” (Palmer, 2025). Several larger cities across the U.S. formalize this approach by offering free trainings and technical assistance for landlords, helping them understand the code requirements and connect to resources (House, 2021).

Overall, inspectors and enforcement officials must balance flexibility and collaboration with the severity of any identified health or safety risks, and be prepared to use more punitive enforcement measures when addressing repeat or severe offenders.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAMS**

### **Rental Rehabilitation Assistance Programs**

Smaller “mom-and-pop” landlords, or low-income property owners may not have the financial capacity to complete the required repairs. To address this challenge, some cities offer financial assistance to ensure those repairs are made. These programs may be limited to emergency repairs or habitability issues, but they also may be broader in scope to support improvements in energy efficiency, accessibility modifications, or weatherization. San Francisco, for example, operates a program that allows property owners to access low interest loans of \$2,500 - \$10,000 per unit, with the majority of the funds required to be used for habitability-related repairs (ChangeLab Solutions, 2022). Cities without the capacity to fund similar programs should explore partnerships or referral pathways to connect property owners with existing state, federal, or nonprofit assistance resources.

### **Cooling Requirements**

Most states require homes, including rental units, to have an installed and functioning heating system. However, many state laws have not been updated to require similar cooling systems, despite increasingly prolonged periods of high summer temperatures across much of the United States. In response, some cities have adopted local cooling requirements and enforce them for all or most rental units.

Chicago, Illinois, for example, requires residential buildings with 100 or more units to provide at least one indoor common space capable of maintaining a safe indoor temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit through a permanent cooling system when the outdoor heat index reaches 80 degrees or higher. Tempe, Arizona, requires all habitable rooms in rental units to be equipped with air conditioning systems capable of maintaining indoor temperatures no greater than 82 degrees Fahrenheit, with cooling controls accessible to tenants (Lawton, 2025).

### **Lead Testing and Remediation**

As noted earlier, some cities incorporate lead testing and remediation into their rental inspection programs, with rental housing inspectors trained in appropriate lead testing practices. In addition, local housing code should require remediation in all rental units. Integrating lead testing into routine inspections allows cities to identify and remediate lead-based paint hazards and contaminated dust before children are exposed, helping to prevent childhood lead poisoning and its long-term health impacts (Goodwin & Jacobs, 2019).

### **Wraparound or Referral Services**

Lastly, cities should consider formal partnerships with community-based organizations or health-care providers to refer tenants as necessary. For example, an inspector who discovers lead paint may be able to refer the tenant(s) to an appropriate clinic or health department for blood lead testing. Similarly, inspection programs may benefit from referral pathways to utility assistance, housing stabilization, or other social services (Center for Community Progress, 2024; CityHealth, 2024). Grandview officials mentioned they often refer tenants to legal aid organizations and other services (R. Dunn, personal communication, August 21, 2025).

## LESSONS LEARNED

As noted earlier, five municipalities in Jackson County currently operate some form of a rental inspection program. To better understand how these programs function in practice, InCoLab members conducted informational interviews with city staff in two of these jurisdictions: Grandview and Raytown. These conversations highlighted several common themes and practical lessons that may be useful for cities considering or refining a proactive rental inspection program.

### **Adequate and Consistent Staffing**

Staff from both cities described the importance of adequately staffing their programs. Grandview recently increased their staff from one full-time inspector to two inspectors, while Raytown mentioned that they've had high turnover in the role, with four different inspectors in the last five years. Both jurisdictions noted that for a program to reach its full potential, ensuring adequate staff and resources is essential.

### **Building Relationships and Trust**

Similarly, both cities emphasized the importance of their inspectors' interpersonal skills, attributing much of their programs' success to inspectors' ability to build trust with both landlords and tenants and foster collaborative relationships. These relationships have been key to building broad acceptance of the program, especially among landlords. City staff also noted that inspectors are highly motivated and share a strong commitment to ensuring safe and healthy living conditions for residents. One staff member highlighted the value of lived experience, sharing that she has been a renter her entire life, which informs her approach and perspective in the role.

### **Political Will**

Both cities rely on some level of general revenue to support their programs. The continued willingness of elected officials to fund these programs year after year shows city leadership's support and recognition of the programs' value to the community. As the Center for Community Progress (2024) notes, a general consensus that local government bears responsibility, at least in part, for ensuring rental housing meets basic health and safety standards is critical to both the adoption and long-term sustainability of these policies.

# Closing

Housing has become one of the defining social determinants of health in the 21st century. As housing costs continue to rise, and a growing share of families are renting rather than purchasing homes. Cities face a growing opportunity – and responsibility – to ensure that all residents have access to safe and healthy rental homes. Proactive rental inspection programs protect tenants from unsafe conditions, hold bad actors accountable, preserve neighborhood stability, and maintain the long-term quality of the housing stock. When thoughtfully designed and implemented, healthy rental housing policies create lasting public value – supporting tenant health and safety, strengthening communities, supporting responsible landlords, and ensuring that safe and dignified housing remains a core community value for generations to come.



# Additional Resources

The following resources were cited throughout this document and provide additional context and information on code enforcement, healthy rental housing policies, and proactive rental inspections:

[ChangeLab Solutions: A Guide to Proactive Rental Inspections \(2022\)](#)

[CityHealth: Health Rental Housing Policy Action Guide \(2024\)](#)

[Center for Community Progress: Reevaluating Code Enforcement \(2024\)](#)

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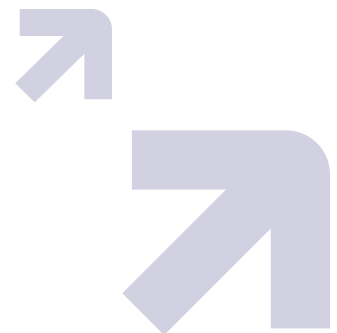
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## APPENDIX

# Sample Checklists

These publicly available checklists offer a framework for developing a rental inspection program. Typically, municipalities develop their specific criteria by integrating local and state codes with broader regulatory standards such as the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). These examples serve to give municipal staff or community partners a basic idea of inspection scope; however, cities must ensure their final program aligns with their unique state and local housing codes.

-  [Boston, MA: Rental Inspection Checklist](#)
-  [Brooklyn Center, MN: Rental Property Maintenance Checklist](#)
-  [Central Keystone Council of Governments \(CO\): Pre-Inspection Checklist](#)
-  [Grandview, MO: Inspection Checklist](#)
-  [Los Angeles, CA: Rental Housing Habitability Program – Inspection Guide](#)
-  [Minneapolis, MN: Rental Property Checklist](#)
-  [Rochester, NY: Property Maintenance Inspections for a Healthy Community – Inspection Checklist](#)
-  [Seattle, WA: Rental Registration and Inspection Checklist](#)
-  [Pittsburgh, PA: Residential Housing Rental Permit Program Inspection Checklist](#)





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