

MEMORANDUM

TO: HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
MIKE ROY, CITY MANAGER
PATTI DUBOIS, CITY CLERK

FROM: NICK ISGRO, MAYOR

SUBJECT: VETO OF RESOLUTION 42-2018

DATE: MARCH 7, 2018

Today I am vetoing the passage of Resolution 42-2018, Creation of Housing Study Committee.

The purpose statement for the creation of this committee states that it will “investigate methods and tools to help Waterville’s CEOs ensure businesses, that rent property for housing, meet laws and ordinances that the town, the state and the federal government have in place for health/safety and construction standards.” It then goes on to state that the committee will look at problems of vacant and abandoned properties.

While I believe investigating the issue of unsafe and unsightly abandoned properties is a worthwhile effort, it does not appear that is the primary goal of this committee. Rather, we have learned from testimony by the promoters of this committee, who also are the same citizens/councilors who previously proposed a potential “landlord registry” and are many of its pre-selected members, is to delve into a variety of perceived issues that may erupt between landlords and tenants.

Most Waterville landlords are well meaning responsible business owners who are providing a much needed service to the residents they do business with. In fact, most of these relationships between landlord and tenant are already being legally governed by contracts. Most of their properties are being inspected annually by the Fire Department, Waterville Housing Authority, Maine State Housing, insurance companies and, when needed, our city code enforcement. In fact, in the last year the city has provided for additional code enforcement resources to assist in these efforts.

There is no reason for a new committee to continue to layer additional redundancies on one select group of property owners over another.

While I believe that the stated goal of this committee is a redundancy in city government, we know that is not the final aim of this committee. Given what has been heard and seen at city council meetings and elsewhere, it is my belief that this committee’s true goal is far more insidious.

In the latter portion of 2017 the City Council was presented with information suggesting the city move towards a Portland-style landlord registry that would obligate rental property owners to register each of their units with the city at the cost of \$100 per unit, to be eventually turned into a “renter’s tax” driving up the cost of housing. It was also suggested that the money earned from this scheme not be used to offset taxes, but rather expand the size and scope of city government by



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hiring more city code enforcement officers, secretaries, and vehicles in order to then go out and find more code violations and bring in more fee income.

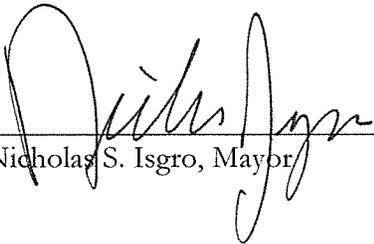
Not only is the formation of such a registry unnecessary and burdensome, it is downright repugnant.

It is not the job of municipal government to inject itself into policing landlord-tenant disputes unless those buildings are not up to code. When they are not the vast majority of property owners are happy to comply and take the necessary steps to ensure their properties meet requirements.

While it is true that there are a few derelict property owners – as exists anywhere people own property – the City of Waterville should not act in a manner that sullies the name or reputation of the majority of our business owners who work hard to provide and maintain quality housing, provide local jobs, and pay a large portion of city property tax. Many of these property owners are also residents here in Waterville – our friends and our neighbors – and should not feel they are the target of misplaced municipal scrutiny.

If the council wishes to study the issue of hazardous and unsightly abandoned properties there are few in our city who will disagree with this goal. It should be made clear, however, that the council will not pursue any kind of landlord registry or similar scheme, that no new taxes, fees, or red tape be implemented, and that the city is not going to become the de facto arbiter of disputes between landlords and tenants.

Respectfully submitted,



Nicholas S. Isgro, Mayor