

City of Minneapolis

Request for Committee Action

To: Community Development & Regulatory Services
Date: 9/15/2015
From: City Clerk's Office
Prepared by: Casey Carl
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File type: Ordinance
Subcategory: Code Amendment

Subject:

Tenant notification of voter registration information

Description:

Passage of Ordinance amending Title 12, Chapter 244 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to Housing: Maintenance Code by adding a new subsection requiring certain notice be given to tenants about voter registration.

Ward/Neighborhood/Address:

All Wards

Background/Analysis:

The voter registration system is one of the most significant obstacles to full democratic participation in the United States. A 2001 task force chaired by former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford concluded: “The registration laws in force throughout the United States are among the world’s most demanding ... [and are] one reason why voter turnout is near the bottom of the developed world.” Research conducted by the Pew Center on States supports this conclusion, showing that:

- One in four eligible citizens in the United States is not registered to vote;
- One in eight registrations is invalid or contains significant errors which may cause it to be invalidated;
- One in six Americans moves to a new residence every year; and
- One in four voters wrongly assumes their registration status is automatically updated when change of residency forms are completed with other government agencies.

Studies also repeatedly demonstrate that registration challenges disproportionately have a negative impact on young/first-time voters (including new citizens); low-income voters; highly-mobile populations (such as students, military families, and those in transition); and communities of color.

A common thread uniting these various groups is that they are more mobile than the “average voter.” But registrations are not portable and do not move with the voter. As a consequence, voters who change residency risk being prevented from voting if the mandatory first step—registration—is incomplete or inaccurate. A Harvard study noted fully one-third of unregistered voters were those who had failed to re-register at a new residence after moving. Thus, the negative impact for highly-mobile populations can be especially significant. This is concerning for the City of Minneapolis, where more than half its population is composed of renters.

To counter this challenge, the City proposes to require that individuals licensed for a rental dwelling unit provide voter registration information to new tenants aged 18 or older upon first occupancy. The policy objective of this requirement is to ensure that eligible individuals who are

renting a primary residence in the city are informed of their voting rights and provided an opportunity to register. The requirement does not impose any burden on the landlord/property manager to ensure that tenants register, vote, or participate in any election; instead, it merely requires that information about voter registration processes—in a manner approved by the City—be passed along to new tenants who are aged 18 or older.

The City's Elections & Voter Services Division, in collaboration with the Secretary of State and Hennepin County, will be responsible for providing the necessary notice materials to landlords/property managers. The Regulatory Services Department will monitor, track, and enforce the notice regulation, consistent with similar requirements which exist under the Code. Given the coordinated, interjurisdictional work required between the city, county, and state to implement this change, an effective date of March 1, 2016, has been included in the draft ordinance amendment.

Financial Review:

No additional appropriation required, amount included in current budget.

Attachments:

1. DRAFT Ordinance