

ATTENTION LANDLORDS

Properties with 4 Rental Units or Less

LICENCE REQUIRED
IN 2024

Licence Required During Pilot

Licence Not Required During Pilot

Licensing, creating safer rentals for all.

Residential Rental Licensing (RRL) Pilot Program

City of Brampton

URBAN AFFAIRS

Brampton launches landlord accountability program in select wards; tenants frustrated over exemption of corporate property owners

By Hafsa Ahmed-Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
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The City of Brampton launched its Residential Rental Licensing pilot program at the start of the new year, with landlords now facing random inspections of their rental units in designated wards. Advocates say the program should have included corporate property owners as well – only properties with four or less units are part of the pilot, leaving thousands of tenants across the municipality with no extra protection against abuse.

“If multi-residential [properties] were included in the landlord licensing program in Brampton, it would be a great asset because units and buildings could easily be inspected,” Tanya Burkart, a member of Peel ACORN and resident of Ardglen Drive in Brampton, told The Pointer. She described the difficulty of getting even basic maintenance and repairs done in units owned by corporate property owners such as the one that owns her townhouse complex, which is part of a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), a type of investment vehicle committed to creating profits for shareholders.

She said that maintenance in her complex is not proactively kept to standard, and unless tenants speak up and advocate for repairs themselves, they are not done. “The full responsibility lies with tenants, and so landlord licensing would be a great help in making sure that buildings and units are in good working order.”



A photo depicts a ceiling that has not been properly repaired and has been exposed over years at Tanya Burkart's townhome complex in Brampton, a result of water leakages that seep into tenants' units.

“Landlord licensing is a way to protect aging affordable housing,” Burkart said, highlighting that there is no other program “in the province or in municipalities or even from the federal government to protect existing affordable housing as it ages, and so landlord licensing forces buildings to be maintained and I think that’s for the benefit of tenants and it’s a way to keep affordable housing.” She said with the ongoing housing affordability crisis it is “vital that buildings are maintained and that they don’t fall into disrepair and that they’re simply torn down and their tenants displaced.”

“Landlord licensing has a real role in the housing crisis, for sure. At the municipal level, it’s one of our important tools to maintaining affordable housing.”

As previously reported by The Pointer, Peel ACORN members protested at City Hall in September 2022 for an end to renovictions in Brampton, a practice where landlords are able to remove their tenants by undergoing major renovations, which often results in them increasing rent and sometimes pressuring previous tenants not to return. Burkart said buildings and townhouse complexes like the one she occupies can use renoviction strategies, calling for major work that requires tenants to move out, if basic maintenance and repairs are continuously ignored, with no routine upkeep of properties. She said Brampton’s pilot program is only addressing individual landlords, mostly houses that have been converted to feature rental units (many of these in the city are located in basements), with the goal of protecting tenants by enforcing compliance of all building and fire codes. “Which is wonderful, there are thousands of additional rental units in Brampton,” she said. “But what about people who are living in apartment units that also have the same building code and fire code safety requirements?” Additional residential units, or ARUs, sometimes referred to as secondary suites or basement apartments, are units built or converted into housing on properties with detached houses, semi-detached houses or townhouses.

Burkart said corporate-owned units are increasingly designed for profit, not the needs of renters. “We’re kind of the unintended consequence of financialized housing. If the unit was empty it still would be used for investment purposes. Financialized landlords, their profit comes in displacing tenants because we have a lack of full rent control.” She said it is just as necessary to keep tenants in safe and livable midrise and highrise units as it is for renters of ARUs.

According to a 2022 report by the Canadian Human Rights Commission called The Financialization Of Multi-Family Rental Housing In Canada: A Report for the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, the affordable housing crisis is “related to the financialization of housing, in which mortgages, houses, apartments, and shelter are treated as assets for financial investment.” The report highlights how corporate housing investments in Canada are “undermining the realization of the right to adequate housing,” citing the decline of social housing through federal policy going back to the 1990s. “Deregulation of rent control and the introduction of ‘vacancy decontrol’ created a lucrative incentive for landlords to acquire buildings, remove tenants paying low rates, and increase rents to ‘market’ levels,” it states. “Legislation allowing for rent increases above the cost of living has also been used as a revenue-generating tool by financial firms.”

According to the report the largest increase in rental revenues for firms that own apartments is through “removing tenants paying low rents and charging much more to the next person – sometimes renovating the suite in the meantime.” This business strategy, it says, “generates profits through dispossession, targets low-income people for displacement, drives rental housing price increases, and catalyzes gentrification.”

Brampton Ward 7 and 8 Councillor Rod Power told The Pointer in an email that it is important to remember the program is still just a pilot project, and aims to evaluate “whether implementing a business licensing program for residential rental properties is an effective measure to reduce the number of property standard complaints and preserve the character of neighbourhoods.”

“[W]e’ve seen a rapid increase in [additional residential units]’s and multi-unit dwellings,” Councillor Power said. “Currently there is a gap in By-laws with accountability of 4 and fewer rental units so this pilot project will close that gap.” He shared that the newly formed task force may make adjustments as it evaluates the progress of the pilot.

Brampton is uniquely characterized by its suburban housing makeup which has accommodated double-digit annual population growth over much of the past four decades (in 1971 its population was 72,000, which tripled in two decades, by the end of the ‘90s, and then tripled again over the next two decades; there are currently about 700,000 residents). But the housing stock has not met what the market has needed (particularly affordable housing) causing an explosion of illegal secondary suites or basement apartments, with council members recently estimating there are at least 50,000 unregistered units across the city. According to 2021 Statistics Canada data, more than half of the private dwellings in Brampton, 52.6 percent, were single-detached houses and 13.6 percent were semi-detached houses. Apartments made up 21.2 percent of private dwellings.

The RRL pilot program requires owners of all designated rental properties with four or less residential units to obtain a \$300 annual license through the City Clerk's Office, but the fee will be waived during the first three months of the pilot and will be discounted by 50 percent between April 1, and June 30 this year. The pilot only launched in wards 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7, for two years and will apply to registered second units, unregistered residential rental units and ARUs. The goal of the program is to help “maintain the character of local neighbourhoods, uphold property standard by-laws and keep individuals and families safe with enforcement of the Ontario Fire Code,” according to the City, and will subject units to random inspections, with penalties for non-compliance planned to be announced some time this month.

As previously reported by The Pointer, advocates spoke up about the need for the program to extend beyond properties renting four or less units, so corporate landlords can be held accountable, but as of January 1, the program went forward without applying to properties renting more than four units.

According to the City, the scope of the program falls short of City zoning designations, which categorize buildings with four or more units as apartment dwellings. “The City supports tenants of apartment dwellings by providing them access to appropriate resources depending on the tenant complaint as the relationship between tenants and landlords are under the purview of the Province,” a City webpage states. “Building issues related to fire safety and property standards will continue to be addressed by the City to ensure tenant safety and

well-being.” It says the main objectives of the RRL pilot program are to “identify these smaller rental operators within Wards 1,3,4,5 and 7, ensure there is compliance with Property Standards By-Law, Fire and Building Codes and to hold landlords accountable to provide safe living accommodations for renters in Brampton.”

Burkart said there are other cities in Ontario with landlord licensing programs that include buildings. “It is the City’s jurisdiction to include multi-residential, it’s part of our communities.” She referred to the City of Toronto, which has a program called RentSafeTO: Apartment Building Standards program. It defines an apartment building as a “purpose built rental building with 3 or more storeys and 10 or more rental units but does not include a long-term care home, a licensed retirement home or a housing co-operative.” Its RentSafeTO program requires building owners and operators to register their apartment buildings with the City and carry out an annual renewal, as well as have a “process for tracking and responding to tenant service requests,” conduct “regular inspections in common areas for cleanliness and pests,” and post maintenance, waste, cleaning and disruption plans pertaining to “vital services such as water, heat and electricity” on a Tenant Notification Board. It also requires them to notify tenants of service disruptions and to undergo routine building evaluations, and to comply with “all applicable bylaws, including Property Standards Bylaw.” Building owners and operators are subject to financial penalties if tenants report them to the City for failing to comply with a list of regulations.

“Apartments and additional rental units both need to be in compliance in terms of safety,” Burkart said, encouraged that the program will be a great way to uncover the issues it aims to address in smaller rental buildings including houses, but said the City also needs to take care of tenants in larger buildings who she said are “struggling with accessibility, who have struggled in the past with fire safety violations, who need to ensure building code compliance.”

“Additional rental units are not the only units that would benefit from landlord licensing.”



Photo depicting a lack of lighting along a pathway in Tanya Burkart's Brampton townhome complex.

(Peel ACORN)

Burkart said it is difficult to hold corporate landlords accountable due to the bureaucratic nature of companies, forcing tenants to resolve issues through the province's Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB). "They assume that tenants, if they're having maintenance issues, will go to the LTB, [but] there's no enforcement at LTB."

"The only type of enforcement is the Rental Housing Enforcement Unit and there's no office in Peel Region," she said. "I can go to LTB and get a judgement tomorrow or eight months from now and who enforces that order? Who makes sure that landlord fixes the property and follows up?"

"There's a disconnect between what tenants are able to achieve," to ensure all tenants are living in "safe, habitable conditions." She said tenants are struggling and have gone to the City but it's hard to get a response to issues that can often put

tenants in harm's way, with Brampton's By-law enforcement department unable to keep up with the growing number of calls.

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