

Bachman Lake Tenants Need Support

City must review whether it has adequate resources to crack down on bad landlords

Reporting bad landlords who won't fix apartments to maintain adequate living conditions should be easier for Dallas tenants, especially for those who are the most vulnerable because of their economic or immigration status.

It has been a little over a month since this newspaper reported the hazardous conditions endured by Bachman Lake-area tenants, including moldy walls, pest infestations and leaky roofs.

This is not a case of "they get what they pay for." Residents said they are paying up to \$1,400 a month, close to the rent average in the Dallas area.

For these tenants, most of them with limited English skills, navigating the city's bureaucracy to report code violations has been frustrating. They said they rarely see results.

"We are not living for free; we are paying," Bachman Lake resident Claudia Cruz, 38, told us.

The good news is that the city has taken more proactive steps in recent months. On Thursday, Bachman Lake residents will meet with their council member, Omar Narvaez, to address their concerns. City departments including Code Compliance and the Office of Equity and Inclusion are taking a more active role reaching out to tenants in community forums.

The city is considering updating a "chronic nuisance abatement" ordinance to make sure the apartments comply with its rules for rental homes. Narvaez told us he is coordinating with the city attorney in crafting this rule.

Stronger ordinances can help, but ultimately, cracking down on bad landlords will require more staff and political will. Code Compliance has 20 inspectors for apartment complexes. City leaders should take a closer look at whether Dallas is efficiently using its resources to enforce the rules that it passed some years ago to improve rental living conditions.

In Bachman Lake, 2 out of 3 residents are Hispanic. There are about 43 apartment complex properties and 7,000 units registered with the city in that area, according to a *Dallas Morning News* analysis of city records. Many of these residents are immigrants or from mixed-status families and are often Spanish-only speakers. For them, complaining to apartment managers sometimes carries the risk of retaliation and eviction.

The city of Dallas website already has information in several languages, including links about eviction proceedings and resources for tenants in the Fair Housing Division page. Code Compliance inspectors are giving out flyers in Spanish, and they report more residents are attending their meetings.

Daisy Torres, director of 311, told us the 311 website will be available in Spanish this spring, but the app will take longer to translate, with a launch date yet to be determined.

Building trust between tenants and city officials is an ongoing issue, and it will take time. This is why nonprofits already working with these residents, including Dallas Area Interfaith and Bachman Lake Together, will continue to be involved, Narvaez said.

Bachman Lake is not the only neighborhood where residents are complaining about deteriorating apartment living conditions. That is all the more reason for city officials to review their infrastructure for dealing with this problem.