




**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: BOS, Second District
Department No.:
For Agenda Of: January 14, 2025
Placement: Departmental

Estimated Time: 30 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Supervisor Laura Capps, 2nd District 
Contact Info: Eleanor Gartner egartner@countyofsb.org

SUBJECT: Isla Vista Rental Housing Inspection Pilot Program

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a. Receive and file this report on the unsafe and substandard housing conditions of rental housing units in the community of Isla Vista and discuss a potential pilot rental housing inspection program;
- b. Direct the Planning and Development Department to prepare an ordinance to create and implement an Isla Vista Rental Housing Inspection Pilot Program;
- c. Determine that this report does not constitute a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5); and
- d. Provide direction to staff, as appropriate.

Summary Text:

This item is on the Board of Supervisor's Agenda to provide direction to staff to return to the Board with a draft ordinance of an Isla Vista Rental Housing Inspection Pilot Program.

Discussion:

On March 14, 2024, the County of Santa Barbara entered into the 2024 Agreement with the Regents of the University of California resolving matters related to the University's failure to comply with its housing obligations under the 2010 Long Range Development Plan Mitigation Implementation and Settlement.

The settlement reached with UC Santa Barbara includes projects and limited term programs in the community of Isla Vista, including, among other things:

- Payment of \$3.7 million to the County for mutually beneficial capital projects, agreed upon by the parties;
- Construction of 3,500 new student beds by the University; and
- Construction of up to 1,874 new units for faculty and staff, including the nearly completed 160-unit Ocean Walk development dependent on future University demand.

The Office of Supervisor Capps completed extensive community outreach and received input on the most pressing needs in Isla Vista and worked with UC Santa Barbara to develop a list of mutually beneficial projects. Housing safety and combatting substandard living conditions rose to the top of the needs list. A list of recommended projects was presented to the Board of Supervisors on July 9, 2024. At that hearing, the Board of Supervisors approved the project list to be funded by the \$3.7 million agreement, including designating \$600,000 of the total agreement funds to create an Isla Vista Rental Housing Inspection Pilot Program.

This agenda item is to discuss providing staff direction to return to the Board with an ordinance that includes the parameters and structure of the pilot inspection program. A preliminary review of multiple jurisdictions throughout the State has found that rental housing inspections program exists to improve the rental housing stock, address substandard housing conditions, and ensure that rental housing meets health and safety standards. These programs generally include the following components:

- Enacting regulations
- Registration of rental properties
- Inspections of the exterior and interior conditions of rental properties
- Exemptions from the program
- Self-certification process for property owners
- Enforcement mechanisms to ensure health and safety standards are met

Background:

Isla Vista, a densely populated community in Santa Barbara County, has long struggled with substandard housing conditions. 87% of Isla Vista residents are renters and 96% of residents are college-aged, the vast majority of them living on their own for the first time. There is a 72% poverty rate according to the latest U.S. census data.

For years, young and low-income tenants have expressed concern on the state of housing available in Isla Vista. The Office of the Second District did extensive outreach, including hosting housing safety listening sessions for Isla Vista residents, went door-to-door to dozens of apartments, and received feedback from the Isla Vista Community Services District, Isla Vista Recreation & Park District, UC Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara City College students. Safety hazards cited include:

- Presence of mold
- Rodent/insects
- Fences in disrepair along the bluffs
- Lack of smoke detectors in units
- No heat
- Exposed electrical wiring
- Unpermitted construction to habitable space and more.

These conditions disproportionately impact vulnerable renters, including students, who often have little recourse due to high housing demand and limited affordable options. Deficient and substandard housing may have the following impacts:

- Many detrimental effects on the stability of a community's neighborhood
- Is environmentally undesirable
- Creates unsafe living conditions for tenants and neighbors
- Contributes to blight
- Negatively affects property values
- And is otherwise detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of the community and its citizens.

Currently, the County sends staff to inspect a building safety issue after an individual files a building complaint on the County website or via formal complaint via phone call or in-person. While this complaint-based system is a helpful tool, many young student renters, often living on their own for the first time, do not feel safe or well-supported to file complaints against a potentially retaliatory landlord.

A rental housing inspection pilot program would take the onus off of young renters and give the County authority to proactively inspect and identify potential unsafe and substandard housing conditions. The program would address long-standing community concerns about the safety of the living conditions in Isla Vista, and the corresponding safety of young tenants. The adoption and implementation of a rental housing inspection program will promote public health and safety of the community by the reducing of substandard housing conditions, and will promote community standards for the maintenance of properties.

A pilot rental inspection program would provide a proactive mechanism to ensure rental properties in Isla Vista meet basic health and safety standards. The pilot program would only be effective in the unincorporated community of Isla Vista, a 'special problems' area, there is no intention to expand this program beyond Isla Vista. The pilot program would include reporting to the Board of Supervisors on its effectiveness and continued implementation. Inspections and compliance with State and local housing codes, the program would hold landlords accountable, protect tenants from exploitative practices, and ultimately enhance the quality of housing in the community. A rental inspection program for Isla Vista is not only a vital step toward ensuring safe and habitable housing but also an investment in the well-being and stability of the community as a whole.

Performance Measure:

N/A

Contract Renewals and Performance Outcomes:

N/A

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Costs associated with developing and implementing this pilot program are included in designated funds from Santa Barbara County's Agreement with UC Santa Barbara's Long Range Development Plan.

Staffing Impacts:

N/A

Special Instructions:

N/A

Attachments:

1. Attachment A: Minute Order – Approval of the mutually beneficial capital projects and limited term programs - July 9, 2024 Board of Supervisors Hearing

Authored by:

Eleanor Gartner, District Representative, 2nd District