

Greetings Councilmembers,

After speaking with some of you and discussing the feasibility of a mandatory inspection program for rental units, whether it be of a percentage of units or of all units, the Associated Students (AS) and I are aware that any sort of inspection system that is not complaint-based is unlikely to get passed. Earlier this year we presented a petition signed by upwards of 1,200 students who were in favor of both mandatory registration and inspections and the AS has repeatedly and persistently advocated for mandatory inspections in order to level the nocuous power dynamic that exists between landlords and tenants, especially younger student tenants. However, we are aware that in order to find a truly effective solution, we must first understand the real nature of the problems with rental units. While we maintain that inspections are key to revealing the nature of housing conditions, we also understand that there are not enough resources to inspect every unit in order to gain this information. In order to promote an efficacious program that represents both a way to combat unsafe living conditions and promote renters' rights as well as an understanding of the resource restrictions that any program will have, we would advocate for the following compromise:

Our proposal is one that recognizes that any rental safety program will be most effective if promoted equally by the City and the University as Western students represent a large part of the renting population. Since the Council believes that a need for mandatory inspections has not been demonstrated, we would request that open negotiations begin between the City and the university about how students can exercise their rights as renters. This would include increased education programs for students and a marketing campaign for informing both student and non-student renters. As part of an educational system, we would request that either the Planning Department or whichever department the new FTEs would fall under as part of the proposed Ordinance in conjunction with the university's Legal Information Center begin to track and analyze all complaints in order to discover the true nature of rental problems.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of any rental safety program and are determined to find a tangible compromise that will work to better living conditions for all Bellingham residents.

Sincerely,
Kendra Thomas
AS Local Liaison