

Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative

~ Goals & Objectives ~

The Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative being undertaken by the Town of Amherst has identified several critical health, safety, and economic development goals with regard to housing and residential neighborhoods. Among these are:

- Preserving and enhancing existing residential neighborhoods as they evolve over time in response to changing housing needs.
- Creating, preserving, and expanding a housing stock that is safe and healthy and meets the community's diverse housing needs.
- Preserving and increasing the supply of affordable housing, including both low income and workforce housing.
- Timely and effective enforcement in response to housing complaints.

The Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative has the following desired objectives:

- Rental units in good structural and functional repair
- Safe housing conditions which consistently meet basic health and life safety codes, including assuring indoor air quality, fire protection, egresses, and number of occupants.
- Sidewalks designed and maintained to promote walking in residential areas
- Lighting for safe use of streets, sidewalks and pedestrian spaces
- Properties that are well maintained and free from residual trash, old furniture, and other indicators of neglect and poor maintenance
- Neighborhoods that are relatively quiet and livable in the evenings
- Amicable and respectful relations between homeowners and tenants within shared neighborhoods
- A widely shared understanding of Town housing goals and its regulations and bylaws among landlords, tenants, and the community
- Meaningful reductions in inappropriate behaviors and high-risk activity among the Town's large population of young, inexperienced tenants.

Toward the achievement of these goals and objectives, the Town will develop consistent criteria, methods, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure the proper maintenance and management of non-owner occupied residential dwellings and properties, in the following areas:

Education & Outreach – The Town is working cooperatively with campus officials to develop and implement ways to inform property owners, landlords, property management companies and new tenants about their respective rights and responsibilities, and to provide opportunities for tenants and residents of Amherst’s neighborhoods to establish amicable and mutually respectful relations.

Enforcement Strategies - In order to determine which areas of the community should receive priority attention, it will be necessary to evaluate and address the strengths and weaknesses of our rental housing stock and the surrounding neighborhoods. The degree to which the Town’s housing objectives are not currently being met in any given area or neighborhood will be a useful measure by which priority areas and properties can be identified for pre-inspection and other remedial actions. On the basis of priority need, the Town will develop a plan for the proactive inspection of rental units, in order to pre-emptively identify and remove conditions that lead to visibly blighted properties, deteriorated housing stock, and which encourage inappropriate and illegal behavior by landlords and tenants.

New Regulations - Applicable sections of the Amherst Zoning Bylaw, Town of Amherst General By-Laws, health regulations and others will be revised to address specific aspects of Amherst’s housing challenges and create an appropriately comprehensive and mutually-supportive set of housing regulations.