



Rent Stabilization Board
Office of the Executive Director

DATE: May 11, 2015

TO: Honorable Members of the Rent Stabilization Board

FROM: Budget & Personnel Committee and
Jay Kelekian, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Proposed Registration Requirements for Sororities and Fraternities

Recommendation

That the Board adopt the proposed resolution to authorize a Summer Rental Period registration fee of \$50.00 and procedures for sororities and fraternities for the pending 2015-16 registration year. Under the proposed resolution, qualifying sororities and fraternities will continue to be eligible to participate in a revised registration process which includes a pro-rated registration fee for summer rentals provided that the following conditions are met: 1) a contact person/liaison must be provided for a all future Board-related matters; 2) any participating sorority or fraternity must be in good standing with the registration requirements of the ordinance; 3) All qualifying sororities and fraternities must meet the requirements for sorority or fraternity status as determined by the Rent Board; and 4) Participating sororities and fraternities must comply with registration procedures as will be developed by the Agency.

Background

In late 2009/early 2010 our agency was made increasingly aware that many fraternities were and had been renting out some of their rooms during the summer to non-members to support their budgets and operating costs. We discovered that this practice was, in fact, widespread. Since units that are not expressly exempted under the ordinance must be registered we were compelled to investigate the matter. Our investigation confirmed that fraternity houses have routinely been renting to non-members, particularly during the summer months.

Because the Board believed that most fraternities were unaware of their obligation to register these seasonal/summer units, the Board authorized an Amnesty Program in November 2010 for

chapters that had been renting out rooms to non-members on a seasonal or summer basis. The Amnesty Program was successful in its goal of resolving prior years registration fees owed the agency as the Board collected \$49,583.00 in past due registration fees from twenty-two (22) chapters. In addition, through the Amnesty Program, staff was able to make positive contacts with various members of the fraternity community including property owners, property managers, student representatives and UC Berkeley staff.

At the conclusion of the Amnesty Program fourteen lawsuits were filed in Superior Court against those property owners and chapters that had not availed themselves of the Amnesty Offer. Of these fourteen, all resolved via settlement.

Summer Registration Process

As a result of the Amnesty Program, staff had numerous discussions with various representatives of the Greek community regarding our agency's' registration process. These talks were with chapter presidents, students, property managers, members of the Fraternity Alumni Council (FAC), the FAC as a group, alumni representatives, and attorneys representing a consortium of chapters and have covered the unique needs and concerns of fraternities. This process enabled all stakeholders to be educated on the rights and responsibilities of the Greek community as it related to rent control and housing.

After several committee meetings and Board presentations, the Board approved, via resolution, a Summer Registration Process for fraternities at its May 14, 2012 meeting. The pilot summer registration process for fraternities required chapters to:

- 1) Pay a reduced, pro-rated fee of \$50.00 per unit for summer rentals;
- 2) Fill out Registration Forms specifically tailored to summer rentals and;
- 3) Provide the Board with a permanent contact person/liaison.

For the 2012/13 year, the agency collected \$9,520.00 in registration fees from the various fraternities representing the registration of one hundred seventy six (176) units.

As part of the registration process, staff conducted unannounced inspections of four chapters to ensure that Fraternity Summer Registration Forms were placed in the room as mandated by the Board's prior resolution. Forms were in place for these chapters.

The pilot program was renewed for the 2013/14 registration year. For the 2013/14 year, the agency collected \$8,144.00 in registration fees from the various fraternities representing one hundred sixty (160) units. Four chapters claimed full exemption and one chapter failed to make any payments. Two chapters paid summer registration fees approximately two weeks late.

For the most recent 2014/15 registration year, the agency collected \$8,076.00 in registration fees from the various chapters representing one hundred forty six (146) summer rental units and four full-time units. In addition to the \$8,076.00 in fees collected, the agency also collected \$9,506.00 in full-time registration fees due to two chapters having been suspended and renting to other tenants and house being sold to private ownership and being rented as a rooming house.

Two chapters paid late but received Administrative Waivers. These chapters will be notified of the ramifications should they continue to pay late in the future. One chapter remains in arrears for non-payment and will be charged the full fee for the upcoming registration year and will be part of the 2015/16 Small Claims Court efforts.

For the most part, chapters have been successful in the payment of fees and the filing of Unit Status Forms and/or Registration Forms. While staff has provided a moderate level of assistance to the various chapter representatives, a majority of chapters were able to register their houses with little or no assistance. This second year of Summer Registration was substantially easier than the first with most chapters paying summer fees and filing the appropriate forms in a timely manner.

Registration for Sororities

As the initial research, review and compliance activities with fraternities wound down, the Board made clear that staff was to begin communications with the various sororities. Commencing in January 2013, staff began this process.

Staff identified thirteen sorority chapters that owned and operated houses in Berkeley. As a result of staff review and investigation it was confirmed that no houses rented rooms to non-members. To determine the exempt status of sororities, staff corresponded with each chapter representative as well as conducted site inspections. As a result of these efforts, staff obtained declarations from chapter representatives affirming that no rooms/units were rented to non-sorority members.

Based on staff's findings that no sororities are being rented to non-members, staff recommends reviewing their status every three years. On April 3, 2015, the Budget & Personnel Committee unanimously concurred with staff's recommendation.

Conclusion

The resolution makes clear that the modified registration fee for the 2015-16 fiscal year is a continuation of the program initially started in 2012 and the Board retains authority to discontinue, renew and/or amend it in future years. Staff and the Budget & Personnel Committee believe the proposed Resolution is the most fair and equitable way for the Board to address the matter of registering any possible sorority or fraternity summer rentals. For the majority of the Board's registration year, fraternities operate rental units that have been conditionally exempted from rent and eviction controls. While the non-member students who occupy these units are fully protected by rent and eviction controls during the summer, they uniformly vacate at the end of the summer break. Fraternities consistently rent these units at below market rents, and imposing a full fee and registration reporting requirement for such a short tenancy represents a substantial burden for an organization that exists for the sole purpose of maintain the chapter/house. This process not only covers our costs to administer the program but also increases the likelihood that tenants renting these units will be timely informed of their rights.

RESOLUTION 15-03

ESTABLISHING THE REGISTRATION FEE FOR FRATERNITIES AND SORORITIES FOR THE SUMMER RENTAL PERIOD DURING THE 2015-16 FISCAL YEAR

BE IT RESOLVED by the Rent Stabilization Board of the City of Berkeley as follows:

WHEREAS, pursuant to Rent Ordinance Section 13.76.050, neither fraternities nor sororities are exempted from the provisions of the rent control ordinance; and

WHEREAS, as early as 1982, the City Attorney crafted legal opinions for the Rent Board and City Council that confirmed the applicability of the ordinance to fraternities and sororities due to their similarity to rooming houses; and,

WHEREAS, the Board did not charge a number of fraternities for Registration Fees before the 2012 – 2013 fiscal year, because the Board was not made aware that fraternities were routinely renting to non-members during the summer months; and,

WHEREAS, when the Board became aware of these summer rentals, the Commissioners authorized an amnesty program wherein the fraternities were only charged fees for three years and all penalties were forgiven; and

WHEREAS, by Resolution 12-07, the Board initiated a pilot program during the 2012 – 2013 fiscal year to charge all qualifying fraternities \$50 per unit for summer rentals to non-members in order to meet the anticipated costs for implementing services related to this discreet group of summer fraternity rentals; and

WHEREAS, Board staff was largely successful in registering fraternities' summer tenancies; and,

WHEREAS, before the 2013 – 2014 fiscal year, staff investigated summer rentals in sororities and found that the vast majority of sorority rooms did NOT qualify as controlled rental units; and,

WHEREAS, the Board adopted Resolution 13-04 on May 13, 2013, which made clear that the Board wishes to continue to charge a reduced fee for summer rentals in fraternities and wishes to extend the same option to sororities should they decide to provide housing to non-member summer tenants;

WHEREAS, the Board adopted Resolution 14-04 on May 12, 2014, which made clear that the Board wishes to continue to charge a reduced fee for summer rentals in fraternities and wishes to extend the same option to sororities should they decide to provide housing to non-member summer tenants;

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ESTABLISHING THE REGISTRATION FEE FOR FRATERNITIES FOR THE SUMMER RENTAL PERIOD DURING THE 2015 – 2016 FISCAL YEAR (Page 2)

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board extends the program during the 2015 – 2016 fiscal year to charge all qualifying fraternities and sororities \$50 per unit for summer rentals to non-members in order to meet the anticipated costs for implementing services related to this discreet group of summer fraternity/sorority rentals; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that for purposes of this Resolution, the “Summer Rental Period” shall be May 17, 2015, through August 16, 2015; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if a non-fraternity/non-sorority member remains a tenant during any time outside of the Summer Rental Period, the fraternity/sorority shall be required to pay a full registration fee as defined by Resolution 15-01 for the rental unit; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that fraternities and sororities shall be required to submit Fraternity/Sorority Summer Registration Forms for each rental to a non-member living at the chapter during the Summer Rental Period; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that fraternities and sororities shall post a copy of this Fraternity/Sorority Summer Registration Form in a clearly visible space in the room/unit occupied by the non-member tenant throughout the entirety of the Summer Rental Period; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all fraternities and sororities shall provide a permanent contact person to whom Board staff can send a bill (this person should not be a student, as the Board intends to maintain contact with this representative for all matters related to current and future registration and billing); and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution incorporates by reference the fraternities and sororities listed in Board Resolutions 12-07, 13-04 and 14-04 that qualify for the Summer Rental Period Fee; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board shall revisit the issue of which fraternities and sororities qualify for a reduced Summer Rental Period registration fee should the Board wish to adopt a similar fee in future years; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if another fraternity or sorority not identified by this Resolution submits a claim that it should qualify for the reduced Summer Rental Period registration fee, the fraternity/sorority shall submit its claim to the Board, and staff shall review any such claim and determine its eligibility; such determination may be appealed to the Board as other claims of exemption are reviewed; and,

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**ESTABLISHING THE REGISTRATION FEE FOR FRATERNITIES FOR THE
SUMMER RENTAL PERIOD DURING THE 2015 – 2016 FISCAL YEAR (Page 3)**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in no case shall a fraternity or sorority be permitted to participate in this program to pay a reduced registration fee for the Summer Rental Period for the 2015 – 2016 fiscal year unless that fraternity/sorority has fully resolved any past due Board registration fees and is otherwise in compliance with the Rent Ordinance registration requirements; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Board staff shall be empowered to investigate and inspect fraternities and sororities during the Summer Rental Period to ensure they are complying with the terms of this Resolution; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Board staff is authorized to develop rules and procedures to implement the counseling, registration, and services associated with this program; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that violations of terms set forth in this Resolution shall require Board staff to charge fraternities and sororities a full registration fee for all units where violations are found and require that Board staff charge penalties allowed by Berkeley Municipal Code Section 13.76.080.

Dated:

Adopted by the Rent Stabilization Board of the City of Berkeley by the following vote:

YES:

NO:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT:

Jesse Townley, Chairperson
Rent Stabilization Board

Attest: _____
Jay Kelekian, Executive Director