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The Town of Niagara-On-The-Lake

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January 14, 2010

Dear Resident/Property Owner:

As you probably know, a number of houses in your area have been and are being used for rental accommodation for students at Niagara College. The Town has had concerns with this issue and a number of complaints that have been made with regard to this usage.

Recently a rental accommodation had an incident regarding carbon monoxide due to inadequate air supply to the furnace and the water heater. Fortunately, no one was hurt but it could have been a tragic accident. Had the renovations been done under a Building Permit and with the input of the Town's Inspectors the whole incident may have been avoided.

The Town would like to clearly outline what is permitted and what steps must be taken to ensure the safety of all residents.

1. First of all, only 2 roomers or boarders are permitted in any dwelling unit (a house being a "dwelling unit") in the Niagara-on-the-Green subdivision (Section 2.3, By-law No. 500KH-96). An apartment unit is different from a dwelling unit and is not permitted at all. There are a number of factors that were used to determine this limitation; house size, density, available parking, etc. The bottom line is the safety of all residents.
2. Next, any changes to the structure of the house including the finishing of a basement for living space or changes to the plumbing system requires a Building Permit. This is to protect the structure of the building as well as the safety of the residents living in it. In some cases a Permit may not be required but in all cases you should contact the Town to find out. The Building Code requirements are not arbitrary rules, they are the minimum standards needed to ensure your safety.
3. The Town also has a Property Standards By-law. What this means to those of you living in rental accommodation is that there are minimum standards that the owners of the property must conform to. Keeping the plumbing, heating and electrical services working properly, maintaining the floors, walls, ceilings, doors and windows in good repair and general maintenance of the property. These are all factors that the owners of the property are responsible for maintaining in good condition.

4. Probably the most important aspect of maintenance, particularly where rental use is concerned, is fire safety. Smoke alarms and CO detectors must be functional and, if battery powered, checked regularly. The number and placement of the smoke alarms is also important. In fact, if there are more than 5 bedrooms in the house an interconnected Fire Alarm system is required.
5. Does your insurance cover you if you have made changes that have not been through the Building Permit process? If you are using your house for rental accommodation contrary to the Town's laws and an accident occurs, will you be protected? Have you told your insurance company? Something that many property owners don't consider when changing the use of their house is their insurance.

Your safety is our number one priority. The Fire, Building and Property Standards inspectors at the Town are always available for consultation and to answer your questions. If you are a home owner and have made changes to your house, please call us so we can find a solution. If you are planning on renting rooms in your home, again, call us so we can help you do it properly.

If you are a roomer or boarder and have any concerns regarding the maintenance of the house or any safety aspects, call us and we can help you resolve these problems. If you have a question about who is responsible for what, call us. We're here to help.

For more information or to arrange a meeting or inspection, please call:

Fire – Jo Zambito, Deputy Fire Chief
Building – Rolf Wiens, Chief Building Official
Property Standards – Randy Berg, Municipal Law Enforcement

Yours Truly



Randy Berg
Supervisor, Municipal Law Enforcement