Date: May 7, 2021
To: Mayor Hart
From: Husien El-Zein, Ethan Gosden, Sophie Janicki, Sam Stucky, and Sierra Wicks
Cc: The Waterloo Housing Authority, The Waterloo City Clerk, and The Waterloo Housing Task Force
Re: Waterloo Housing Policy Inventory
Appendix: Attached

INTRODUCTION
The city of Waterloo must work towards having easily accessible and understandable housing information for its citizens.

SUMMARY
The city of Waterloo currently struggles in making housing policy accessible. As of now, homeowners, landlords, and renters have no way to easily obtain information on housing codes. An individual looking for housing information must click through various links and websites to find information on housing policies. This extra burden to access policies can prevent homeowners and renters from following the housing regulations out of a lack of knowledge. Waterloo can provide accessible housing information on the City website, as well in a physical format. By creating mechanisms like infographics and policy inventories, Waterloo can make their housing codes and policies both easier to access and easier to understand.

BACKGROUND
Following the creation of the Waterloo Housing Task Force, the centralization and accessibility of housing policies became a priority. While most of the codes are there to help citizens, without being able to access and understand them, the chance that someone misinterprets or violates a code is much higher. Through conversations with Waterloo residents, landlords, and city officials, it is obvious that certain code violations are consistent and ongoing including lawn maintenance, garbage pickup, and general curb appeal.

Currently, in order to find codes, one must click on upwards of five links from the City of Waterloo website before finding dense, legal codes.[i] These codes are difficult to search and are held in an external website that also houses several other city ordinances.[ii] Furthermore, there is no centralized database where one can find information or filed codes tenants must follow.[iii] Unless someone has a full legal comprehension of these codes, and knows where to find them, they must rely on a baseline understanding and word of mouth to not get fined.

Without an immediate change to the accessibility and understanding of housing policies in Waterloo, the issues faced by landlords, tenants, and homeowners will only continue. It is important that Waterloo identify these issues and move forward with a plan that strategically identifies and provides the key players and communities of interest with centralized and digestible information.

STAKEHOLDERS

Housing Task Force
The Housing Task Force was convened to address housing accessibility and affordability in Waterloo. The task force requested the creation of a housing policy inventory and a way to make Waterloo housing codes and policies more accessible.

Waterloo City Clerk's Office
The City Clerk's office receives and investigates code violation complaints[iv]. This office has knowledge of which specific codes are often violated and which properties have frequent violations. This office has incentive to decrease the number of violations by increasing awareness of the city codes.

Black Hawk County Landlord Association
The Black Hawk County Landlord Association is the main advocacy group for Waterloo's landlords[v]. This organization provides information and resources to their members. Code violations often result in fines for landlords, so more information about specific policies could reduce violations, for them and their tenants.

BEST PRACTICES

- Davenport, IA
  The City of Davenport's website includes several resources for tenants and accessible information about housing codes and policy. The first is a tenant resource page which includes a PDF of a "Tenant's Guide to Renting in Davenport," this guide lays out the tenant and landlord's rights and obligations in a way that is easy to understand and is all based on the State of Iowa Code[vi]. The Property Maintenance page also gives a detailed and accessible description of what is expected of a property occupant as far as lawn care, debris, and snow removal, illustrated in *Figure 1*.[vii]

- Ames, IA
  The Ames city website provides a great example of how we could model the structure of our policy inventory . The website organizes information by using "Landlord" and "Tenant" sections. The Tenant section breaks down basic information on leases and inspections that should be done before moving in and is pictured in *Figure 2,*[viii] as well as providing information on the proper documentation needed when moving in and signing a lease.[ix]

- Eugene, OR
  The Eugene, Oregon housing website features a well-organized housing resources page with different topics listed on the side to explore[x]. The rental housing standards page is a simple bulleted list with the general codes and four heavily informative yet straightforward infographics that make these complicated policies easy to understand. An example infographic can be found in *Figure 3*. The website is searchable and provides a direct link to the housing codes at the top of the page. Finally, this website has simple and direct links to Homelessness Resources, Fair Housing information and includes contact information on every page.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create Graphics Illustrating specific Waterloo Housing Code
  Currently the only policy information available on the Waterloo City Website is the Waterloo Code Book and several out of context pictures referring to property regulations. More specific

graphics will make these codes easier to understand and should increase compliance. Each graphic should be one to two pages and contain visually appealing and easy to understand information about Waterloo housing codes. We utilized the free graphic design platform Canva, but any similar application could be utilized. The sample infographic focuses on property maintenance and explains the codes and policies surrounding lawn care, snow removal, trash removal, parking regulations and other exterior building codes in accessible language and is pictured in *figure 4*.

- Categorize Codes and Policies on One Centralized Spreadsheet
  While the Code of Ordinances is linked to the current website, issues such as noise disturbances, garbage disposal fees, or maintenance responsibilities are spread out into different chapters over the entire document. This spreadsheet will categorize codes into topic and relevancy (homeowners, landlords, or tenants). It should summarize, in accessible language, a brief paragraph or bullet points covering the responsibilities and expectations regarding each topic.[xi] Finally, each code should be labeled with the title, chapter and section that it belongs in the actual Code of Ordinances so that landlords, tenants, homeowners, and other visitors will be able to quickly search for that direct code for more details.

- Distribute infographics and digital information
  To make this information accessible digitally, the Waterloo website or new housing website could feature PDF versions of infographics and utilize drop down menus to make all necessary information easy to find. To physically distribute this information, physical copies of the infographics could be made and distributed to physical locations with high traffic flow like libraries, grocery stores, and food pantries. These graphics could also be sent out on the back side of the city water bill to limit costs. Additionally, these graphics could be printed quarterly so that the information corresponds with the season (i.e. snow removal during the winter).

NEXT STEPS
- Categorize/simplify all of the information from the City
  - Simplify codes into accessible language to increase usability by the citizens of Waterloo.
  - Categorize all codes by who they apply to. Example: landlord, tenant, homeowner, etc.
  - Categorize codes so that all similar information is in the same place. Example: all information regarding lawn care is in the same section of the spreadsheet.
- Consult community members on housing policy accessibility
  - Contact different groups affected by housing policy (landlords, tenants, and homeowners)
  - Inquire what specific parts of the housing code is confusing and what community members feel like they need more information on.
  - Create a committee of community members to review graphics before the graphics are distributed – could be included in the roles of the Housing Task Force.
- Connect with experts about codes, distribution and translation
  - Lawyer- In order to ensure all code-related information is accurate in the spreadsheet and infographics, finding a lawyer to clarify and check all policy information is vital.
  - Library-To get an understanding of the feasibility of the distribution plan, work with Waterloo Libraries to coordinate a distribution plan that utilizes community spaces.
  - Translator- - After identifying the languages needed, contacting translators in the Waterloo area can help gauge price and time commitments before moving forward.

APPENDIX 1

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

[i] *Waterloo Housing Authority.* City of Waterloo Iowa,
https://www.cityofwaterlooiowa.com/departments/housing_authority/index.php. Accessed 16 April 2021.

[ii] *City Code*. Code Library, https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/waterlooia/latest/waterloo_ia/0-0-0-1.
Accessed 22 April 2021.

[iii] *Building Department.* City of Waterloo Iowa,
https://www.cityofwaterlooiowa.com/departments/building_inspections/index.php. Accessed 13 April 2021.

[iv] *City Clerk*, City of Waterloo Iowa, https://cityofwaterlooiowa.com/government/city_clerks/index.php.
Accessed 15 April 2021

[v] *Black Hawk Landlords.* http://www.blackhawklandlords.org/. Accessed 17 April 2021.

[vi] *Tenant Resources*. City of Davenport, https://www.davenportiowa.com/services/tenant_resources.
Accessed 21 April 2021.

[vii] *Property Maintenance*. City of Davenport,
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cit
ed_electronic_sources.html. Accessed 21 April 2021.

[viii] *Tenants*. City of Ames, https://www.cityofames.org/living/rent-smart-ames/tenants. Accessed 21 April
2021

[ix] *Sample Forms*. City of Ames, https://www.cityofames.org/living/rent-smart-ames/resources/sample-forms.
Accessed 21 April 2021.

[x] *Rental Housing Code*. Eugene Or, https://www.eugene-or.gov/845/Rental-Housing-Code. Accessed 21
April 2021.

[xi]*Tenant Rights, Laws and Protections: Iowa.* U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development,
https://www.hud.gov/states/iowa/renting/tenantrights. Accessed 17 April 2021