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City condemns Fenway apartment

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Northeastern student

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

After uncovering a litany of alarming violations, the city has condemned a Fenway apartment unit owned by a landlord who has repeatedly drawn



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complaints and fines.

Inside the unit that had been rented to a Northeastern University student, city inspectors found evidence of roaches, grime-caked walls and ceilings, exposed wires, and rusty pipes.

The studio apartment in the basement of a six-floor building at 115 St. Stephen St. had no windows or other source of ventilation, no working carbon monoxide detector, and no emergency lighting.

Labeled apartment No. "B5," the building's landlord, Allston-based [Alpha Management Corp.](#), had never obtained a city permit to use the space for housing.

"The landlord should have known that this is an illegal unit and that these violations need to be repaired," said Lisa Timberlake, spokeswoman for the city's Inspectional Services Department.

The company manages hundreds of apartment units in the Boston area, and has been [repeatedly scrutinized](#) for its management practices. Alpha Management formed in 1993 and is owned by Anwar Faisal, state records show. Faisal did not return messages left for him Thursday at his management office.

"We've had a problem with Anwar Faisal and his company's noncompliance with our rental ordinance," said Dion Irish, the city's former housing inspection

"He was under the gun," his father said by phone Wednesday.

His father, who lives in East Granby, Conn., first saw his son's apartment on move-in day. He was appalled.

"A couple of girls moving into a two-bedroom next door were in tears," he recalled.

The father, a 52-year-old who works as a general contractor overseeing residential construction, immediately sensed the unit did not meet code

requirements.

He first tried to contact Alpha Management.

“But the landlord really just blew us off,” Granger said. “They were like ‘Hey, you signed the lease, that’s what you got.’”

So the father contacted the city. A housing inspector arrived early last week.

“When she walked through the door, her jaw hit the ground,” Granger said. “The city folks were great. The inspector that came out was awesome and really had a sincere concern for my son’s wellbeing.”

The city inspector immediately pushed for the unit to be condemned so Tim Granger suddenly had no place to live.

Northeastern provided the student with temporary housing, and has since worked with his family to move him into permanent housing on campus.

The Grangers had paid a finder’s fee of \$1,200, equivalent to one month’s rent, to the realty company that helped them rent the apartment. They refunded that money without hesitation, the father said.

The family also paid first month’s rent, last month’s rent and a security deposit, totaling another \$3,670, according to the father. That money went to Faisal’s company, which at first refused to refund the Grangers. When the father visited the company’s office in person, he said he was told the company plans to pay him back soon.

If the money does not come soon, the father said he plans to take the landlord to housing court where, according to city officials, he could recoup more than what the landlord owes him.

The city’s recommendation to condemn the unit was upheld at a hearing on Tuesday. The unit cannot be re-rented until, if and when, the space is brought up to proper housing code, city officials said. Faisal never showed up to the hearing.

“I think he hoped his tenant wouldn’t speak up,” Irish, the former housing inspection commissioner said. “It just amounts to greed.”

He said that in recent years city inspectors have frequently visited and cited rental properties owned and managed by Faisal's Alpha Management Corp. and his subsidiary companies.

The vast majority of the inspections have been based on complaints made by tenants. Irish said the landlord has often stalled – sometimes waiting until matters are brought before city housing court – before remedying unit violations. Faisal owes \$900 in city fines issued more than one year ago, records show.

“We noticed there’s been a trend of us having to inspect a lot of his properties,” he added. “We have sort of felt we were being used as his maintenance work order system. It is a needless waste of city resources.”

Even after meeting with Faisal recently, Irish said that the city has “not been able to get the desired results from him at this point.”

City inspectors said the case is a prime example of why Boston should to adopt a recently announced proposal by Mayor Thomas M. Menino to hold landlords more accountable for providing rental properties that offer safe and healthy living conditions.

Under [the proposed rental ordinance rewrite](#) that is expected to soon seek City Council approval, landlords in Boston would be required to register their rental units and rental properties would be subject to city inspection every three years.

The existing city ordinance relies on landlords to voluntarily request inspections. As a result, 98 percent of city housing inspections are conducted in response to complaints.

The proposed ordinance also calls for creating a publicly accessible system – or “Chronic Offender Registry” – to track landlords who regularly fail to meet standards or correct problems. Landlords on the list would be subject to fines and court prosecution.

“Landlords like Anwar Faisal are one of the driving factors behind the new ordinance,” said Indira Alvarez, the acting assistant commissioner of the housing division of the city’s inspection department.

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