

## CHAPTER 82.

[ Sub. S. B. 6. ]

## CITIES—MINIMUM HOUSING STANDARDS.

AN ACT relating to cities and towns; defining terms; authorizing cities and towns to enact an ordinance for the repair, closing and demolition of dwellings unfit for human habitation, and buildings and structures unfit for use; to provide for the administration and enforcement thereof; to prescribe minimum standards for the use and occupancy of dwellings, buildings, and structures; and permitting the expenditure of public money therefor.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Washington:*

SECTION 1. It is hereby found that there exist, in municipalities of the state, dwellings which are unfit for human habitation, and buildings and structures which are unfit for other uses due to dilapidation, disrepair, structural defects, defects increasing the hazards of fire, accidents, or other calamities, inadequate ventilation and uncleanliness, inadequate light or sanitary facilities, inadequate drainage, overcrowding, or due to other conditions which are inimical to the health and welfare of the residents of such municipalities.

Legislative  
declaration.

It is further found and declared that the powers conferred by this act are for public uses and purposes for which public money may be expended, and that the necessity of the public interest for the enactment of this law is hereby declared to be a matter of local legislative determination.

SEC. 2. The following terms, however used or referred to in this act, shall have the following meanings, unless a different meaning is clearly indicated by the context:

Definitions

(1) "Board" shall mean the improvement board as provided for in section 3 (1) (a);

"Board."

(2) "Local governing body" shall mean the council or other legislative body charged with governing the municipality;

"Local  
governing  
body."

"Municipality."

(3) "Municipality" shall mean any incorporated city or town in the state;

"Public officer."

(4) "Public officer" shall mean any officer who is in charge of any department or branch of the government of the municipality relating to health, fire, building regulation, or other activities concerning dwellings, buildings, and structures in the municipality.

Permissible ordinances  
—Appeals.

SEC. 3. (1) Whenever the local governing body of a municipality finds that one or more conditions of the character described in section 1 hereof exist within the municipality, said governing body may adopt ordinances relating to such dwellings, buildings, or structures within the municipality. Such ordinances may provide for the following:

(a) That an "improvement board" or officer be designated or appointed to exercise the powers assigned to such board or officer by the ordinance as specified herein. Said board or officer may be an existing municipal board, or officer, in the municipality, or may be a separate board or officer appointed solely for the purpose of exercising the powers assigned by said ordinance.

If a board is created, the ordinance shall specify the terms, method of appointment, and type of membership of said board, which may be limited, if the local governing body chooses, to public officers as herein defined.

(b) If a board is created, a public officer, other than a member of the improvement board, may be designated to work with the board and carry out the duties and exercise the powers assigned to said public officer by the ordinance.

(c) That if, after a preliminary investigation of any dwelling, building, or structure, the board or officer finds that it is unfit for human habitation or other use, he shall cause to be served either personally or by registered mail upon all persons hav-

ing any interest therein, as shown upon the records of the auditor's office of the county in which such property is located, and shall post in a conspicuous place on such property, a complaint stating in what respects such dwelling, building, or structure is unfit for human habitation or other use. If the whereabouts of such persons is unknown and the same cannot be ascertained by the board or officer in the exercise of reasonable diligence, and the board or officer shall make an affidavit to the effect, then the serving of such complaint or order upon such persons may be made by publishing the same once each week for two consecutive weeks in a newspaper published in the municipality, or in the absence of such newspaper, it shall be posted in three public places in the municipality in which the dwellings, buildings, or structures are located. Such complaint shall contain a notice that a hearing will be held before the board or officer, at a place therein fixed, not less than ten days nor more than thirty days after the serving of said complaint; or in the event of publication or posting, not less than fifteen days nor more than thirty days from the date of the first publication and posting; that all parties in interest shall be given the right to file an answer to the complaint, and to appear in person, or otherwise, and to give testimony at the time and place fixed in the complaint. The rules of evidence prevailing in courts of law or equity shall not be controlling in hearings before the board or officer. A copy of such complaint shall also be filed with the auditor of the county in which the dwelling, building, or structure is located, and such filing of the complaint or order shall have the same force and effect as other *lis pendens* notices provided by law.

(d) That the board or officer may determine that a dwelling, building, or structure is unfit for human habitation or other use if it finds that con-

Permissible  
ordinances—  
Appeals.

ditions exist in such dwelling, building, or structure which are dangerous or injurious to the health or safety of the occupants of such dwelling, building, or structure, the occupants of neighboring dwellings, or other residents of such municipality. Such conditions may include the following, without limitations: Defects therein increasing the hazards of fire or accident; inadequate ventilation, light, or sanitary facilities, dilapidation, disrepair, structural defects, uncleanliness, overcrowding, or inadequate drainage. The ordinance shall state reasonable and minimum standards covering such conditions, including those contained in ordinances adopted in accordance with subdivision (7) (a) herein, to guide the board or the public officer and the agents and employees of either, in determining the fitness of a dwelling for human habitation, or building or structure for other use.

(e) That the determination of whether a dwelling, building, or structure should be repaired or demolished, shall be based on specific stated standards on (i) the degree of structural deterioration of the dwelling, building, or structure, or (ii) the relationship that the estimated cost of repair bears to the value of the dwelling, building, or structure, with the method of determining this value to be specified in the ordinance.

(f) That if, after the required hearing, the board or officer determines that the dwelling is unfit for human habitation, or building or structure is unfit for other use, it shall state in writing its findings of fact in support of such determination, and shall issue and cause to be served upon the owner or party in interest thereof, as is provided in subdivision (1) (c), and shall post in a conspicuous place on said property, an order which (i) requires the owner or party in interest, within the time specified in the order, to repair, alter, or improve such dwell-

ling, building, or structure to render it fit for human habitation, or for other use, or to vacate and close the dwelling, building, or structure, if such course of action is deemed proper on the basis of the standards set forth as required in subdivision (1) (e); or (ii) requires the owner or party in interest, within the time specified on the order, to remove or demolish such dwelling, building, or structure, if this course of action is deemed proper on the basis of said standards. If no appeal is filed, a copy of such order shall be filed with the auditor of the county in which the dwelling, building, or structure is located.

(g) The owner or any party in interest, within thirty days from the date of service upon the owner and posting of an order issued by the board under the provisions of subdivision (c) of this subsection, may file an appeal with the appeals commission.

The local governing body of the municipality shall designate or establish a municipal agency to serve as the appeals commission. The local governing body shall also establish rules of procedure adequate to assure a prompt and thorough review of matters submitted to the appeals commission, and such rules of procedure shall include the following, without being limited thereto: (i) All matters submitted to the appeals commission must be resolved by the commission within sixty days from the date of filing therewith, and (ii) a transcript of the findings of fact of the appeals commission shall be made available to the owner or other party of interest upon demand.

The findings and orders of the appeals commission shall be reported in the same manner and shall bear the same legal consequences as if issued by the board, and shall be subject to review only in the manner and to the extent provided in subdivision (2) of this section.

Permissible  
ordinances—  
Appeals.

If the owner or party in interest, following exhaustion of his rights to appeal, fails to comply with the final order to repair, alter, improve, vacate, close, remove, or demolish the dwelling, building, or structure, the board or officer may direct or cause such dwelling, building, or structure to be repaired, altered, improved, vacated, and closed, removed, or demolished.

(h) That the amount of the cost of such repairs, alterations or improvements, or vacating and closing, or removal or demolition by the board or officer, shall be assessed against the real property upon which such cost was incurred unless such amount is previously paid. The county treasurer, upon certification to him by the treasurer of the municipality of the assessment amount being due and owing, shall enter the amount of such assessment upon the tax rolls against the property for the current year, and the same shall become a part of the general taxes for that year to be collected at the same time and with the same interest (not to exceed six percent) and penalties, and when collected shall be deposited to the credit of the general fund of the municipality: *Provided*, That if the total assessment due and owing exceeds twenty-five dollars the local governing body shall, upon written request of the owner or party in interest, divide the amount due into ten equal annual installments, subject to earlier payment at the option of owner or party in interest. If the dwelling, building, or structure is removed or demolished by the board or officer, the board or officer shall, if possible, sell the materials of such dwelling, building, or structure in accordance with procedures set forth in said ordinance, and shall credit the proceeds of such sale against the cost of the removal or demolition, and if there be any balance remaining, it shall be paid to the parties en-

titled thereto, as determined by the board or officer, after deducting the cost incident thereto.

(2) Any person affected by an order issued by the appeals commission pursuant to subdivision (1) (f) hereof may, within thirty days after the posting and service of the order, petition the superior court for an injunction restraining the public officer or members of the board from carrying out the provisions of the order. In all such proceedings the court is authorized to affirm, reverse, or modify the order and such trial shall be heard *de novo*.

(3) An ordinance adopted by the local governing body of the municipality may authorize the board or officer to exercise such powers as may be necessary or convenient to carry out and effectuate the purposes and provisions of this section. These powers shall include the following in addition to others herein granted: (a) (i) to determine which dwellings within the municipality are unfit for human habitation; (ii) to determine which buildings or structures are unfit for other use; (b) to administer oaths and affirmations, examine witnesses and receive evidence; and (c) to investigate the dwelling and other use conditions in the municipality and to enter upon premises for the purpose of making examinations when the board or officer has reasonable ground for believing they are unfit for human habitation, or for other use, provided that such entries shall be made in such manner as to cause the least possible inconvenience to the persons in possession, and to obtain an order for this purpose after submitting evidence in support of an application which is adequate to justify such an order from a court of competent jurisdiction in the event entry is denied or resisted.

(4) The local governing body of any municipality adopting an ordinance pursuant to this act may ap-

appropriate the necessary funds to administer such ordinance.

(5) Nothing in this section shall be construed to abrogate or impair the powers of the courts or of any department of any municipality to enforce any provisions of its charter or its ordinances or regulations, nor to prevent or punish violations thereof; and the powers conferred by this section shall be in addition and supplemental to the powers conferred by any other law.

(6) Nothing in this section shall be construed to impair or limit in any way the power of the municipality to define and declare nuisances and to cause their removal or abatement, by summary proceedings or otherwise.

(7) Any municipality may (by ordinance adopted by its governing body) (a) prescribe minimum standards for the use and occupancy of dwellings throughout the municipality, (b) prescribe minimum standards for the use or occupancy of any building or structure used for any other purpose, (c) prevent the use or occupancy of any dwelling, building, or structure, which is injurious to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare, and (d) prescribe punishment for the violation of any provision of such ordinance.

Discrimination prohibited.

SEC. 4. For all the purposes of this act and the ordinances adopted as provided herein, no person shall, because of race, creed, color, or national origin, be subjected to any discrimination.

Severability.

SEC. 5. If any provision of this act, or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act, or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

Passed the Senate February 27, 1959.

Passed the House February 26, 1959.

Approved by the Governor March 6, 1959.