



Letter to the Editor
Pasadena Inspector Offers Easy Solution:
‘Take Off All the Doors’ ... Huh??

Dear Dan:

My small “bread and butter” apartment house has been in my family since 1941. I inherited it in 1986 and do much of the work myself. The building originated in 1898, likely a rooming house for maids at a grand Pasadena hotel. The City acquired that land as part of the new City Hall site and the building was moved to its present location in 1921.

The downstairs was then carved into three units, each with a kitchen and bath; the upstairs was increased from four bedrooms to five – two with kitchenettes, one existing before the building was moved – and one was added. All five bedrooms were served by one “down the hall” bath. My father paid his yearly “license fees” based on eight units until his death in 1986. In the mid-80s, we reduced the upstairs density by opening up two sets of rooms to each other with interior doors, creating two “suites” with kitchenettes and one remaining single room, still all served by one bathroom.

Due to the presence of only four bathrooms in my building, somewhere along the way, the “legal” description became “four units”. I don’t think even Neighborhood Housing Services cared about that when they granted me a carefully monitored equity loan for major repairs and refurbishment in the early 90s. (One of the many requirements was that I offer low rents to low income people; a precept already acquired.)

Pasadena has imposed their Quadrennial Inspection Program for some years now, supplanting an “as vacated” program. Tenants always complain at the intrusion, but we have always complied and the “deficiencies” duly cured. I have received praise from a past inspector for a good building.

Enter the New Guard, a young bunch apparently full of great zeal for the power of position. This new young woman, paperwork in hand entered the upstairs hall saying, “You HAVE to change it back. It says here this building is four units. You have to change in back!” Change what back to what? Back to five bedrooms? Back to one unit? It has never ever been a one-unit upstairs!! How would you do that anyway? The answer, ladies and gentlemen, was “Take off all the doors.”

Although I did not see that demand in writing at that time, my business license, (I pay for SIX units now), was withheld and is still withheld, although they certainly cash my checks. A year later, after another pointless, frustrating three way telephone conversation with the department, in which one of my states was “But I can’t change something back that hasn’t been changed forward in the first place” gained this response from a young man – “But you already said that you had changed things”. (I suppose he was referring to the decrease in number of “units” upstairs from five to three) and I was told that I “must be polite”. I called a lawyer. Another year and nothing is resolved. I suppose the 14-

Day Notice to Comply is still out there somewhere, but at least I don't have to talk to them again – just pay a lawyer to do it.

I am sure there are many non-conforming older buildings in Pasadena. Doesn't the fact that my building has been exactly the same since the 1920s have any relevance today with these people? Has anyone experienced this type of bureaucratic mayhem in Pasadena recently? The ability and power to disrupt life and livelihood is astonishing.

I will fight for my long-term upstairs tenant's rights to their homes and spend the rest of my life paying off the legal bills, I suppose. Has the "landlord-hating" attitude we read about now become part of the Pasadena scene? The previous inspector, a no-nonsense efficient and knowledgeable man, did try to warn me, I believe. The new people told me that the reason this "problem" has just now surfaced is because the previous people did not do their jobs! *Sincerely, Sylvia T., a distressed owner in Pasadena.*