

Posted on Thu, Oct. 06, 2011

Miami Springs seeks stricter code inspections

By THEO KARANTSALIS
River Cities Gazette



Gazette Photo

THE ENFORCERS: Code Compliance Officers Jose Sadin (l.), Lourdes Taveras, Awilda Rivera and Compliance Officer and Department Supervisor Tex Ziadie will be charged with enforcing the new “re-occupancy” code inspections if passed by the city council.

Miami Springs is seeking more stringent “re-occupancy” code inspections before home sales.

At the Sept. 26 council meeting, a first reading to amend the code passed 4-1, with City Councilman Dan Espino dissenting. A final vote is needed before the new rule takes effect.

“I don’t think there is a single home in Miami Springs that doesn’t have a code violation,” said Councilman Dan Espino, who feels the city should not be in the home inspection business.

Most homes in the city were built in the ’50s and have not been updated.

“I think this will just open up a can of worms,” said Laz Martinez, one of the city’s leading brokers and owner of Mar-Bay Real Estate, located a few doors down from City Hall. “These inspections will ultimately affect home sales and property values.”

Currently, there are only 49 homes for sale in Miami Springs, according to the Multiple Listing Service. The city’s real estate market has struggled to regain traction since the housing bubble burst in 2008, but stringent bank rules, high unemployment and a bad economy have stalled a housing recovery.

Martinez calls it a bad idea and said Miami Springs would be the only city, out of 50 or so county-wide, to do so.

Here is how it would work: After the seller paid a \$100 fee to the city, an inspector would be dispatched to snoop around the inside and outside of the home for code violations. The city would not conduct inspections for roof, plumbing or structural matters.

Anything that is “readily observable” by the city official — including oversized sheds or an illegal addition — would trip an “informational” alarm. If a single-family home, for example, has an extra entry door, kitchen and address suffix like “B” or “1/2,” it might signal an illegal subdivision. Notification would then be passed on to the real estate agent and buyer, right before closing.

Though no violation notice would be issued, according to city officials, details would be retained for “informational” purposes.

“There are things that you cannot see from the outside,” said Tex Ziadie, a code compliance officer, who has done re-occupancy certifications since 2003. “Like a washer not hooked up to the sewer line or a deck

they installed without a permit.”

The most common indoor violations, according to Ziadie, are garages that have been converted into apartments.

“What we are saying is that there may be an issue here that you might want to straighten out before you buy it,” said City Attorney Jan Seiden, who added that the process is a “thorn in the side of the real estate broker.”

The city could remedy problems like illegal structures without spending the city’s money, using its resources or going to court, according to Seiden, who stressed that the process would be “informational only.”

“If it doesn’t work, you can repeal it,” said Seiden.

“For now, it closes the hole in the donut.”

The final vote on the city’s new “re-occupancy” inspections takes place at 7 p.m. Monday, Oct. 10, at City Hall.

© 2011 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miamiherald.com>