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CHAPTER 15.

DWELLINGS UNFIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION

ARTICLE 1.

IN MUNICIPALITIES OF OVER 1,000

**SECTION 311510.** Definitions.

The following terms whenever used or referred to in this article shall have the following respective meanings for the purposes of this article, unless a different meaning clearly appears from the context:

(1) “Municipality” shall mean any city or town regardless of population;

(2) “Governing body” shall mean the council or other legislative body charged with governing a municipality;

(3) “Public officer” shall mean the officer or officers who are authorized by ordinances adopted hereunder to exercise the powers prescribed by such ordinances and by this article;

(4) “Public authority” shall mean any housing authority or any officer who is in charge of any department or branch of the government of the municipality or State relating to health, fire or building regulations or to other activities concerning dwellings in the municipality;

(5) “Owner” shall mean the holder of the title in fee simple and every mortgagee of record;

(6) “Parties in interest” shall mean all individuals, associations, corporations and others who have interests of record in a dwelling and any who are in possession thereof; and

(7) “Dwelling” shall mean any building or structure, or part thereof, used and occupied for human habitation or intended to be so used and includes any outhouses and appurtenances belonging thereto or usually enjoyed therewith.

**SECTION 311520.** Repairing, closing or demolishing unfit dwellings.

Whenever any municipality of this State finds that there exist in such municipality dwellings which are unfit for human habitation due to (a) dilapidation, (b) defects increasing the hazards of fire, accidents or other calamities, (c) lack of ventilation, light or sanitary facilities or (d) other conditions rendering such dwellings unsafe or insanitary, dangerous or detrimental to the health, safety or morals or otherwise inimical to the welfare of the residents of such municipality, such municipality may exercise its police powers to repair, close or demolish any such dwelling in the manner herein provided.

**SECTION 311530.** Provisions permitted to be included in ordinances relating to unfit dwellings.

Upon the adoption of an ordinance finding that dwelling conditions of the character described in Section 311520 exist within a municipality, the governing body of such municipality may adopt ordinances relating to the dwellings within such municipality which are unfit for human habitation. Such ordinances may include the following provisions:

(1) That a public officer be designated or appointed to exercise the powers prescribed by the ordinances;

(2) That whenever a petition is filed with the public officer by a public authority or by at least five residents of the municipality charging that any dwelling is unfit for human habitation or whenever it appears to the public officer (on his own motion) that any dwelling is unfit for human habitation, the public officer shall, if his preliminary investigation discloses a basis for such charges, issue and cause to be served upon the owner of and all parties in interest in such dwelling a complaint stating the charges in that respect and containing a notice that a hearing will be held before the public officer or his designated agent at a place therein fixed not less than ten days nor more than thirty days after the serving of such complaint; that the owner and parties in interest shall be given the right to file an answer to the complaint and to appear in person or otherwise and give testimony at the place and time fixed in the complaint; and that the rules of evidence prevailing in courts of law or equity shall not be controlling in hearings before the public officer;

(3) That if, after such notice and hearing, the public officer determines that the dwelling under consideration is unfit for human habitation he shall state in writing his findings of fact in support of such determination and shall issue and cause to be served upon the owner thereof an order

(a) if the repair, alteration or improvement of the dwelling can be made at a reasonable cost in relation to the value of the dwelling (the ordinance of the municipality may fix a certain percentage of such cost as being reasonable for such purpose), requiring the owner, within the time specified in the order, to repair, alter or improve such dwelling to render it fit for human habitation or to vacate and close the dwelling as a human habitation or

(b) if the repair, alteration or improvement of the dwelling cannot be made at a reasonable cost in relation to the value of the dwelling (the ordinance of the municipality may fix a certain percentage of such cost as being reasonable for such purpose), requiring the owner, within the time specified in the order, to remove or demolish such dwelling;

(4) That, if the owner fails to comply with an order to repair, alter or improve or to vacate and close the dwelling, the public officer may cause such dwelling to be repaired, altered or improved or to be vacated and closed; that the public officer may cause to be posted on the main entrance of any dwelling so closed, a placard with the following words: “This building is unfit for human habitation; the use or occupation of this building for human habitation is prohibited and unlawful”;

(5) That, if the owner fails to comply with an order to remove or demolish the dwelling, the public officer may cause such dwelling to be removed or demolished; and

(6) That the amount of the cost of such repairs, alterations or improvements, vacating and closing, or removal or demolition by the public officer shall be a lien against the real property upon which such cost was incurred and shall be collectible in the same manner as municipal taxes.

(7) If a municipality in demolishing unfit dwellings as permitted by this article contracts with a third party not employed by the municipality to do the work, it must bid the work in conformity with the procurement code applicable to the municipality.

**SECTION 311540.** Power of municipality to declare nuisances not impaired.

Nothing in Section 311530 shall be construed to impair or limit in any way the power of a municipality to define and declare nuisances and to cause their removal or abatement by summary proceedings or otherwise.

**SECTION 311550.** Standards in ordinances for determining fitness of dwelling for human habitation.

An ordinance adopted by a municipality under this article shall provide that a public officer may determine that a dwelling is unfit for human habitation if he finds that conditions exist in such dwelling which are dangerous or injurious to the health, safety or morals of the occupants of such dwelling, the occupants of neighboring dwellings or other residents of such municipality. Such conditions may include the following (without limiting the generality of the foregoing): Defects therein increasing the hazards of fire, accident or other calamities; lack of adequate ventilation, light or sanitary facilities; dilapidation; disrepair; structural defects; uncleanliness. The ordinance may provide additional standards to guide the public officer or his agents in determining the fitness of a dwelling for human habitation.

**SECTION 311560.**