

To: Mayor and City Council
Thru: Patrick Urich, City Manager
From: Ross Black, Community Development Director
Date: July 5th, 2017
Subject: Code Enforcement/Tenant Education – Mid-Year Report

Leading up to 2014, administration of the City of Peoria’s Code Enforcement and Community Development programs had changed little over twenty years. The City was divided into geographic areas, with the majority of code enforcement inspectors and neighborhood development resources assigned to areas with the highest concentration of blight. Rather than develop different protocols to address the various needs of different neighborhoods, a one-size-fits-all approach was used. As little data was collected to review the conditions of the neighborhoods pre and post enforcement, very little time was spent studying the effectiveness of this approach. In 2015, the Community Development Department began to change the approach to improving neighborhoods and that approach continues to be tweaked in 2017. Included in this report is background information on the new approach, updates on the changes that have occurred/are occurring, a mid-year update for 2017 on Code Enforcement activity, a mid-year report on demolition activity, and a mid-year report on tenant education/awareness activity.

Background Information on approach to Code Enforcement

Following the realization that existing methods were not making tangible progress within neighborhoods, the Community Development Department decided to take a different approach to deploying resources. In addition to a generally ineffective strategy, the Code Enforcement Division was reduced from thirteen to seven inspectors within a six-year period. Leadership within the Department understood that a drastic change was needed in order to generate a greater impact with fewer resources.

Another major challenge to fighting blight in City neighborhoods has been pressure to address issues and allocate resources evenly. In times of budget and staff reductions, spreading resources evenly without a strategic approach ensures equally inadequate services.

Staff conducted research on best practices across the country, turning to pioneer cities such as Baltimore, New Orleans, and Detroit. Inspired by their efforts, the Neighborhood Wellness Plan was created in 2014. The concept of the Neighborhood Wellness Plan was established to display data that could not be skewed by “squeaky wheels” or personal interests. The goal of the plan was to adapt a strategy based on conditions of the area. Just as the same prescription should not be written for two different ailments, Community Development services must be tailored to the specific needs of a neighborhood.

Data was collected across economic and physical conditions within neighborhoods to distinguish the types of services to be rendered within those areas. The data currently included in the Neighborhood Wellness Plan evaluation are:

Economical	Physical
Unemployment Rate	Median Year Built
Median Household Income	Percent Renter Occupied
Percent Families in Poverty	Percent Vacant Housing
Home Purchase Loan Amount	Assessor Grade
Equalized Assessed Value	

Upon assessment of the data, census tracts were assigned to four categories: Stressed, Transitional, Good, and Excellent. Three areas of the City were delineated into different strategies of resource deployment, with the Good and Excellent census tracts combined into one category. Area 1 was established as those census tracts with the greatest blight, highest vacancy rates, and virtually no private market for home sales. Area 2 was created for neighborhoods at risk of deteriorating that still maintained a weak housing market. Area 3 included parts of the City where the private housing market remained strong. The Department then crafted a strategy with the intention of maximizing available resources for specific needs of these three distinct areas.

This summer (2017), two interns have been hired by the Community Development Department to canvas the City of Peoria to assess housing quality stock to provide a better baseline of current conditions and allow the Department to continue to improve the strategic focus. In addition, the Department will continue to update and monitor the Wellness Data as it becomes available.

Mid-Year Report (2017) for Code Enforcement Activities

In conjunction with the Neighborhood Wellness Plan, the specific approach to delivering code enforcement has changed drastically over the last few years. Faced with a staff reduction of close to fifty percent but an ever increasing demand for Code Enforcement, the Department looked at every process to eliminate redundancy and become more efficient. Based on better use of technology, improved staff development, and a more committed workforce, work output has drastically improved in Code Enforcement.

	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u> <u>YTD</u>
Code Inspectors (Full Time)	13	12	12	9	7.5	6	7	9	8
Total Actions	10,957	11,493	10,302	10,751	9,891	7,940	14,586	18,979	9,270
Actions Per Full Time Inspector	843	958	859	1,195	1,319	1,323	2,084	2,232	1,158

*Actions Include: ABATE Notices, Citations, Tagging Vehicles, Towing Vehicles, Hearing Officer Cases, Demolition Cases, Rat Abatement, Board Up Notices, Work Orders

In addition to increased output, staff has worked to provide additional educational opportunities for citizens to prevent code violations from occurring in the first place. Educational Opportunity and Citizen Engagement Activities for 2017 include:

- Multiple educational flyers on residential property maintenance, pest control, proper waste disposal and Peoria Cares have been created and strategically mailed throughout the community.
- Coffee with Code events were held through the City of Peoria to provide citizens an opportunity to directly connect with their area Code Enforcement Inspectors and Neighborhood Enhancement Coordinators.
- The Community Development Department launched a brand new website, AppreciatePeoria.com, which acts as a central hub for all city sponsored neighborhood activity and information.
- The Code Enforcement Division launched a new initiative “100 Blocks in 100 Days.” Code Enforcement staff canvassed over 100 blocks in the City of Peoria going door to door to talk to citizens about neighborhood conditions and introduce themselves.
- Code Enforcement staff created a video that discussed property maintenance issues. The video allowed staff to provide real life examples of code violations and what to look for when creating a property maintenance plan for your property.

Mid-Year Report on Demolition Activity

The Community Development Department has exhausted all the general demolition funds for 2017. As such, the only demolitions for the remainder of 2017 will be emergency situations where a structure is clearly unsound, and a limited number of demolitions in the 61605 zip code financed with special State grant dollars. The Department demolished 46 structures in 2017 with the allocated budget. Demolitions will be scheduled to start in January 2018 pending budget adoption.

Demolitions occurred at the following locations in 2017:

1503 W. Antoinette	1026 S. Hickory	1219 E. Melbourne
1714 S. Arago	1302 W. Howett	1006 E. Nebraska
1816 S. Arago	1721 W. Howett	1008 E. Nebraska
818 W. Bartlett	2502 W. Humboldt	2713 W. Nevada
1002 E. Behrends	2104 W. Idaho	323 SW New
1402 N. Broadway	2906 SW Jefferson	325 SW New
1912 N. California	2908 SW Jefferson	2815 W. Seibold
207 S. Charlton	3115 SW Jefferson	920 S. Shelley
1611 S. Charles	1125 Koch	2008 S. Stanley
1518 S. Faraday	1517 S. Livingston	2308 W. Starr
4825 N. Fairview Place	426 S. Louisa	2708 W. Starr
2816 W. Fremont	428 S. Louisa	2901 W. Trewyn
2052 N. Gale	1710 S. Lydia	706 S. Warren
2132 N. Gale	2618 NE Madison	1520 S. Westmoreland
2023 W. Garden	2414 W. Marquette	
1012 NE Glendale	3003 W. Meidroth	

Increasing Tenant Education/Awareness and Improving Housing in the City of Peoria

During the 2017 budget process that occurred in 2016, there was discussion regarding the quality of rental stock and affordable housing in the City of Peoria. The discussion stemmed from the Community Conversations on Race and some ongoing dialog with Prairie State Legal Services regarding fair housing in the City of Peoria as it related to landlord/tenant relations. Some of issues that were brought during both discussions were:

Housing Stock Quality –

1. The tenant does not know that a housing violation case has been opened on the property unless the landlord tells them.
2. There may be interior code violations that we do not know about because most our cases are based only on exterior inspections.
3. Tenants are reluctant to complain about code violations as they fear that they will be evicted. They are also not sure who to complain to about issues that the landlord is not correcting.

We've been asked multiple times by community groups to re-start the interior rental inspection program. The issue with the interior inspection program is that we don't have the staff to implement it, and because it required an inspection of almost all rental properties, we would waste a significant amount of time inspecting properties that do not have violations. This led us to think about an approach where tenants would feel comfortable letting us know if there were violations and allow us to focus only on those properties. Landlords often mention that they feel the City paints all landlords with a broad brush. A general interior rental inspection program is a broad brush; staff feels that some of the steps that have taken place or will take place in the immediate future focuses on properties that have code violations and providing better support/education for tenants.

Tenant Education Seminar - The City of Peoria Community Development Department has begun to host quarterly tenant education seminars starting in 2017. The seminars provide an opportunity for tenants to gain a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Speakers from the City review common misconceptions of property maintenance codes and go over frequently asked questions on the renting process in the City of Peoria. In addition to City Staff members, representatives from Prairie State Legal and Navicore present on the legal rights of tenants and ways to improve financial literacy.

The Tenant Education Seminar cover: tenant responsibilities and rights, how to effectively communicate with your landlord, how to be a good neighbor, red flags to notice and avoid, the landlord's perspective and expectations, how to maintain a clean, safe and healthy home, how to pre-screen yourself as a landlord would, creating a workable household budget that makes paying rent a priority and reviewing rental agreements to understand common terms and expectations.

Tenant Education Flyer - The Community Development Department staff designed an educational flyer that will be sent to all registered rental property in the City of Peoria on an annual basis. City staff understands that not all tenants are available or feel comfortable attending an education seminar. The flyer acts as a brief summary of the items that are discussed in detail at the seminar and provide contact information for the multiple resources that are available for tenants in the City of Peoria. The flyer was designed in conjunction with Prairie State Legal Services and Navicore. (Attachment A) In addition to mailing the educational flyer, staff will make the flyer available to multiple non-profit groups in the City of Peoria and Neighborhood Associations by request.

Better Communication of Hearing Officer Process - Within the next month, City staff will begin sending a letter to tenants in properties where a housing code violation case has been opened. The letter would notify the tenant that a case had been opened, provide a list of the violations that were found, and ask them if there are any other issues with the property that we should be aware of. In addition, the letter includes a brief discussion of the required self-inspection form that landlords should be providing to the tenants and a copy of the actual form. For the good landlords, if a property doesn't have exterior violations, then the tenant would never receive such letter. (Attachment B)

PeoriaCodeViolations.com - The Community Development Department launched a new website to assist property owners in monitoring their property and proactively take responsibility when the City of Peoria initiates a code enforcement case.

City staff creates a daily list of locations in Peoria with cited code violations. The tool will allow property owners concerned about not being aware a code violation exists at a property address to check daily and make sure their property is not contributing to neighborhood blight. Correcting violations is still not a defense for violations existing in the first place, which is why it still remains important for property owners to monitor properties regularly and communicate the importance of following the City code and regulations with tenants. In addition to the new website, Community Development Department put together an informational video on property maintenance issues. Tenants are encouraged to contact their landlord if the standards identified in the video are not being maintained.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKn0UOTm5CU&feature=youtu.be>

Mass Mailing to Landlords Regarding Neighborhood Involvement - In June of 2017, a mass mailing was sent to all registered non-owner occupied property owners in the City of Peoria. The mailing encouraged landlords to increase their involvement in neighborhood associations and neighborhood programs. It also asked landlords to encourage their tenants to attend the tenant education seminars. (Attachment C)