

Keeping Alameda Looking Good
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Have you ever driven through a City and noticed old, run down, dilapidated buildings. Or buildings with trash and numerous old vehicles parked where the front lawn should be. Sometimes you find whole neighborhoods looking tired and worn out. For the most part, Alameda has not fallen victim to this level of neglect and decay. There are a number of reasons for this; one small reason is the diligent efforts of Alameda's Code Enforcement Division.

Alameda's Code Enforcement Division is a small workgroup, with a large workload, within the Community Development Department. Code Enforcement staff consists of one Code Enforcement Officer, one full time and one part time Combination Building Inspector and a Code Enforcement Clerk, who all report to the Supervising Building Inspector. They are charged with enforcing Alameda Municipal Code provisions dealing with property maintenance. The scope of violations they deal with range from noise complaints to work without permits to dangerous and abandoned buildings.

The Code Enforcement Division has grown and evolved over the past 17 years reflecting the community's desire to maintain the high quality of life we all expect in Alameda. The current Code Enforcement Division was established in 1995 as an enforcement program within the Police Department. In late 1998, Code Enforcement was transferred to Building Services under the supervision of the Building Official. At that time, the City Council adopted Code Enforcement Investigation fees of 4 times the

regular permit fees to be assessed against illegal construction projects. In early 1999, the City Council ratified code enforcement priority guidelines establishing high, medium, low and secondary enforcement priorities. In 2003, the City Council authorized that citations could be written for code enforcement violations. In 2007, the City Council added one more tool to assist Code Enforcement staff by authorizing the pursuit of a court appointed receiver to facilitate repairs of particularly egregious violations where a property owner was either unable or unwilling to maintain a safe building.

In Alameda, code enforcement is a reactive program not a proactive program. Staff responds to complaints rather than going out and looking for violations. Complaints come from any number of places. Often they are received from neighbors and tenants. A fair number of complaints are forwarded from police and fire when they run across health and safety violations in their normal course of business. When complaints are received they are prioritized as either high, medium, low or secondary. High priority cases include illegal units, housing code violations, and dangerous buildings; medium priority cases include work without permits, abandoned vehicles (on private property), vacant buildings and graffiti; low and secondary priority cases include garbage, illegal signs, noise and illegal fences.

Every effort is made to visit the site of the alleged violation and confirm its validity as soon as possible. Once a complaint is confirmed as valid, the property owner is contacted to schedule an inspection and attempt to gain compliance. Many cases are resolved at this stage, the property owner makes the required corrections, the case is closed and all is right with the world. Other cases take more persuasion before compliance with the Alameda Municipal Code is reached. Enforcement efforts become

increasing more demanding and can include the issuance of citations, a rare but sometimes necessary step. In the most difficult cases, where the safety of building occupants or neighboring properties are effected and the City is unable to gain compliance, the City Council may authorize civil proceedings against the property owner.

Last year the City has successfully prevailed on the Alameda County Superior Court to appoint a receiver for the purposes of repairing an historic residential building that was on the verge of collapse. The appointment of a receiver is a drastic step that was only contemplated and agreed to after all efforts to have the property owner repair his building were exhausted. The receivership process is an enforcement tool granted to the City by the State of California. The Court appointed receiver was able to move forward to perform the necessary work to make this building safe for future occupants as well as for neighboring structures. This was Alameda's first attempt at using what has proven to be a very successful tool in other jurisdictions as well as in Alameda.

Whether compliance is gained through an initial contact or through more involved means, the sole purpose of the Code Enforcement Division is to assure that buildings and properties in Alameda are maintained in a safe manner and that the community standards adopted by the City Council are adhered to. It is by doing so, that in our own small way we are diligent in keeping Alameda a great place to work and live.

And of course you can always contact us here at City Hall or by emailing me at buildingofficial@ci.alameda.ca.us. Obtaining a permit is the law, and it is also a good idea. Planning & Building staff are ready to assist you as you navigate through the review process. We are located in Room 190 on the first floor of City Hall, located at 2263 Santa Clara Avenue. We can be reached by phone at 510-747-6850.