

CITY OF MOUNT VERNON

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Property Enforcement Efforts Paying Off for City

MOUNT VERNON – Over the past three years, Mount Vernon's nuisance property violations have been declining according to a report by Greg Bemiller, the City's Property Maintenance Enforcement Officer. Overall, the total number of violations in 2017 was 866 followed by 877 in 2018, and down significantly to 695 in 2019. Violations may include any number of codes, but mostly include accumulation of refuse, furniture and appliances outside of the home, high grass and weeds, inoperable vehicles and property maintenance structural violations among others.

"It's nice to see the efforts we are making are starting to pay off", Bemiller stated. "Ninety percent of the time, residents respond to an initial letter and the matter is settled. However, there are occasions when we have to take additional action", Bemiller continued.

For instance, when a property owner has been notified to clean up or mow their property and doesn't do this in the time prescribed. The City can send a crew to abate the issue. If the issue is an inoperable motor vehicle, the City can request the MVPD to remove and impound the vehicle. Last year, thirty-five violations were abated by the City.

"In 2019, City Council changed the ordinance to include a fine for a property owner receiving a third violation notice in a calendar year and a \$100 per day fine for each day a violation exists beyond the time prescribed for abatement of a violation", Bemiller explained. "It is very much an incentive for property owners and tenants to take care of ordinance violations and it has clearly helped improve neighborhoods."

The most frequently cited violation Bemiller sees is the accumulation of refuse, appliances and furniture on the property. Violations totaled 382 in 2017, 409 in 2018 and 323 in 2019. Likewise, violations of high grass and weeds saw similar trends resulting in 254, 320 and 230 in 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. Violations of inoperable vehicles on the property owner's premises slightly varied from the other two violations, but continued to show a decrease in the overall number with 160 in 2017, 76 in 2018 and 84 in 2019.

"What struck me in all of this was the market trend in the property owners", said Bemiller. "In 2017, there were 616 violations from tenant occupied properties, that dropped to 548 in 2018 and again to 364 in 2019. That's almost half of the violations on tenant occupied properties in three years".

In contrast, the owner occupied violations are showing an upward trend with 197 violations in 2017, 229 in 2018 and 233 in 2019. Also, vacant buildings have shown to be on the rise with 46 reported in 2017, 73 in 2018 and 84 in 2019.

"Overall, this is ground up economic development", said Mount Vernon Mayor Matt Starr. "Another key measure that City Council took last year is to provide enough funds for Greg's department, so he can contract mowing and trash removal services when needed. We can be more responsive to the neighborhood without having to pull staff from other departments who are already busy doing other city business".

City Council has been working on the budget appropriations for 2020 and will be discussing the matter more in depth over the next month. Currently, plans of keeping the Property Maintenance Officer's budget financed to handle property violations is pending Council's final approval.

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