

Walking the Talk

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*'Every good citizen
adds to the strength of
a nation.'*

Gordon B. Hinckley (1910 - 2008)

UNDERSTANDING CODE ENFORCEMENT

I recently rode along with Chief Code Enforcement Officer Russell Tisone to better understand the County's code enforcement duties and responsibilities. Its Mission is to ensure safe and sanitary conditions so that our County remains a great place to live and to do business.

Our Code Enforcement staff enforces the County's Unified Development Code (*zoning, growth and development*), Code of Ordinances (*local laws*) and the International Property Maintenance Code (*minimum maintenance standards*). They do not have the authority to enforce State laws, subdivision/homeowners' association covenants, or property disputes. They also issue sign permits.

Just a note before I get into some details - please remember that it is your responsibility as residents to learn and comply with all codes and ordinances. It affects your lifestyle, your aesthetics and those of your neighbors, as well as property values.

Code Enforcement is a thankless job but it is necessary and our staff has a formidable task every day. Here are examples of what they have to monitor.

- **Litter:** trash, debris, high grass/weeds, dead tree debris, junk vehicles (*vehicles must have a current license plate and be operable*), junk vehicle parts and discarded items;
- **Zoning:** automotive repair in residential areas (*not allowed*), accessory building violations (*oversized building, improper location on a property, no building permit obtained prior to construction*), certain animals on residential property (*must meet minimum property size and have below the total number of animals allowed*), commercial outdoor storage screening, heavy truck parking in residential areas (*not allowed*)
- **Property Maintenance:** structural integrity, habitability and upkeep of primary and accessory structures

Our Code Enforcement Officers are on the streets every day investigating possible violations. Approximately 90% of their leads come from complaints and concerns made by citizens, but a complaint is not necessary for our officers to stop at a property to investigate something that they happen to see.

With the limited resources in this Department - a total of 3 officers - it is critical that citizens help by contacting them with their concerns. Every complaint will be investigated, but may not be a violation or end up with a citation.

Citizen concerns/complaints may be made by:

- telephone to 770.920.7372 (*caller may remain anonymous*)
- mail to Code Enforcement, Douglas County Courthouse, 8700 Hospital Drive, Douglasville 30134 (*becomes part of the official County/public record*)
- e-mail to CodeEnforcement@co.douglas.ga.us (*becomes part of the official County/public record*)
- in person at the Courthouse
- clicking on "Submit Citizen Concerns or Questions" on the home page of the County web site at www.CelebrateDouglasCounty.com (*an e-mail is generated, becomes part of the official County/public record*).

Every complaint/concern must have an accurate street address and a description of the problem.

Our Code Enforcement Officers typically investigate a concern/complaint within about 48 hours. If a citation is issued, the offender is given 10 days to correct the problem. If progress is being made, another 10 days will be allowed. After that, a summons may be issued to Magistrate Court. We try to work with the offender as much as possible, but we will go to Court when necessary. Penalties imposed by the Court can be up to 60 days in jail, up to \$1,000 in fines, assessment of Court costs and community service. None of us want this.

It's summer, so high grass and weeds are the most common complaint this time of year (*grass generally must be 8" or higher to be in violation*). Litter is always a problem. So are the pesky illegal roadside signs that seem to 'grow', especially at intersections (*no signs are allowed on rights-of-way or utility poles and are subject to removal/citation*).

Please do your part. Cut your grass. Don't litter. Keep your house and property in good condition. Contact Code Enforcement when you see unsafe, unhealthy, or illegal conditions and we will do what we can to get things corrected. Be the good citizen! Thanks!

Walking the Talk with You,

Romona

