



COUNTY OF MENDOCINO
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND BUILDING SERVICES

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 9, 2016

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FROM: PLANNING & BUILDING SERVICES STAFF

RE: RECENT ACTIVITIES IN CODE ENFORCEMENT AND BOS PRIORITIES

Background

On July 7, 2015, a presentation was given to the Board on code enforcement activities in the county. Consensus direction of the Board at that time provided priorities for code enforcement activities, which included, in addition to the regularly balanced workload: (1) ponds, land clearance, environmental crimes; (2) red-tagging active unpermitted job sites; (3) highly visible cases; (4) working with the Contractors State License Board to strengthen the "culture of compliance" in Mendocino County.

Staffing

Subsequent to the July presentation, the Board approved an additional position for the code enforcement division, which will bring the number of code enforcement officers in the County to 4. Currently, with building permit technician, Lisa Washburn, promoted to code enforcement, there are three code enforcement officers working in the department; the Department has contracted with Trent Taylor, a recently retired Captain from the Ukiah Police Department. Another recruitment for the fourth officer will be launched within the next month to fully staff the division.

Recent Activities

In addition to activities consistent with the consensus board direction, the department is continuing to maintain regular workload. In the last six months, the Department has streamlined Abandoned Vehicle Abatement (AVA) record keeping and reports, and the program has removed 61 abandoned vehicles. Code enforcement cases have also been worked which include multi-agency investigations of commercial properties and an elder care home, all of which generated multiple complaints, substandard rental units, and hoarding. Code enforcement also monitors the storm water illicit discharge complaint hotline, with three complaints received in this time.

Consistent with Board priorities, nineteen active, unpermitted construction sites have been red-tagged since July. As a result of these stop-work orders, the Department has received several permit applications, issued and finalized permits, and is pursuing further action on other properties. Violation fees are assessed against these permits, consistent with MCC Section 18.08.10. For property owners that do not cooperate in a timely fashion, additional fees are assessed through code enforcement action, per MCC Section 8.75

In the last six months, six grading and pond permits have been issued for work that was previously unpermitted.

Highly visible violations that have been abated since July include the long standing “graffiti sheds” on Highway 101, north of Laytonville. Four new cases have been opened which are highly visible, including three on Highway 1 (near Manchester, Rockport, and Caspar) and one highly visible from Highway 253 (Boonville Road).

Additionally, staff from have been working to strengthen the local “culture of compliance” with building and zoning code regulations. To make it easier for the public to review recent permitting records and activity on a property, the Department has been able to open a “portal” on the County’s website. This new portal allows any member of the public to quickly determine whether or not a particular property has had permits issued recently, and the status of those permits. After meeting with staff from the Contractors State License Board (CSLB), Planning & Building Services has added information to the Department’s website related to the importance of reporting unpermitted work by both licensed and unlicensed contractors. Additionally, the building permit application form has been completely revised, to include specific information on the duties and responsibilities of owner-builders and contractors. Consistent with statute, applicants now acknowledge their awareness of this information in writing. Another process enhancement has staff including evidence of license and insurance verification in the file when permits are issued. A final component of this partnership with the CSLB involves referring projects and individuals to the CSLB for investigation. This process already takes place on an irregular basis, most recently in August 2015, but it will be emphasized in the coming year.

Planned Activities

In the next six months, Planning & Building Services intends to continue balancing regular code enforcement workload with the expressed priorities of the Board. In particular, the Department plans to continue creating “best practices” for the function of code enforcement, and formalize those best practices through a policy & procedure manual. The creation of a “Top 10” list of code enforcement cases, which are consistent with Board priorities to the maximum extent practicable, will provide focus for the Department. It is important to note that the Top 10 cases will most likely be difficult and time-consuming to address.

The Department will also be bringing forward suggested code language for adoption by the Board, which will mandate posting of notice on jobsites that have received necessary permits. This is intended to make it easier for the public and staff to determine at a glance if enforcement action may be necessary. Finally, consistent with Board direction to collaborate with the CSLB in strengthening the local culture of compliance, the Department will emphasize referring licensed contractors found working on unpermitted job sites to the CSLB for independent investigation.