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New Approach to Enforcement of Property Maintenance Codes Successful

WHEELING, W.VA. – Wheeling City Council passed an ordinance last Spring that streamlined the citation process for property violations - things like overgrown weeds, unlicensed motor vehicles and garbage - and has seen much success with compliance since the new approach to enforcement was implemented.

Councilman Dave Palmer, who worked with the Economic & Community Development staff to make the changes, said he is pleased with the progress.

“The citation process has been very helpful for property maintenance. The possible \$100 fine with the citation got residents to take action. One of the big successes within the last year has been the removal of junk vehicles from properties. Approximately 75 vehicles were removed or licensed last year,” he said. “Although we have had success, council and staff will continue to work on loopholes that allow the offender to drag out issues instead of correcting them in a timely manner.”

According to information provided by the City’s Economic & Community Development Department, in 2019, approximately 300 citations were issued for high weeds, unlicensed and inoperable motor vehicles and sanitation. About 85-90 percent of the violations were corrected without court action. The other 10-15 percent of violators either paid the citation or complied. The offenders who did not comply, about 5 percent, were taken to court. Most of those individuals appeared in court and complied without being fined. Capias warrants were issued for the few individuals who failed to appear.

“Some residents only complied after they were summoned to court. In most cases, if they complied within a given time period, the citation was dismissed. However, the complaint was never dismissed for repeat offenders,” Palmer said.

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Streamlining the citation process for property violations was an effort to resolve issues in a timelier manner. It became the focus of City Council last year after it was determined that the enforcement process for violations took too long and led to too many repeat offenders. Council and City staff will continue working to implement a system of expedited enforcement that would provide property owners with incentives for early compliance.

For tips on how to be a good neighbor by keeping property tidy, please visit the City's website at <https://www.wheelingwv.gov/departments/Economic-CommunityDevelopment/beagoodneighbor>.