

City of Bremerton Code Enforcement/Abatement Program

The City of Bremerton Code Enforcement program, orchestrated by Janet Lunceford, has been evolving for the past 5 years. The program consists of 5 elements:

- *Dangerous building abatement*
- *Housing code violation abatement*
- *Zoning Code abatement*
- *Garbage and debris abatement*
- *Weed abatement*

The Bremerton Building Department is charged with responding to citizen complaints in these areas. Most complaints can be dealt with by inspection and a letter to the violator; however, more serious complaints regarding unsafe buildings frequently become lengthy processes. The City has adopted the Uniform Code for the Abatement of Dangerous Buildings, the Uniform Housing Code, the Bremerton Zoning Ordinance and garbage and weed abatement codes modeled after existing RCW's to deal with community nuisance problems.

During World War II, the population of Bremerton ballooned from approximately 20,000 residents to an estimated 80,000, due to increased need for shipyard workers. The existing housing stock of Bremerton was incapable of sheltering the additional people, and sheds and chicken coops were quickly converted into dwelling units. Single-family residences were divided into apartments, many sharing common bath facilities. After the wartime boom, these buildings continued to be rented as affordable housing, and to this day 60% of Bremerton's housing stock is owned by absentee landlords and the community continues to have an inordinate number of substandard dwellings. Age and deterioration have further contributed to the problems these buildings have caused, as have landlords who are reluctant to spend the money to upgrade them to today's standards.

These conditions lead to the need for Bremerton to develop a program by which the City could order the abatement of substandard and dangerous buildings and the removal of weeds and garbage, and be in a position to do the work and lien the property if the owner was unwilling or unable to perform the work. A revolving abatement fund was established, which gave the City funding for garbage and weed removal, as well as money to pay for demolition of dangerous structures. After the work is performed, either by City crews or by outside contracts, a lien is placed on the property. When the lien is paid by foreclosure, the normal course of the sale of the property, or by the owner, the revolving fund is replenished, allowing other abatement projects to be undertaken.

Today, the program has expanded, with the City obtaining a line of credit for abatement projects. The money from this program is expended on abatement projects only if certain criteria are met:

- *The property has a record of building, housing, environmental, health and zoning code violations*
- *Documentation of likelihood that abatement will prevent the deterioration of surrounding properties*
- *Visibility of the site within the community*
- *Value of the property after the abatement; owner's property or personal worth and liquidity*
- *Estimated total cost of enforcement and abatement actions, including administrative costs*
- *Effectiveness of abatement actions in removing the violation*
- *Criminal activity recorded at the site*
- *Documentation of health and safety threats to children on or near the site*
- *Location of the site is within a neighborhood development target area.*

To help in the decision-making process and coordinate activities from multiple departments and agencies, the City developed a Code Compliance Task Force, composed of the Mayor and representatives from the Building, Land Use, Fire, Engineering, Public Works, Police, Business License, Parking Enforcement, Animal Control, Treasurer's and Attorney's Departments within the City, as well as members from the Bremerton Housing Authority and the Bremerton-Kitsap County Health District. The committee meets once a month to discuss everything from garbage issues to drug busts. The purpose of the meeting is to identify properties on which multiple violations are present and to determine which departments have jurisdiction and/or the expertise to assist with handling the problems. Past experience has revealed that the most difficult cases for the Building Department are frequently problem properties for other departments as well. City staff benefits from becoming familiar with the responsibilities and activities of other departments and knowing who to contact to report violations found during daily job functions and calls for service. The city as a whole benefits from the removal of blighted buildings, both in the physical improvement of the neighborhood, the quality of life improvement, and the savings realized from reduction in calls for fire and police services. The cost of the abatement work is placed squarely where it belongs--on the property owner, and tax dollars are eventually recouped through the lien process. In addition to these benefits, landlords are receiving a clear message that allowing the deterioration of rental properties in Bremerton will not be tolerated and may result in losing the property altogether, either through the demolition of the structure, or by the foreclosure on the lien.

Some of the successful abatement projects undertaken by the City include:

- *Demolition of four dilapidated houses in the city's industrial area, which has stimulated development of a new auto dealership.*
- *Abatement of substandard 10 unit apartment complex with the highest number of calls for service for police and fire last year. Building owner signed a deed in lieu of foreclosure and building is now empty and awaiting demolition or rehabilitation to today's building and fire code standards. Estimate of savings due to lack of police and fire calls is \$22,208 per year.*
- *After police arrested 5 persons for possession and distribution of a controlled substance, Building Department was called to inspect suspected building and housing code violations. As a result, 8 units were closed until repairs were made, 4 are still not repaired. The City Attorney filed an order requiring the closure for one year of the units where drug activity*

was proven under the criminal nuisance statutes. Residents report the neighborhood has not been this quiet in years. This is another site where the calls for police and fire response has been severely curtailed, with savings in manpower and equipment costs to the City.

- Structure fire due to illegal woodstove installation resulted in abatement orders. Owner sold property to developer, house has been rehabilitated and will soon become a viable housing unit, with all code violations remedied.*
- In 1997, 595 complaints were received and investigated. Forty four sites are currently under abatement.*

Several other cities have expressed interest in the abatement/lien process and the cooperative relationship established between city departments and outside agencies to rid their communities of crime and blight. Ms. Lunceford has been invited to present the City of Bremerton's program to their officials.

Unresolved Code Enforcement Prioritization Evaluation

Target Areas/Sites	Priority Grouping - Staff			Priority Grouping - Mayor	
	1 = Low	2 = Med.	3 = High		
1. Multiplicity of violations present	1				
2. Adequate chance of conviction.	1				
3. Likelihood that resolution of violations will halt deterioration of surrounding neighborhood.				x2	
4. Likelihood that resolution of violation will promote re-development of the neighborhood.					
5. Location visibility within community.					
6. Likelihood to recover funds spent on enforcement and/or abatement.				x2	
7. Amount of criminal activity associated with code violations.					
8. Cost of Enforcement. 1 - high cost to city 2 - low cost to city 3 - No cost to city					
9. Likelihood of abatement of violations.					
10. Public Safety Threat				x2	
11. Civic Impact					
12. Target Neighborhood Proximity					
Total Score					

ABATEMENT PROCESS FOR DANGEROUS BUILDINGS AND HOUSING CODE VIOLATIONS

- STEP 1 COMPLAINT REC'D
DAY 1
- STEP 2 FOR LIFE-SAFETY VIOLATIONS, INSPECTION PERFORMED
DAY 2 WITHIN 1 DAY, SKIP TO STEP 6
- STEP 2 FOR NON-LIFE-SAFETY VIOLATIONS, COMPLAINT
DAY 6 INVESTIGATED WITHIN 5 DAYS OF RECEIPT OF COMPLAINT
- STEP 3 OWNER NOTIFIED BY LETTER OF VIOLATION, ALLOWED 2
DAY 7 WEEKS TO CORRECT VIOLATION
- STEP 4 REINSPECTION
DAY 21
- STEP 5 IF CONDITION IS NOT CORRECTED, CONTACT OWNER TO
DAY 22 INFORM OF IMPENDING ABATEMENT
- STEP 6 POST NOTICE AND ORDER TO ABATE UNSAFE CONDITION OR
DAY 23 HOUSING CODE ABATEMENT, NOTICE TO VACATE IF
NECESSARY
- STEP 7 DEADLINE FOR APPEAL OF ABATEMENT ORDER OR FOR
DAY 53 OBTAINING PERMITS FOR REPAIR OR DEMOLITION OF
STRUCTURE. IF APPEAL IS FILED, SCHEDULE APPEALS BOARD
NO SOONER THAN 10 DAYS NOR MORE THAN 60 DAYS FROM
DATE OF APPEAL. DEADLINES OF ABATEMENT ORDERS ARE
STAYED DURING APPEAL PROCESS; VACATE ORDERS ARE STILL
IN EFFECT
- STEP 8 DEADLINE TO HAVE ALL WORK COMPLETED AND READY FOR
DAY 113 FINAL INSPECTION
- STEP 9 IF PERMITS HAVE NOT BEEN OBTAINED, OR CONDITION IS NOT
DAY 114 CORRECTED, ORDER TITLE REPORT
- STEP 10 NOTIFY LIENHOLDERS OF IMPENDING DEMOLITION BY CITY
DAY 124±
- STEP 11 DEADLINE BY WHICH LIENHOLDERS MUST FILE APPEAL OF
DAY 154 ABATEMENT OR OBTAIN PERMITS TO CORRECT DEFICIENCIES
- STEP 12 PUBLIC WORKS ASKED TO ESTIMATE COST OF DEMOLITION
DAY 155

STEP 13 BID SUBMITTED FROM PUBLIC WORKS
DAY 165

STEP 14 DEMO PERMITS ISSUED, ASBESTOS REMOVED. STRUCTURE IS
DAY 175 DEMOLISHED

STEP 15 FINAL BILLING RECEIVED FROM PUBLIC WORKS
DAY 180

STEP 16 PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULED, ADVERTISED, OWNER NOTIFIED,
DAY 181 POST PROPERTY, AGENDA BILL AND RESOLUTION CREATED

STEP 17 AGENDA BILL TO DEPARTMENT HEAD MEETING FOR
DAY 188 SIGNATURES

STEP 18 AGENDA BILL TO COUNCIL OFFICE FOR INCLUSION IN COUNCIL
DAY 190 PACKET

STEP 19 PUBLIC HEARING
DAY 195

STEP 20 LIEN PREPARED AND FORWARDED TO CLERK'S OFFICE FOR
DAY 196 SIGNATURES AND RECORDING

STEP 21 LIEN IS FILED ON TAX ASSESSOR'S AND COUNTY TREASURER'S
DAY 200 RECORDS AND BECOMES A DELINQUENT TAX ASSESSMENT. IF
 NOT PAID WITHIN 3 YEARS, FORECLOSURE PROCEEDINGS
 BEGIN.

ABATEMENT PROCESS FOR DANGEROUS BUILDINGS AND HOUSING CODE VIOLATIONS

