

Understanding the Role of Property Code Enforcement



What Are We All Looking For?

- A “good” quality of life
- Healthy and productive communities...
- Freedom to “build” our lives and families



Why Enforce Quality of Life Issues?

Our primary mission in property code enforcement is to:

- Ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare of our citizens.
- Improve and enhance the quality of life in Prince William County.
- Prevent deterioration of neighborhoods and associated loss of home value throughout the county.



So what *exactly* are we talking about when we talk "codes"?

- Just some examples of the Quality of Life issues we work on through property code enforcement activity. What we hope is that Neighborhood leaders can help us identify these challenges before they become major problems for the community:
 - IOVs (Inoperative Vehicles)
 - Prohibited Vehicles
 - Parking on an unimproved surface (i.e. grass or gravel)
 - Trash & Debris
 - Outside Storage
 - Non-permitted home-based businesses
 - Farm animals (that don't live on a farm!)
 - Overcrowding
 - Tall Grass & Weeds
 - Unpermitted Land Disturbance
 - Building Maintenance Issues
 - Graffiti
 - Illegal Signs (in yards OR in the right of way.)
 - Spot Blight
 - Hoarding



Inoperative vehicles



Inoperative vehicles



Prohibited Vehicles



Prohibited vehicles



Parking on Unimproved Surface & Prohibitive Vehicle



Parking on unimproved surface



Trash and debris – Dump heap



Outside Storage



Outside Storage



Outside storage - Commercial



Operating a Business from home without permit



Farm Animals



Overcrowding

Trash, Garbage, Refuse, Litter and Other Substances....

- Prince William County Code -Chapter 22 Article V
- Once the issue is identified and verified by inspection a notice is sent.
- Once cited, the owner must abate or the County can abate the violation.
 - A lien would be placed on property to recover cost if the County is involved.
- Again it is NOT always that easy.



Refuse – Dump Heap

Example of a Gray Area

- Some areas of enforcement are harder for citizens to interpret.
- **EXAMPLE: Trash cans**
 - Where to store them between trash pickup days?
 - When is it considered “Left out at the curb too long?”
 - Major source of “neighbor angst” and NSD complaints!



Prohibited Growths

- Section 29-17
- It shall be unlawful for the owner of any property of less than two acres to permit weeds of more than 12 inches in height to remain standing upon any part of such property.
- Properties of 2 acres or more
 - 150 from edge of state maintained road
 - 200 feet from a building or structure
- Notice sent to owner – if not abated our contractor cuts the grass and a lien is placed on the property to recover costs.
- *Weeds* shall mean grass, weeds, bushes, vines, poison ivy, poison oak or any other foreign growth, other than trees, ornamental shrubbery, flowers and garden vegetables.



Tall Weeds and Grass

Tall Weeds and Grass



Unpermitted Land Disturbance

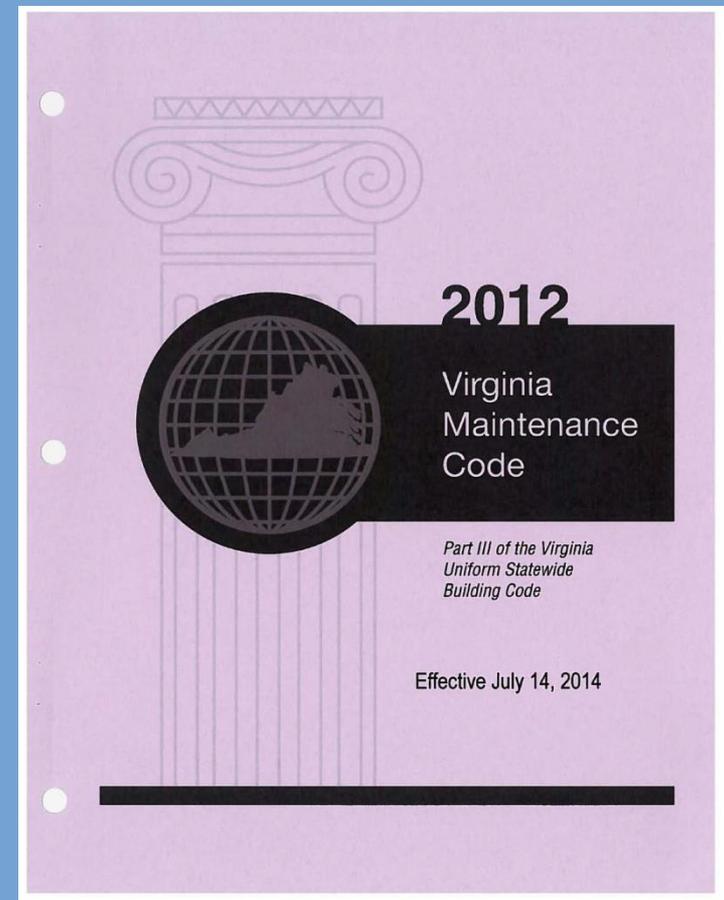




Unpermitted Land Disturbance

Building Maintenance

- Article IV under Chapter 5 of the Prince William County Code.
- Article IV adopts the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (VUSBC) part III – The Virginia Maintenance Code which adopts the International Property Maintenance Code.
 - Structural
 - Plumbing
 - Electrical
 - Mechanical
 - Fire Safety
 - Occupancy



Building Maintenance



Exterior Structure



Exterior Walls

All exterior walls shall be free from holes, break, and loose materials; and maintained waterproof and properly surface coated where required to prevent deterioration.



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Roofs and Drainage

Roof drains, gutters and downspouts shall be maintained in good repair and free from obstructions.



Handrails and Guards

Every handrail and guard shall be firmly fastened and capable of the supporting normally imposed loads and shall be maintained in good condition.



Swimming Pools, Spas and Hot Tubs
Shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition and in good repair.



Swimming Pools – Enclosures

Private swimming pools, hot tubs and spas, containing water more than 24 inches in depth shall be completely surrounded by a fence or barrier at least 48 inches in height.



Accessory Structures

All accessory structures, including detached garages, fences and walls, shall be maintained structurally sound and in good repair.



Stairways, Decks, Porches and Balconies

Every exterior stairway, deck, porch and balcony, and all accessories attached thereto, shall be maintained structurally sound, in good repair, with proper anchorage and capable of supporting the imposed loads.

Building Maintenance



Interior Structure



Interior Surfaces

All interior surfaces shall be maintained in good repair, structurally sound and in a sanitary condition. Peeling, chipping, flaking or abraded paint shall be repaired, removed or covered.



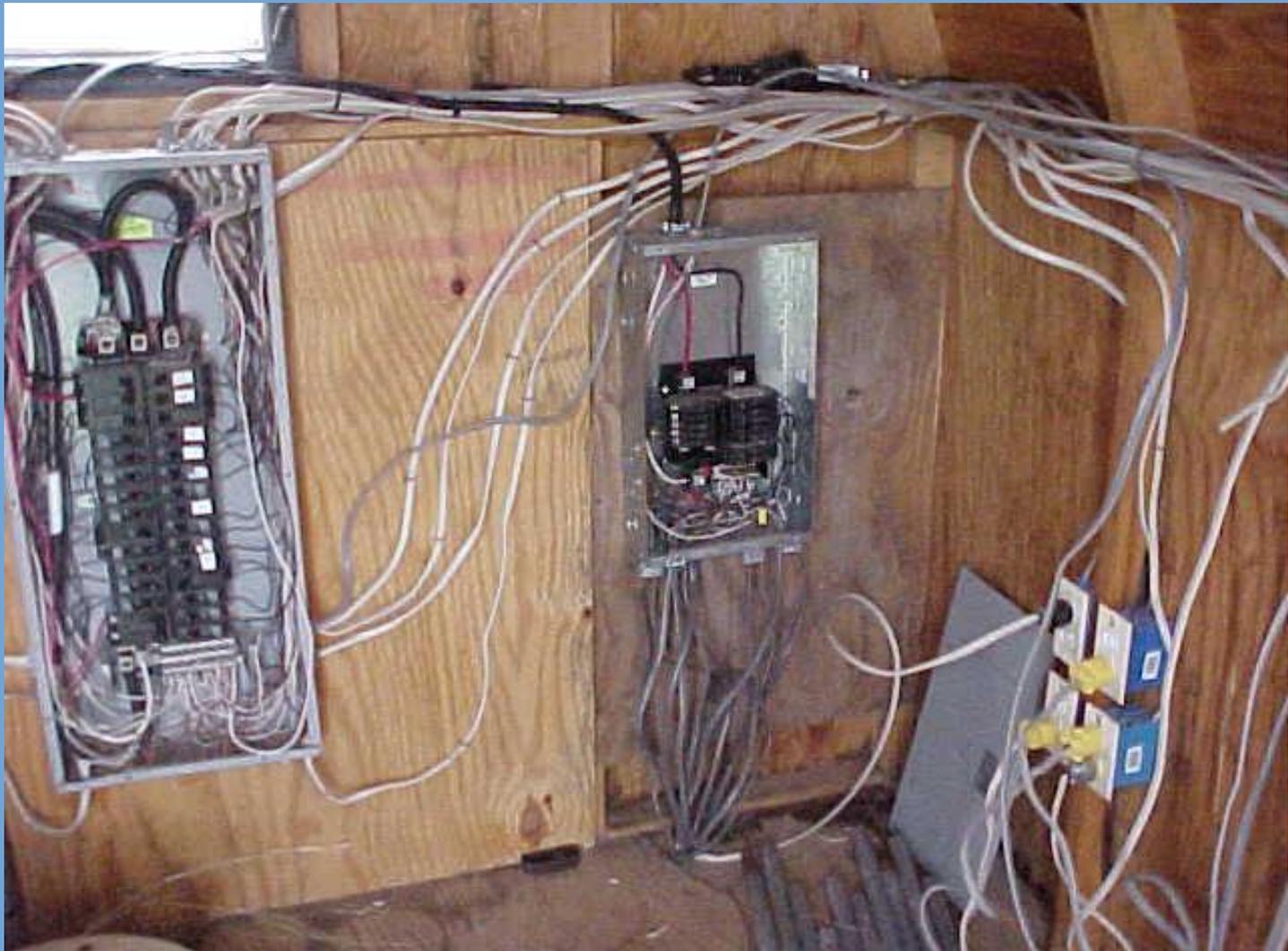
Interior Structure

The interior structure and equipment therein shall be maintained in good repair, structurally sound and in a sanitary condition,



Plumbing Systems and Fixtures – General

All plumbing fixtures shall be properly installed and maintained in working order, and shall be kept free from obstruction, leaks and defects and be capable of performing the function for which such plumbing fixture are designed. All plumbing fixture shall be maintained in a safe, sanitary and functional condition.



Electrical Equipment - Installation

All electrical equipment, wiring and appliances shall be properly installed and maintained in a safe and approved manner.



Electrical Equipment - Wiring

Flexible cords shall not be used for permanent wiring, or for running through doors, windows, or cabinets, or concealed within walls, floors, or ceilings.



Mechanical Equipment – Clearances

All required clearances to combustibles shall be maintained.



Occupancy Limitations – Room Area

Every living room shall contain at least 120 square feet and every bedroom shall contain 70 square feet and every bedroom occupied by more than one person shall contain a minimum of 50 square feet of floor area for each occupant thereof.



Second Kitchens



Mechanical Equipment – Removal of combustion products
All fuel-burning equipment and appliances shall be connected to an approved chimney or vent.



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Illegal Roadside Advertising Enforcement

- Signs in VDOT right of way
 - State Law 33.1-373 and 375
 - Agreement between the Board of County Supervisor's and the Commissioner of Transportation
- Reported violations and proactive enforcement.
- May issue Summons with fine for each sign!





Illegal Signs NOT in the Right of Way



Illegal Roadside Advertising

Graffiti & Abatement

- Prince William County Code Chapter 16- Section 56
 - Expressly declares the existence of Graffiti within the County to be a public nuisance.
- Enforcement
 - Identify and issue notice to property owner
 - If not abated the County proceeds with abatement process.
- Graffiti Abatement Volunteers
 - Informed & Engaged Citizens—Help identify and report (phone or PWC website) both the appearance of graffiti and the lack of swift abatement of existing graffiti.
 - County Volunteer corps
 - Partnerships with community organizations.
 - NSD Communication with utilities, VDOT, businesses.
- Litter Crew



Graffiti

Spot Blight

- Definition of “blight property” set forth in Virginia code Section 36-49
 - Vacant for at least 1 year
 - Documented complaints
 - No longer maintained for useful occupancy
 - Lacks normal maintenance and upkeep





Blight properties – Fire Damage

SPOT BLIGHT BEFORE ENFORCEMENT



17 separate cases over 12 years for spot blight, zoning, illegal signs, unsafe structure, vegetation, graffiti and property maintenance.

SPOT BLIGHT AFTER ENFORCEMENT



Although it took 12 years to abate this blight, the average spot blight case takes about two years from start to finish.

Structure has been completely renovated

SPOT BLIGHT BEFORE ENFORCEMENT



Structure was left vacant after owner died. Heirs lived out of state and were not interested in maintaining property.

Could not get personal jurisdiction over heirs for property maintenance violations, which at the time were criminal.

SPOT BLIGHT

BEFORE ENFORCEMENT

Previous owner had been a hoarder and structure was full of household items, trash and debris.

Spot Blight team issued multiple notices and worked with heirs to try to keep property maintained.

Heirs listed property for sale and it eventually sold. New owner completely renovated interior and exterior.



SPOT BLIGHT AFTER ENFORCEMENT



Although this structure was purchased and repaired by the new owner, for most blighted properties, repair is too costly and therefore not always feasible.

Structure renovated by owner

SPOT BLIGHT BEFORE ENFORCEMENT



Residential structure vacant for over 10 years

SPOT BLIGHT BEFORE ENFORCEMENT



Neighborhood Services took action to have structure and open well secured and abate zoning and vegetation violations.

SPOT BLIGHT AFTER ENFORCEMENT



Although the County demolished this structure, the vast majority of blighted structures end up being demolished by the owner.

Structure was demolished by County after BOCS action

Emerging Issues: Hoarding

- Hoarding, known as “disposaphobia,” is the excessive collection and retention of things or animals until they interfere with day-to-day functions such as home, health, family, work and social life.
- Hoarding is a multi-faceted problem that has psychological, physical welfare, and public safety implications.
- As the County faces an overall population growth and an aging residency, there is a marked increase in the hoarding phenomenon.

HOARDING



1. Fire and health hazard for residents
2. Life and health hazard for first responders and rescuers
3. Community health concerns.

Fire situation in a home where hoarding was occurring. Elderly woman and firefighter injured as a result.

HOARDING

1. Unsafe living conditions for the resident.
2. Sanitary facilities, water, and electricity often fail.
3. Increased fire risk and encouragement of rodent and insect infestation.



Occoquan Magisterial District—Elderly couple unable to use kitchen

DEALING WITH THE ISSUE FROM BOTH A CODE AND A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE



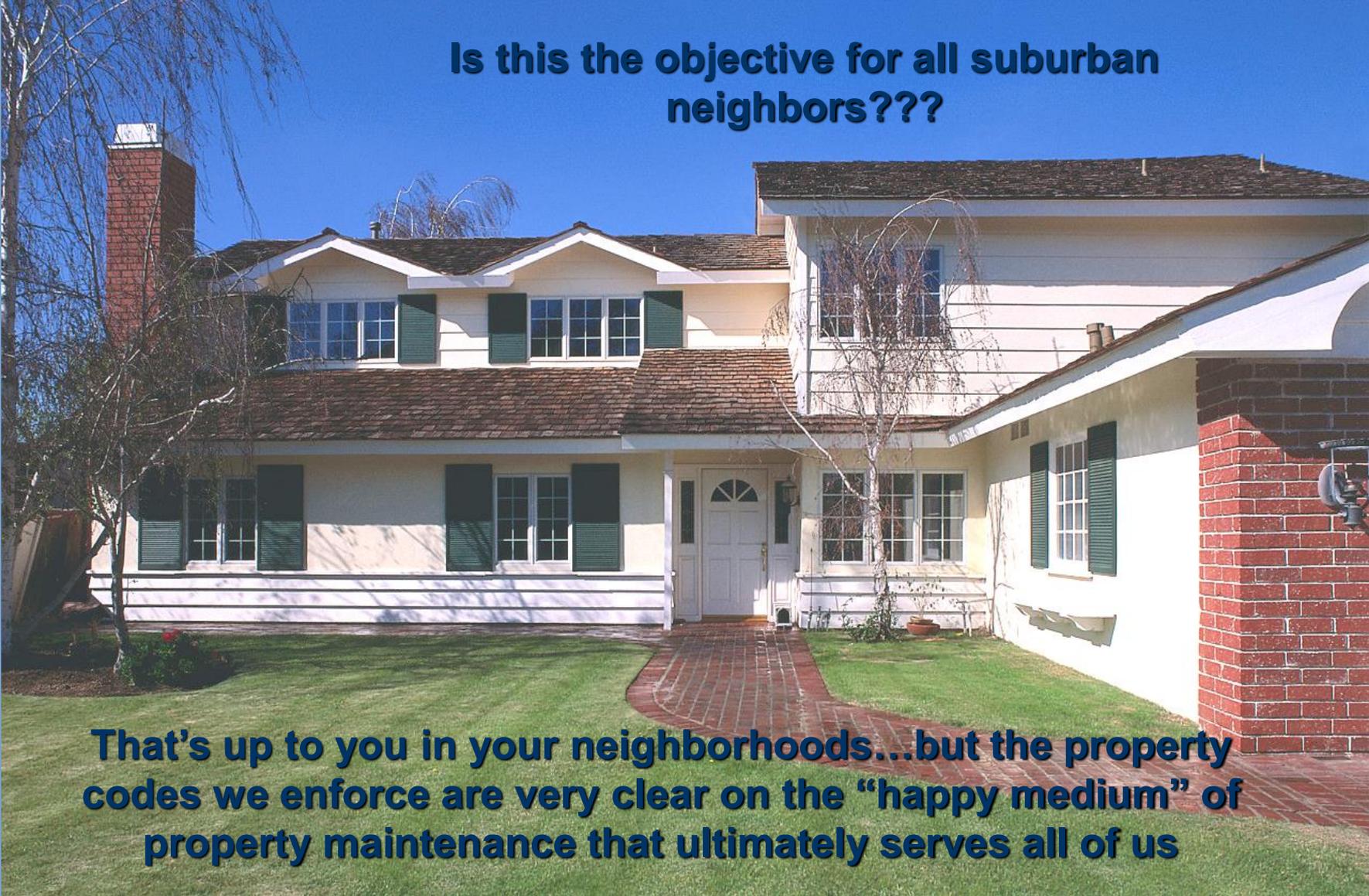
Neighborhood Services' enforcement actions for blighted properties, unsafe structures and structures unfit for human occupancy deals only with problems *with the structure itself*.

Neighborhood Services must reach out to other local or state agencies and non profit organizations to identify help that may be available to those residents necessarily displaced by code enforcement related to severe hoarding.

These services may include behavioral counseling related to hoarding as well as temporary transportation, meals, lodging, financial assistance, and medical care.

Donation Boxes



A large, two-story suburban house with a light-colored exterior and dark green shutters. The house features a prominent brick chimney on the left side and a brick walkway leading to the front door. The house is set on a green lawn with some trees in the background. The sky is clear and blue.

Is this the objective for all suburban neighbors???

That's up to you in your neighborhoods...but the property codes we enforce are very clear on the "happy medium" of property maintenance that ultimately serves all of us

YOUR TURN! Questions? What are you seeing out there?

Effective ways to work neighbor-to-neighbor to resolve issues BEFORE relying on PWC enforcement?

Issues with inspector responsiveness or methods?

Opportunities for future code enforcement discussion?

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**See the Prince William County Neighborhood Services
Division web pages at
www.pwcgov.org/neighborhoodservices**