

**COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
CALIFORNIA**

For the Agenda of:
September 9, 2004
9:30 a.m.

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Planning and Community Development Department

Subject: Report Back On Implementation Of Reduction To Code Enforcement Vehicle-Abatement Staffing Approved In Fiscal Year 2004-05 Adopted Proposed Budget

Contact: Richard Maddox, Principal Officer, 874-7440

BACKGROUND:

At the Final Budget Hearings held on September 1, 2004, your Board asked for a report back on alternative approaches to reducing Code Enforcement programming in vehicle abatement by 1.8 positions.

DISCUSSION:

At the Proposed Budget Hearings held on May 14, 2004, the Department recommended eliminating (Program 003-D) Rural Vehicle Abatement Response to achieve the required Code Enforcement program reduction of \$186,606. Your Board was presented with options to achieve this reduction. At your direction, rural vehicle abatement response was not eliminated, and instead the reduction in staff was spread over all non-mandatory code enforcement programs.

To absorb the funding reductions and perform the approved Code Enforcement programs, the following response times are anticipated. Response time for this discussion refers to the average time it takes for a field level Code Enforcement Officer to inspect/investigate a property or an on-street vehicle after a complaint has been received. All days shown are on a calendar week basis.

Program	Average Response Time 2002-03	Average Response Time 2003-04	Present Response Time 2004-05
Housing - Priority	72 hour (mandated)	72 hour (mandated)	72 hour (mandated)
Housing – Regular	14 -35days	3 – 10 days	5 – 12 days
Nuisance-Zero Tolerance	5-10 days	25-30 days	35-40 days
Zoning Code	5-10 days	25 – 35 days	35-40 days
On-Street Vehicle Abatement	3-5 days	7-21 days	14 – 28 days

The times reflected are only an average. Actual response times vary depending upon the type of violation and the magnitude of the problem.

The average response time for priority housing violation has remained constant, as this is a mandatory response time. Regular housing enforcement response time has actually improved as a result of a change in procedures that require the tenant to notify a landlord before action is taken to inspect a unit. Response times for the so-called Zero Tolerance Nuisance's actually increased as a result of the Board's policy to bill (at full-cost recovery) automatically for such violations. Prior to 2003, a courtesy notice of violation was sent to a property owner within 3-5 days of receipt of the complaint for all zoning code violations. Now all such cases are physically inspected prior to a notice being issued. This change has delayed action by 20-30 days over the response achieved in 2002, increasing response time from 3-5 days to 35-40 days.

It is important to note that the various program components comprising Code Enforcement are done on a reactive and not a proactive basis. This was not always the case. Prior to 2002, on-street vehicle abatement was operated largely on a proactive basis and was very successful. However, in 2002 the program was reduced, and the on-street vehicle abatement program was merged into the overall code enforcement program. Another highly successful program was the proactive sign enforcement program, which was eliminated due to budget reductions in 1992.

Some of the discussion by your Board, and testimony made during the presentation on the Sheriff's Department budget, pertained to conditions of blight in certain neighborhoods. In most cases Code Enforcement Field Officers are fully occupied with existing complaint driven caseloads, and must often drive past and disregard other nuisance violations. The table below identifies field officer caseload for the existing 16.0 budgeted positions (1.0 position is currently vacant).

Open Cases by Area as of 8-30-04

Service Areas	On Street Vehicle Abatement	Zoning/Housing/Private Property Vehicles	Budgeted Positions*
North Area			
Orangevale, Carmichael and Fair Oaks	146	563	3.0
Arden Arcade	185	437	2.5
North Highlands, Antelope, Rio Linda Elverta	241	1,094	5.5
Subtotal	569	2,094	11.0
South Area			
South Sacramento	235	319	2.8
Vineyard, Rosemont	126	208	1.5
Consumes, South East, Franklin Laguna, Delta	51	87	.7
Subtotal	412	614	5.0
TOTAL	981	2,708	16.0

*This number reflects actual field Code Officers. Excludes supervisors and managers.

The primary source of new cases is citizen complaints, but an ever-increasing number of referrals come from outreach efforts by the Department of Neighborhood Services, Law Enforcement community meetings, Neighborhood Associations, and others. (A more detail description of these impacts are addressed later in this report.)

Reporting by citizens varies depending upon the neighborhood and community. Clearly, some neighborhoods, which have high concentrations of nuisances and or blight conditions, are not necessarily the same ones that file complaints. Field staff report that there is an ever-increasing number of blight conditions. Staff estimates that on-street vehicle violations in the urbanized areas range from 1,800-3,300. The number of unreported “zero tolerance” violations in the single-family neighborhoods range from 1,100–2,400. Illegal junk sign violations at commercial businesses along most of the commercial corridors exceed 50.0 percent of all commercial buildings.

With 16.0 Code Enforcement Officer Level 2 positions (not including supervisor/management staff) there is currently an average caseload of 230 open cases. This figure has stayed constant for the past nine months. In the urbanized area, the standard for open cases per field officer is 170 open cases. This is a standard used by the Division managers to identify the breaking point to efficiently and effectively handle the violation cases in a normally acceptable period of time. At this time, field staff have a caseload at 130.0 percent of normal. As caseload increases, field staff efficiency decreases due to the amount of time the staff must spend maintaining the case files and responding to phone inquiries on the open cases. Given this current assigned caseload, Code Enforcement is entirely in a reactive mode, and cannot address, on a proactive basis, the unreported violations.

Complaints Submitted to Community Assistance and Resource Center		
Program Year	Calls Received	Cases Opened
Vehicle Abatement 2001-02	11,435	5,289
Vehicle Abatement 2002-03	15,310	6,668
Vehicle Abatement 2003-04	15,811	7,343
Vehicle Abatement projected 2004-05	16,300	8,100
Zoning Enforcement 2001-02	5,771	3,149
Zoning Enforcement 2002-03	9,834	4,057
Zoning Enforcement 2003-04	8,864	4,048
Zoning Enforcement projected 2004-05	8,800	4,040
Housing 2001-02	1,499	563
Housing 2002-03	1,777	762
Housing 2003-04	1,995	906
Housing projected 2004-05	2,180	1,040

Staffing Reductions	
Fiscal Year	Code Enforcement Position Reductions
2000-01	1.0
2001-02	0.0
2002-03	2.0
2003-04	1.0
2004-05	1.8
Total Reductions	5.8

Comparison of the two tables points out that while staffing has been decreased a total of 5.8 positions since 2000, reported cases have continued to increase 68.0 percent over that time period. With the insurgence of outreach efforts of NORCAST, South CAST, and FORCAST a far greater public awareness of nuisance and code violations has been achieved and this, in return, we believe has attributed to the steady rise in complaints despite the loss of service base as a result of city incorporations in Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova. For example, every community now has a designated community Internet Web site, a community brochure, and a refrigerator magnet serving tens of thousands of households, and urging residents to call in complaints. Yet, despite this increased effort to educate the populace, there has been no increase in code enforcement allocations to address the need. In fact, as the above table shows there has been a steady decrease in staffing since 2000.

Proactive Vehicle Abatement Team

The Code Enforcement program once included a six-person team of field staff devoted exclusively to vehicle abatement. This team operated on a proactive basis, routinely canvassing neighborhoods known to have a high incidence of abandoned and inoperative vehicle violations. The team also responded, in the course of their proactive activities, to complaint-generated vehicle abatement cases. This program, which was highly successful at reducing citizen complaints, has been discontinued due to past budget reductions. In the meantime, the vehicle abatement program has been largely blended with other Code Enforcement activities, with vehicle abatement occurring as caseload permits.

The proactive vehicle abatement program could be reinstated, albeit in a more modest form, by assigning 4.0 field staff to work exclusively on vehicle abatement, both on-street and on private property. We would recommend creating two teams, one for the north portion of the County, and one for the south portion of the County. These two teams would focus their efforts on neighborhoods with high incidence of abandoned and inoperative vehicle violations. Vehicle abatement in other neighborhoods would continue to be handled generally by other code enforcement staff. One of the 4.0 field positions could be made available by reassigning an existing staff position from general code enforcement to the proactive vehicle abatement team. In order to avoid further impacting other Code Enforcement programs, the other 3.0 field positions for the proactive vehicle abatement team would need to be new Code Enforcement Officer positions. The cost of the 3.0 new positions, including reinstating \$45,000 toward the cost of vehicle tow contracts, would be approximately \$268,000.

CONCLUSION:

The Board expressed concern at the Proposed Budget Hearing as to any reduction in Code Enforcement services. However, program shifts were implemented July 1, 2004 to absorb the reduction of the 1.8 Code Enforcement staff positions approved in the Adopted Proposed Budget. This shift has delayed response time for all programs except for priority housing response. Coupled with a 68.0 percent increase in citizen complaints this change has resulted in a reduction of service as well as a significant backlog of cases. In addition, Code Officer caseload is 130.0 percent of standard. As a result, unreported blight and nuisance violations are not addressed and, therefore, unabated. Clearly, the demand has increased due to county efforts to outreach to and educate neighborhoods while at the same time the supply of officers has decreased. The backlog in vehicle abatement response could be significantly reduced by reinstating the proactive vehicle abatement program, using 1.0 existing field position and augmenting it with 3.0 new Code Enforcement Officer positions.

Respectfully submitted,

APPROVED:

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Planning and Community Development

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County Executive

By _____
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