 Center for
**COMMUNITY
PROGRESS**
Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Places

Strategic Code Enforcement


REALTORS® Association of Westmoreland, Indiana and Mon Valley

**Place Based Training
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Presentation Outline

 Center for
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Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Places

- I. Understanding the Goals of Code Enforcement**
- II. What does Traditional Code Enforcement Look Like?**
- III. Tools and Considerations for Strategic Code Enforcement**
- IV. Q&A**

Why Code Enforcement?



- In ten words or less, how would you describe the ultimate goal/purpose of housing and building code enforcement?



Code Enforcement



To protect the health and safety of residents.

GROUP A

- Junk vehicles
- Trash and debris
- High grass
- Peeling paint
- Broken windows
- Broken doors
- Sagging roof
- Deteriorated porch
- Couches on porch
- Loud noise

GROUP B

- No fire alarms in rooms
- Lead paint hazards
- Water issues and mold
- Sewage backup
- No heat
- No water
- No vent plates
- Bug infestation
- No way to secure doors
- No window or storm screens

Code Enforcement



- Most owners are responsible.
- Many are not...
- Code enforcement is the local government's power to encourage compliance and act to minimize harm when property owners fail to comply.



What Traditional CE Looks Like



Typical enforcement actions against a problem property:

1. Receive a complaint and inspect
2. Issue a violation notice, provide period to remedy
3. Reinspect, and three options:
 - a. Close case (problem fixed by owner)
 - b. Extend period to fix (owner showing effort)
 - c. Issue court appearance (owner unresponsive)



What Traditional CE Looks Like



Vacant Property Owners Present Many Challenges:

- LLCs
- Out-of-state owners
- Banks difficult to engage
- Zombie properties
- Heir properties
- Local owner responds, but lacks resources to remedy
- Local owner, a frequent flyer, knows how to “game the system”

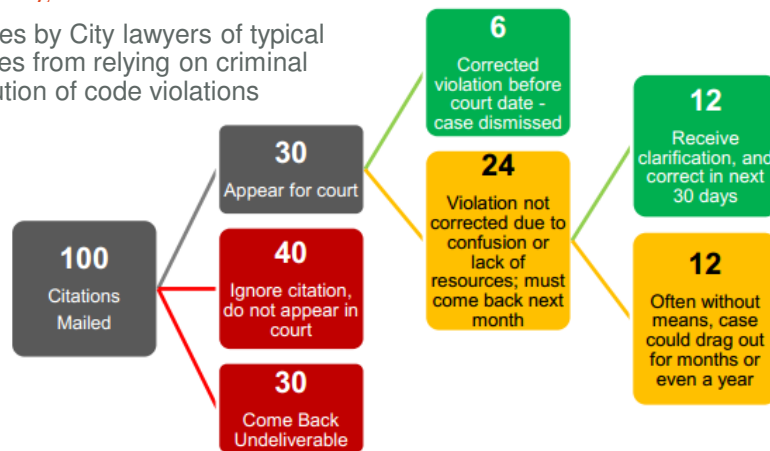


What Traditional CE Looks Like



Criminal Enforcement: Inefficient, Ineffective, Inequitable City of Gary, IN

Estimates by City lawyers of typical outcomes from relying on criminal prosecution of code violations



Strategic Code Enforcement



- The goal of any code enforcement program is to encourage private owners to maintain their properties.
- Being strategic means understanding neighborhood housing markets, setting achievable goals, and focusing resources to generate the greatest impact.
- Code enforcement should not be exclusively punitive.

Goal is Compliance, not Court



The goal for strategic code enforcement is to change the owner's stance

from:

I'm going to ignore You

to:

How much time do I have to get my property into compliance?

Define Success and How to Get There



Ask the following questions at the onset:

- What are community goals and priorities?
- What are the problems that must be solved to achieve goals?
- What tools are available?
- What are the available resources?
- Does the municipality have the capacity to implement a strategic code enforcement system?



Local Government's Challenge



Government actions can be limited by state and local laws

Capacity – city departments, code enforcement office overwhelmed, underappreciated

Funding



Strategic Code Enforcement



Strategic Code Enforcement features:

1. **Documented Understanding** of inventory and assets
2. **Proactive, data-driven** interventions **tailored** to neighborhood market conditions
3. **Targeted** allocation of **limited** resources to achieve **maximal** impact
4. **A suite** of programs, laws, and tools, **flexible** to accommodate and protect vulnerable property owners who want to comply
5. **Coordination** across silos, **aligned with other key systems** of vacancy and abandonment

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Strategic Code Enforcement



Strategic Code Enforcement features: (continued)

6. **Cross-sector** partnerships, investing in the **health and safety** of people and places
7. Enforcement officers with **excellent interpersonal and problem-solving skills**
8. Process is **efficient and effective**, and outcomes are **equitable**
9. **Expanded and sustained capacity**
10. **Political leadership!**



Understanding of Inventory



- Where are the problem properties?
 - What are their conditions?
- How many are tax delinquent?
 - For how long?
- Are they vacant?
 - Do we know why?
 - How many years vacant?
- Who owns them?
- What is the market in those neighborhoods?
 - Average sale price, time on market
- Water shut offs
- Mail delivery

Snapshot: Turtle Creek Housing Data

- 1553** Residential Households
- 334** Chronically Tax Delinquent
- 21** Foreclosures
- 125** Abandoned Households
- 223** Affordable /Section 8 units

Community Assets

- 6** Parks/Play spaces
- 1** Commercial Business Corridor

Community Liabilities

- 6** Dumping Sites
- 28** Moderate- Heavy Overgrowth Vacant Lots


37 abandoned structures were estimated to have \$5,000 or less of exterior damage.

Key:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Government
- Parks



Understanding of Ability



Able, willing, and proactive.

- Owner has the resources, does regular maintenance, makes repairs when needed, and never shows up on code enforcement radar.
- Approach: Give thanks.

Able and willing, but needs a reminder.

- Owner has the resources, but may not address issues until notified of the need.
- Approach: An effective (and gentle) system to provide reminders, such as a regular inspection cycle.

Willing, but not able.

- Owner desires to keep property in good shape, but lacks the resources needed to prevent and address code issues.
- Approach: Identify and provide the missing resources.

Able but unwilling.

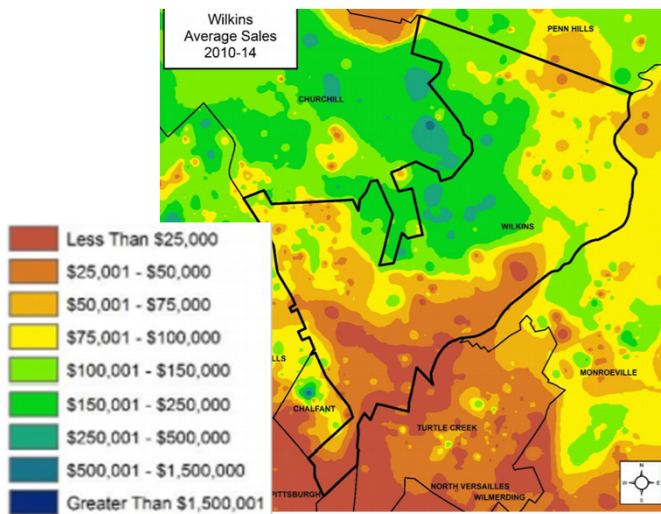
- Owner has the resources, but resists compliance.
- Approach: Sanction-based code enforcement (sticks)

Proactive, Data Driven interventions...



- Community Sweeps
Ex: East McKeesport, PA – Community Education Campaign
- Presale Inspections
 - Address interior and exterior code violations
- Registration of Rental Properties
 - Gather data on ownership and management of property
 - Address interior and exterior code violations
Ex: Minneapolis, MN - Performance Based Rental Registration
- Strategic Demolitions
Ex: Locus County demolition clustering

... tailored to neighborhood market conditions



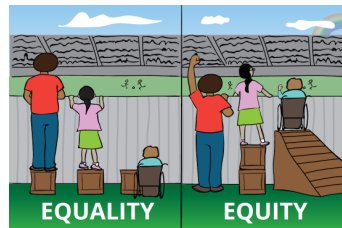
Target Limited Resources



- Target enforcement efforts
- Clearly define when to impose the harshest penalties
- Publicize actions taken to motivate other owners

Create a plan to equitably focus scarce resources

Strategic Code Enforcement Must Accommodate Vulnerable Populations



Share Resources



Turtle Creek Valley Council of Governments multi municipal code enforcement program

Cost Sharing

- Able to hire full time employees who work part time in participating towns
- Education and certification
- Effective technology, allowing better use of limited resources

Finding Regional Solutions

- Oftentimes irresponsible property owners hold properties in many different communities
- Ensures neighboring communities are practicing the same level of enforcement
- Allows for use of state enabled legislation

Code Enforcement Can't be All Hammer



Educate Owners




Property owners should understand what is required to comply with local standards help make complex laws accessible for public



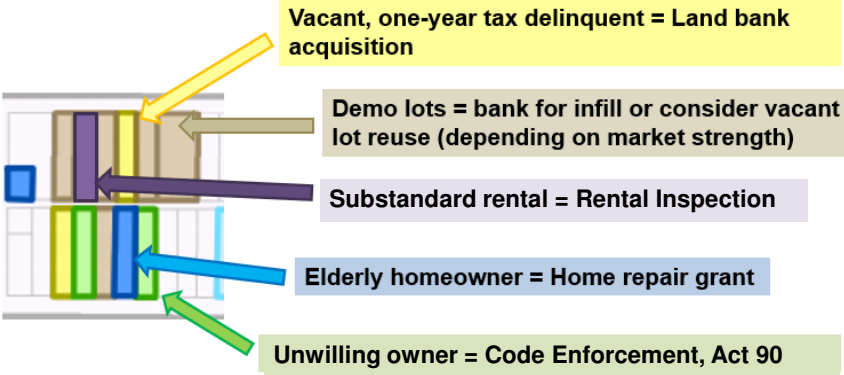
- Inform owners of their basic responsibilities and why you are enforcing a higher standard for condition of properties
- Inform how they will benefit if everyone maintains their property
- Provide help with repairs and maintenance for owners who want to maintain properties but do not have money to do so

Photo Credit: [City of Fort Myers Code Ehero Man](#)


Improving Coordination



Micro-planning Approach: Parcel by Parcel Strategy



Key Takeaways



1. Understand the **problem**, and be clear about what the laws allow and do not allow; where possible, be creative and experiment.
2. While compliance is ultimately the goal, build consensus on outcomes when it comes to enforcing housing and building code on vacant properties.
3. Build capacity to support the desired goals.
4. Work across silos, and align **strategic code enforcement** with other key systems of vacancy and abandonment.
5. Be mindful of the markets, and keep an eye on equity.
6. Embrace the paradigm shift, and “nest” code enforcement within investment strategies that support **places** (community development) and **people** (public health and human services).

THANK YOU

Thank You!



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Vacant Spaces into Vibrant Places

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