

Neighborhoods and Education Committee

Meeting of Dec. 10, 2012

Executive Summary: Code Enforcement, Residential

Issue

How can Tempe efficiently and effectively combat blight in its neighborhoods?

Background:

In the Nov. 5 meeting of this committee, Community Development staff was directed to come up with a methodology for “grading” code compliance among Tempe’s single-family homes. To that end, in all five zones of inspections, a handful of homes (15-29) were inspected for Tempe’s six most-commonly found code violations; grades were given on a 1-5 scale. Staff also was asked to consider using a “complaint” letter as a precursor to a formal violation letter, as is practiced in Phoenix, in an effort to get the issue resolved more efficiently.

Potential Solutions

To ensure the standard developed is valid and reliable, it is estimated that each zone will need inspections of more than 360 properties. If Council ratifies this project, it would be what Community Development regards as “the first time ever (Tempe) tried to establish a citywide standard” for code compliance. From there, the City can have an informed debate about the current conditions of Tempe’s homes, what condition is desirable and, given the distance between *have* and *want*, how best to improve compliance. Also, Community Development has discussed doing a pilot project to test the effectiveness of using a complaint letter as a method to address compliance issues; this will be further examined as part of the broader response to code issues related to developing the standard.

Potential Problems

The grading system needs fine-tuning on such matters as scoring (should a compliant home have a high score or low?), weighting (is a junked-out car in the driveway worse than weeds?) and standards (what, exactly, does a rating of 3 look like?). Another issue arising is that judging a home on its code compliance does nothing to address matters of aesthetics; properties can be completely up to code yet still look unattractive. Finally, the use of a complaint letter has the potential to upset citizens, change the time frames associated with responding to violations, etc.

Short-term Guidance Needed

Is the Committee comfortable with staff continuing to develop the grading methodology?

Presenting

Lisa Collins, Bill Kersbergen and Jeff Tamulevich (Community Development).

Sources

Nov. 30 briefing from Collins, Kersbergen and Tamulevich.