TO: Mayor Marchione and City Council

FROM: Rob Odle, Planning Director, 425-556-2417

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DATE: October 5, 2010

SUBJECT: STAFF REPORT: NEGLECTED RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

PURPOSE

To provide City Council with a background of neglected homes and properties in Redmond.

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Although the majority of homes and properties found within Redmond city limits are well maintained and of high quality, there are a few exceptions. These properties are singly "scattered" throughout all areas of the city and because they are the exception, rather than the rule, tend to stand out in their respective neighborhoods. Neglected homes often trigger complaints from residents who live near these properties. Most are concerned that these homes are either unsafe, or in one way or another, negatively impact their own property. In a continuing partnership between the City and the residents of Redmond, any and all complaints that are filed with the City are dealt with on a case-by-case basis until the property in question is deemed code compliant.

Code Enforcement has a high success rate of bringing a home that is in violation of the Redmond Community Development Guide (RCDG) and/or the Redmond Municipal Code (RMC) into compliance. There are a number of factors that can affect how a home presents itself including, but not limited to: the age of the home; the life style, number, age, and attitudes of the residents living in the home; the financial situation of the residents; if the home is vacant; or if the home is in foreclosure. Corrective actions are imposed on any property owner who is found to be harboring junk, garbage, and/or inoperable vehicles, or on any property that as a whole is a safety hazard. Any report of vermin being seen at a property is immediately reported to King County Public Health Department.

When a complaint is received, Code Enforcement performs a site investigation and substantiates the complaint. While working within the confines and guidelines of the RCDG and the RMC, the Code Enforcement Officer evaluates the situation and makes a determination as to which items (if any) are in violation of the code. Although at first glance a property may appear to be in violation, this is not always the case. For example, the City may receive a complaint regarding a home that may have a lawn mower, a soccer ball, toys, a ladder, a pressure washer, a pile of firewood, and/or a golf bag strewn all around the front yard. Because these items do not meet

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the outdoor storage threshold, and because these items are normally associated with a home, this property would not be in violation of our code. In this particular instance, Code Enforcement could not require that the property owner "tidy up" their residence or remove or screen these items.

Another example of items that generate complaints but are also not currently regulated by our codes are maintenance items such as garage doors that don't hang squarely, shutters that may be falling off, a mossy roof, peeling paint, or a yard that is not being mowed.

Homes which are technically not in violation of our codes, but still considered by many to be neglected, can understandably affect a neighborhood. While our codes do not require homeowners to fix, repair, repaint, or reroof their homes, or to "tidy up" or mow their yards, if a complaint is filed Code Enforcement routinely makes courtesy calls to the owners of these neglected properties and offers recommendations of how these complaints can be addressed and corrected. This approach is only successful, however, if the owner is receptive to the Code Enforcement Officer's suggestions.

Attached, is a matrix addressing homes and properties in Redmond that generate the majority of complaints received from citizens living near a neglected home. The properties in the matrix have been placed into four broad categories, these are: properties that are inhabited by hoarders; properties that have been foreclosed upon and are now unoccupied; abandoned properties; and properties that are a product of neglect, indifference, and/or disregard. Included in the matrix are the numbers, their history, and the action(s) taken against these properties and their owners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

City Council may wish to consider the recommendations that have also been included in the matrix. Staff is recommending creating ordinances that would address the length of time a temporary container can be located in a front yard setback, requiring a homeowner to cut back weeds that have reached or exceeded three feet in height, and giving the City the authority to expeditiously address severely neglected properties.

NEXT STEPS

Planning staff will be presenting the topic of 'Neglected Residential Properties" to the Planning and Public Works Committee at their October 7, 2010, meeting so that a "work plan" for recommending revisions to the RMC can be developed.

If you have any questions or need additional information before then, please do not hesitate to contact Deborah Farris or Jim Roberts.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Neglected Residential Properties Matrix

Types	Number	History	Actions	Recommendations and Additional Tools
Hoarders*	Although the City of Redmond Code Enforcement Officers are not qualified to make a professional determination, we believe we currently have five (5) homeowners who fit the description of hoarder; also known as people who suffer from "chronic disorganization".	As a rule, these homeowners are very cooperative and want to comply with City regulations. Although they promise to comply, they don't always know how. Even while they are in violation, they continue to collect items. They are typically overwhelmed and embarrassed and resist outside help and assistance. They fear that any outside help may rid them of possessions that they need and can't part with. In our experience, there is a recidivism rate of 100%.	Code Enforcement requires that they meet code by screening their possessions. They are required to place their belongings in their home, or behind fences or other types of screening. If items are not screened, they are required to be removed. When available, King County Community Cleanup Assistance Program Vouchers (CCAP) for 3 free dump loads at any King County transfer station are provided. Two property owners are currently working with a volunteer church group to bring their properties into compliance. One property has been sold. The contractor will be cleaning it up. Two are border-line compliant and in "stable" condition for the time being.	Affordable and convenient access to "social service" organizations trained to deal with this particular type of disorder. If the property owner fails to bring a severely neglected property into compliance, legislation that would allow the City to legally clean it up. A lien for the cost of the service could then be placed on the property.

Types	Number	History	Actions	Recommendation and Additional Tools
Foreclosed Homes	This is a relatively new occurrence in the City, directly related to the down turn in the economy. Although we assume there are several foreclosed homes in Redmond, we currently have received complaints for 10 of these foreclosed homes. In the south part of Redmond, junk was required to be removed from 4 of the properties. They are now in compliance. Neighbors are maintaining the yard at one of the properties. A security company was hired by a bank to maintain the properties of two of their foreclosed homes. Five (5) of the homes are located in the north part of Redmond and are currently in violation of the RMC. These homes are being required to be brought into compliance by mid October 2010.	The foreclosure process can take anywhere from 6 months to two years. We have found that during this period, although King County records show that the home is still owned by the homeowner, the premises has been vacated. More often than not, during this period the property is no longer being cared for.	If junk or garbage has been left at the premises after the property has been vacated, time is spent locating the legal owner (per KC parcels). The person or institution is required to bring the property into compliance. Citizens who complain about the general appearance of the home, or grass that has not been mowed, is told that the City does not have a general property "maintenance code".	Action by CC to require that banks hire a property management company during the foreclosure period.

Types	Number	History Actions		Recommendations and Additional Tools
Abandoned Homes Code Enforcement is aware 6 abandoned homes.		These homes are typically in very poor condition and are often an attractive nuisance. These homes can sit vacant for years. They often become inhabited by vagrants.	If a home requires a code enforcement action the property owner is contacted and required to bring the property into compliance. If the Building Official deems a vacant home to be dangerous or an attractive nuisance, the owner is required to board it up or in some cases, to demolish it.	If the owner fails to respond, or cannot be located, legislation that would easily enable Code Enforcement to hire an outside company to board up or demolish a property that has been deemed unsafe by the Building Official. A lien for the cost of the service could then be placed on the property. A property that has not been deemed unsafe by the Building Official but is still severely neglected, legislation that would allow the City to legally clean it up. A lien for the cost of the service could then be placed on the property.
Unsightly, Neglected Homes and Property	The number of these types of violations changes from month to month. When a complaint is filed, the Code Enforcement Officer performs a site investigation, determines if any violations exist, and gives the property owner the 30 days (required by code) to comply. Most violations are corrected before the 30 day deadline. Extensions beyond the 30 days are granted at the discretion of the Code Enforcement Officer.	These homes and properties are owned by people whose "life styles" or "life circumstances" may be at the root of their noncompliant properties OR may simply have a "different set of priorities" and values. There is a vast array of situations and circumstances that could cause a house to be unsightly. These can include: • a collection of junk vehicles, • abandoned or vacant homes,	Working within the confines of the RCDG and RMC, Code Enforcement requires that the property be brought into compliance. For properties that have been illegally dumped upon, or for residents who are on a fixed income, Code Enforcement can provide 3 free CCAP vouchers. King County provides a Junk Vehicle Affidavit to	If the property owner fails to bring a severely neglected property into compliance, legislation that would allow the City to legally clean it up. A lien for the cost of the service could then be placed on the property. An ordinance that would limit the time a portable storage container could sit in a front yard setback to a maximum of 90 days. Once the container is removed, it could

no CC ex cc pp fc cc dc ba	These homes are located in all neighborhoods in the City. Code Enforcement, with the exception of illegal signs, is complaint driven and does not patrol neighborhoods looking for violations. When a complaint is received, each is dealt with on a case by case passis. These homeowners are often repeat offenders.		rentals, owners who don't vet their renters, those who don't care about the general appearance of their homes, different personal values, those who are involved in drugs or other illegal activities, those who don't have the money or the means to maintain their homes, those who are mentally or physically unable to maintain their homes, those who are involved in neighbor disputes, spite or retaliation, domestic problems, anti establishment supporters, older homes that are now surrounded by larger more affluent homes, those who were previously under King County jurisdiction, "collectors" (not to be confused with hoarders)**, more recently there is an increasing frequency of portable storage containers in front yard setbacks	homeowner have an abandoned junk vehicle removed from their property.	elapsed. Require that weeds taller than 3 feet in height be cut back. If the owner fails to comply, legislation that would allow the City to bring the property into compliance. A lien for the cost of the service could then be placed on the property.
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*Most often, there is little logic to the manner in which things are heaped together within a hoarder's home. In lieu of surrounding themselves with friends and family, hoarders will often confine themselves behind a fence of stuff instead. Most hoarders do not appear to suffer (though many admit to feelings of shame and isolation), but there are irrefutable health and environmental side effects. -Geralin Thomas, Disorganization Specialist

*Compulsive hoarding (or pathological hoarding or disposophobia) is the excessive acquisition of possessions (and failure to use or discard them), even if the items are worthless, hazardous, or unsanitary. Compulsive hoarding impairs mobility and interferes with basic activities, including cooking, cleaning, showering, and sleeping. A person who engages in compulsive hoarding is commonly said to be a "pack rat", in reference to that animal's characteristic hoarding. -Wikipedia

** Collectors value and categorize their belongings, often showcasing them in display cases or archives. Hoarders often lump things together without the benefit of system or sequence. Collectors often carry great pride in their treasures, and delight in exhibiting them to any interested party. Hoarders are often embarrassed and hide their belongings (home, car, etc.) from co-workers, neighbors and even repairmen.

Collectors are usually able to classify, quantify and articulate their exact knowledge of the various items in their collection. Hoarders will assign inflated values to arbitrary things based primarily on sentiment. –Metropolitan Organizing, LLC.