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The Honorable Mayor Higgins and
Members of the City Council

Restructuring of Code Enforcement for the City of Lincoln Park

January 31, 2023

Local code enforcement is a function of local government that residents view as extremely important. Code enforcement is the prevention and investigation of potential violations of municipal code and is intended to protect residents' health and safety, as well as preserve property values and quality of life.

In the City of Lincoln Park, code enforcement responsibilities are split between two programs. These two programs are Lincoln Park Pride (under the jurisdiction of the police department) and the building department's code enforcement program. While these programs provide similar services, they have different focus areas.

Responsibilities of LP Code Enforcement Programs	
LP Pride	Building Department
Tall grass (noxious weeds)	Commercial code
Abandoned vehicles	Rental registration and inspection
Accumulation of rubbish	Vacant building registration
General property maintenance issues	Other building related issues (roofs with tarps, etc.)
Parking enforcement	Sign ordinance violations
Rodent harborage	
Animal control	

Table 1: Code Enforcement Program Responsibilities

Table 1, above, shows the overall segregation of duties between these two programs. As shown, the responsibilities of LP Pride range from general environmental code enforcement to parking enforcement and animal control. The code enforcement responsibilities of the building department are focused on items that would require a registration (rental, vacant property, etc.) or perhaps a building permit.

Currently, the building department assigns one full-time individual to code enforcement. The LP Pride Program is currently staffed by four people. One handles all calls and dispatches them to the three code enforcement officers.

Blight in the City

Unfortunately, the city has become overburdened with the amount of residential and commercial blight. Blight is a community issue because it affects neighboring properties, as well as the health and safety of those residents.

There are reasons that we can explore as to why blight has become such an issue in the city. One centers around economics. Over the last few decades, the city's demographics have shifted to a majority low-moderate income classification. With less dispensable income, homeowners are less able to financially manage repairs needed on their homes. Including roof repair, repairs of porches, and other various building issues.

The next reason to explore is that our code enforcement program simply is not as effective as is desired by the community or by the council. The current program is mostly reactive. This means that code enforcement officers usually spend their time responding to calls (or complaints) rather than proactively searching out violations. Again, there are few reasons for this condition.

Because the code enforcement function is split between two departments and two programs it makes it more difficult to be proactive to search out all causes of blight. Even when the LP Pride officers can proactively look for violations related to tall grass or abandoned vehicles, they typically would not be looking for violations related to building conditions (such as broken garage doors, tarped roofs, illegal signs etc.) Building department code enforcement faces this same issue. While they might proactively seek out building related blight conditions, they typically would not also be environmental blight (such as overgrown vegetation or trash).

Part of the issue is that the LP Pride program has three major functions. Enforcement of the environmental codes, parking (and abandoned vehicle) enforcement, and animal control. Parking enforcement and enforcement of overgrown vegetation are very time consuming. While parking enforcement is a year-round issue, overgrown vegetation is often more time consuming during the late spring through the fall.

Based upon the above-mentioned factors there are two major reasons for the proliferation of blight throughout the city. The first is the city's economics and demographics and the second is the current structure of our code enforcement program.

Addressing the Factors Creating Blight in the City

There are things that the city can do to address the factors that are causing blight in the city. One of which the city is already doing. The city's CDBG program can assist homeowners with repairs to their home. This will help low-moderate income homeowners with funding to repair various building conditions causing blight. Finding ways to increase use of this program would help decrease blight in the city.

To address the structure and segregation of duties of code enforcement it makes sense to combine the two code enforcement programs. Doing this would split the duties of environmental code enforcement and parking enforcement and animal control. This would allow all code enforcement officers to focus solely on these duties.

New Lincoln Park Code Enforcement Program

Administration is suggesting a restructuring of code enforcement for the City of Lincoln Park. In this model, code enforcement would solely be the responsibility of the building department. The LP Pride program would be shifted into a strict parking enforcement and animal control program. This program would solely focus on these issues.

This restructuring would require a total of two new code enforcement officers in the building department as well as a code enforcement coordinator. Combined with the current full-time contracted code enforcement officer, the total code enforcement staff would be three officers and one coordinator.

In this new program, code enforcement officers would make routine patrols looking to address major blight issues systematically. There would also be the availability for continued complaint-based responses. It is the intention, that on all code enforcement complaint investigations, all violations would be addressed. Code enforcement officers would also look for violations within the vicinity of the complaint address.

This new structure has three major benefits. The first benefit is that it creates a direct line of accountability to the building department for all blight issues. This can increase response time as there is no need to differentiate between different departments for investigation. Having a single program should also help to create consistency in the enforcement of code violations.

A second benefit to this restructuring is that it should increase the overall performance of code enforcement. With the LP Pride program being split across various responsibilities, there are issues with having the ability to focus solely on any of them. During the spring through fall, as LP Pride is focusing much effort on noxious weeds, they cannot put the same effort into parking enforcement. Eliminating this pressure should increase efficiency for both parking and animal control and code enforcement.

The third benefit to this is that having all code enforcement in the building department can improve the collaboration with the CDBG program. The building department and CDBG currently work together on multiple projects. This restructuring helps align code enforcement and CDBG and adds another collaboration opportunity.

Implementation

There are three obstacles to overcome to implement this restructuring. The first is the physical location for the new program. While the administration intends to house the program within the building department, space is currently limited. To overcome this obstacle, the building department will need more space.

The building department intends minor modifications to their space to address the space issue. These include finishing the scanning of all hard files in the department and removing the filing system. Reconfiguring the office space will also be required and there is a possibility of removing a wall between the two areas of the department.

These modifications alone will not likely create enough space for the program to be located within the building department. Further building renovations are needed to create the amount of space needed for three new employees in the building department. Unfortunately, city hall is extremely limited in space. One suggestion is to physically connect the building department area with the former DDA area next to the kitchen. This presents an issue as the city currently allows space for the farmer's market, the chamber, and storage area for the city clerk.

The cost for the office renovations are not insignificant. The current estimates are \$20,000. This does not include the cost to scan all the documents in the building department.

The second obstacle to implementation is the need for equipment (referred to as FFET). There will be a need for desks as well as computers and other technology. The department will also require vehicles. Hopefully, some CDBG code enforcement funding could help offset some of these costs.

The estimated costs for FFET are in table two (right).

The final obstacle will be to increase the staff. The current staffing for the two departments for code enforcement includes: three code/parking enforcement (and animal control) officers, an LP Pride Coordinator, and the contracted full-time code enforcement

Tablets (2)	\$2,400.00
Mobile Printers	\$800.00
Computer (3)	\$3,200.00
Licenses (4)	\$3,000.00
Desks/chairs	\$3,000.00
Vehicles	\$65,000.00
Total	\$77,400

Table 2: FFET Costs

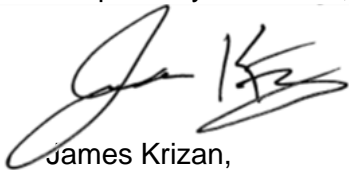
officer in the building department. This restructuring will require two parking enforcement/animal control officers in the police department, two code enforcement officers in the building department, a full-time contracted code enforcement officer, and a code enforcement coordinator. This restructuring will also require moving a part-time records position into a full-time records position to handle various duties currently assigned to the LP Pride dispatcher.

While the restructure of staff mostly represents shifting of expenses, the increase in staff will create more costs to the city's general fund. There will be an additional code enforcement officer which will be an increase in costs and the new code enforcement coordinator position will be at a higher wage scale than the current LP Pride Coordinator position.

Overall, the finance department estimates that the increase in personnel costs will be over \$135,000 annually. The finance department has estimated that the first year cost for this restructuring will be just over \$234,000.

These obstacles indicate that there are costs associated with the initial restructuring. There will also be ongoing costs due to the increase in staff. However, considering the council's goal to increase the cleanliness of the city the increased cost seems like a wise investment.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Krizan', is written over a horizontal line.

James Krizan,
City Manager