



City of Ripon
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August 9, 2018

CITY COUNCIL
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VIA U.S. MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Honorable Linda L. Lofthus, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of San Joaquin
180 East Weber Avenue, Suite 1306J
Stockton, CA 95202
Email: grandjury@sjcourts.org

Re: *San Joaquin County Grand Jury 2017-2018 Report – Case No. 0117
Code Enforcement Departments of San Joaquin County*

Dear Judge Lofthus:

In response to the San Joaquin County Grand Jury Case No. 0117, the City Council of the City of Ripon (“City”) responds as follows:

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

F4.1: Ripon is still experiencing budget and staffing reductions created by the housing crash in 2008. The resulting level of enforcement is reactive, which allows blight and safety issues to continue. Current staffing levels require that one employee perform multiple duties including code enforcement, animal control, part-time communications dispatch, and other duties as assigned.

R4.1: Ripon explore budget options to restore the code enforcement officer position and consider using volunteers to increase code enforcement compliance.

Response to F4.1
and R4.1:

In response to the findings of the Grand Jury in the above referenced matter, the City Council respectfully disagrees with the Finding that overall staffing for code enforcement has been reduced, based upon the summary and statistics set forth below. At the same time, the City Council affirms the principle that code enforcement is a vital local agency function that must be handled proactively whenever possible.

At some point in the future when the code enforcement activity dictates the need to assign a full-time staff member to code enforcement activity, the City Council will direct staff to evaluate the funding for this full-time position.

Additionally, the City Council will direct staff to provide the Council with a report on the ability to use volunteers to assist City staff to increase code enforcement compliance. This report shall be provided at an open and public meeting prior to October 31, 2018.

BACKGROUND

To provide some context for its response, the City has never had a full-time staff person assigned to conduct code enforcement activities and the City Council would note that total staff hours assigned to code enforcement activity in Ripon has increased since before the recession. Prior to the recession, the City's Planning and Community Development Director was assigned the part-time responsibility of conducting code enforcement activities. As the economy has improved and the workload of the City's Planning and Community Development Director increased, a Community Service Officer from the Ripon Police Department was assigned to work under the Planning and Community Development Director.

The number of hours allocated to code enforcement activities by staff is directly related to the need. Code enforcement activity in the City of Ripon is primarily investigated on a complaint driven process, but the City's approach becomes much more proactive when a risk to public safety is present. An example of times when the City's Code Enforcement Officer is proactive is weed abatement. Before the heat begins drying weeds in empty lots increasing chances of a fire, code enforcement staff send out letters notifying property owners of the need to remove the weeds.

In 1999, the Neighborhood Code Compliance committee was established pursuant to Chapter 1.10 of the Municipal Code. This committee is made up of code enforcement staff, Building Official, Planning and Community Development Director, Fire Chief, Police Chief, City Attorney, and a Councilmember. The committee meets from time to time (on average, approximately four times each year since its inception) to review code enforcement matters and provide guidance and recommendations as to appropriate strategies and remedies to obtain compliance. The following is a summary of code enforcement cases the City has taken action on over the last 5 years:

2017: 158
2016: 144
2015: 156
2014: 142
2013: 144

The number of code enforcement actions taken in the last 5 years is fairly consistent and does not indicate an increasing trend, nor the need to add additional code enforcement staff at this time.

If there are questions or concerns regarding any aspect of this Response, please feel free to contact City Attorney, Thomas H. Terpstra, or send correspondence to the City Council at 259 N. Wilma Avenue, Ripon, California, 95366.

Sincerely,



Michael Restuccia
Mayor, City of Ripon