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## 'Instant tickets' to prompt property cleanups

Council votes to end lengthy criminal process

By ADAM TAYLOR, The News Journal  
Posted Friday, October 20, 2006

WILMINGTON -- In April, city code inspectors will begin issuing \$50 tickets on the spot if they see high grass and weeds, litter or excessive animal waste on properties. Garbage cans left in front of buildings on days before trash is to be collected will be a cause for the fines as well.

City Council unanimously passed the "instant ticketing" program Thursday night.

The program was started because residents and city officials have been frustrated with the current process, which they say takes too long to get property owners or tenants to clean up. Currently, a judge fines the violator, often months after the citation is issued. Neighbors have to live with the nuisance properties during that time.

Councilman Charles M. Freel, the sponsor of the bill that made the program law, said he thinks it will do more than make Wilmington cleaner. "The appearance of neighborhoods adds up to a stable community," he said.

Many landlords don't like the program, however, because the fines are imposed before the owners or tenants get a day in court.

Under the current system, code violations are criminal misdemeanors and the fines range from \$100 to \$5,000. The system that will begin in April makes them civil matters for property owners and reduces the fine. The lower, \$50 fine, however, doubles if it goes unpaid after a month. The current criminal system and fine structure will not change for tenants.

Those who are fined can appeal their tickets to the city.

Code inspectors will investigate cases at rental properties before deciding to fine the owner or the tenant, city Communications Director John Rago said.

But landlord Earl Smiddy told the council Thursday that often the litter in front of his properties is neither his fault nor that of his tenants. Pedestrians are the main culprits, he said.

"This ordinance is remedying the problem instead of eliminating the cause," he said. "If you're going to fine somebody, fine the person that does it."

In other business, the council approved four five-year contracts worth a total of \$5.2 million for engineering design work for a series of improvements to the city's water system. Metcalf and Eddy Inc. will get up to \$2.5 million, Whitman and Requardt and Associates will get up to \$1 million, O'Brien and Gere Inc. will get up to \$1 million and Malcolm Pierne Inc. will get up to \$700,000.

The contracts passed by 10-2 votes. Councilman Michael A. Brown Sr. was absent.

Councilman Charles Potter Jr. voted against the contracts because he feels the city's engineering staff is capable of doing some of the work. Mayor James M. Baker's chief of staff, William S. Montgomery, however, said the work needs firms that specialize in the field.

Councilwoman Loretta Walsh voted against three of them because she said they don't have offices in Wilmington. But Councilman Gerald

L. Brady, head of the council's Public Works Committee, said two of the firms, Metcalf and Eddy and Whitman Requardt, have local offices.

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## STORYCHAT

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Posted: Fri Oct 20, 2006 3:47 pm

I think the instant ticketing is a good thing but unless they clean up L&I's act there may be abuses. IT IS PRETTY WELL KNOW IN WILMINGTON THAT L&I IS THE REASON THE CITY CANNOT PROGRESS AS IT SHOULD. When L&I and everyone else knows the exact location of the problem residences or business and we complain, complain, complain about them for years without results but with many excuses! If you wonder why people don't get involved in Wilmington this is why, NO RESULTS! The problem people know they can get away with it and "play the game".

And then when people who are trying to do the right thing and for example, get proper permits for a project. I have heard many a nightmare story about incompetent L&I inspectors some even threatning. Seems like the problem people in Wilmington seem to continue making problems and the good people get hassled when trying to do the right thing. Many people go ahead with a project without proper permits for fear of inspector abuse which is the City's loss and puts everyone in danger if a job is not done correctly.

Even without the instant ticketing there should be better results, there is no excuse that there are such deplorable areas of the City and with this inability to clean up an area of course results in crime. IF WE WANT TO CLEAN UP WILMINGTON WE MUST FIRST CLEAN UP L&I.

Posted: Fri Oct 20, 2006 12:48 pm

Yeah ty.....

You're a great one to be condemning someone's spelling!!!

Posted: Fri Oct 20, 2006 9:36 am

Years ago the people in our clean, safe, neighborhood swept up the litter in the area in front of their own house. 'Outsiders' began walking past on their way home from school and we heard screaming and glass breaking from blocks away. After they passed by, we still went out and cleaned up the trash. People from the nasty neighborhoods moved in and one day a woman passing by angrily complained that her old neighborhood was better because the city cleaned their sidewalk. I said we clean our own area in this neighborhood and added that it saves taxes. She gave me such a mean look, I felt threatened.

Posted: Fri Oct 20, 2006 9:16 am

Sure, everyone gets trash in their yard. As the first house in my development, I get a lot.. but I feel a responsibility to myself and my neighbors to keep it clean. The intent of ticketing unclean yards is obviously not for the single piece of rubbish blown in from the wind, rather just to help clean up ignorance..

I think they should arm the people enforcing this law with cheap digital cameras to help enforce the law, as well as to protect those that do not deserve tickets.

Just a thought.

Oh.. another thought. Ty/VMF, get a life, or a least a job. Clean your apartment. Something. Anything. Just spare us your ignorance.

Posted: Fri Oct 20, 2006 9:00 am

Ummm,, edu"A"cate ? lol

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