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9.8. Building Inspections & Code Compliance

Building Inspections and Code Compliance operates under the direction of the Chief Building Official (CBO). The CBO reports directly to the City Manager.

Building Inspection

The Building Inspection Division provides service in areas such as permit processing, contractor licensing and registration, plan review and field inspection. Adoption of the nation's first common code format in 2002, known as the "International Codes" was an important step in the regulation of built environment. The International codes replace the three model codes, Uniform, Southern and BOCA, which have been utilized throughout the country since the 1920's. Energy conservation in building design and construction is a relatively new area of regulation which is expected to become more important as energy conservation awareness increases.

At this time, the Department has three building inspectors who also perform electrical inspection for residential, three plumbing and mechanical inspectors and one commercial electrical inspector. At this point in the city's development, it is unlikely that additional inspectors will be needed, since the city is beginning the natural transition from the regulation of new construction to the maintenance of existing buildings and premises. Single-family permit activity is expected to decrease over the next three years as land for new development becomes more limited. One aspect of this natural change is the multi-family licensing and inspection program has been identified by the City Council as a strategic goal commencing in 2003. Apartment complexes will be inspected annually or semi-annually as a condition of licensing to assure compliance with a minimum housing code, which will also be adopted as early as 2003. Inspections will likely include building, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, fire and health inspectors.

Code Enforcement

Activity in the code enforcement division is rapidly increasing. Area cities typically employ one code enforcement officer for each 13,000 to 15,000 citizens. This level of staffing allows for proactive enforcement in highly visible areas and reactive, complaint based service to other areas. Between five and six thousand new single-family units will be added in the next five years. As neighborhoods age, more proactive enforcement will be necessary deeper within subdivisions. In addition to an increase in property maintenance violations, zoning violations such as illegal uses and home occupations will grow. The department currently employs three officers and more will be needed in the near future in order to fulfill the Council's strategic goal of enhancing the overall appearance of the City through proactive enforcement of property maintenance codes. Code enforcement officers will also be involved in property maintenance and minimum housing code enforcement for multi-family licensing.

Environmental Health

Existing functions of the Health Division continue to increase as new facilities such as restaurants, schools, day care centers, public and semi-public swimming pools, and mobile food vendors open. Average restaurant scores have increased from 92 to 95 since 1998. In order to maintain excellent scores, a food handler safety program approved by the city is desirable for all persons who handle food in an establishment. A certification is already in place for managers for such establishments. The Environmental Health Division is likely to become more active in broader health and sanitation functions as the city grows. It is anticipated that the City will become involved with mosquito surveillance and control as issues such as West Nile Virus become more prevalent.

Priorities and Implementation Strategies

Priority: Maintain building and code inspectional services at levels which assure the continued health and safety of the citizens.

Implementation Strategies:

- i. Maintain adequate staffing of inspection and enforcement.
- ii. Plans Examiners to obtain certification in the International Energy Conservation Code.

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iii. Building inspectors to obtain certification in the International Energy Conservation Code as required by state law to perform energy inspections currently performed by third party inspectors.

Priority: Prepare for transition of the inspection function from new development to a maintenance emphasis as structures within the city age.

Implementation Strategies:

- i. Adopt a Minimum Housing Code to address deterioration of aging structures.
- ii. Adopt a multi-family licensing ordinance to facilitate an inspection program.
- iii. Amend the masonry requirement for new residential structures by requiring 75% masonry (excluding openings).
- iv. Require the use of low maintenance, durable veneers in residential construction.

Priority: Maintain excellent health inspection scores in all facilities through application of the most current regulations, recognition of appropriate staffing levels, and staff development as the number of facilities increase.

Implementation Strategies:

- i. Monitor health inspection workload and add staff in order to limit each inspector to an appropriate number of inspections per day.
- ii. Require a food handler's certification for everyone who handles food within an establishment.
- iii. Re-assess Environmental Health Ordinance on a regular basis and amend to include various updates in State law and other areas of local public health concern.