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A VIEW FROM HARBOR STREET

September 30, 2015

Moving Toward Code Enforcement

By David Buckingham, City Manager



Our April 1, 2015 column in this space was entitled “Code Enforcement is Good for Everyone” and began with this sentence: “Morro Bay does not have an effective, proactive approach to ensure residents, visitors and businesses follow the civil aspects of our municipal code.” That is about to change as we ease back into a process where the City — in a thoughtful and friendly, but firm and proactive manner — helps ensure that we are all living, working and playing in concert with various aspects of our City ordinances in order to maintain the health, safety and well-being of our community for businesses, residents and visitors. The hope with these types of programs is that code enforcement leads to community enhancement.

Over the past 6 months, the City has been doing preparatory work for the start of a more proactive code enforcement program. This work has included the City Council budgeting funds to hire one or more code enforcement professionals, putting the processes in place for this effort, identifying the top 10 areas of code violation, preparing information so we all understand what our municipals code says, and finally getting City Council approval to implement the program.

Last week the City Council approved our municipal code outreach and enforcement implementation plan. But don’t worry, we are not going to immediately start papering Morro Bay with hundreds of citations and fines. We want to go from zero to 55 over the next four months, not the next four days, giving everyone time to make corrections where needed. That is actually the purpose of any good code enforcement program – achieving voluntary compliance with existing ordinances, especially those that address public health and safety, nuisance abatement, and fairness.

The next step in our plan is a three-month community outreach and education period. We recognize that since we have had a number of years without effective, proactive code enforcement in Morro Bay there are many folks who may have forgotten what our community ordinances require. This may include parking recreational vehicles and boats in one’s front yard; junk and trash creating an nuisance on private property; overgrown shrubbery causing dangerous or inappropriate conditions; and various other concerns that may have developed over time. So, before we start handing out citations, we want to make sure we do a good job communicating.

The city will hire one or more code enforcement officers in the next few weeks and, by the beginning of November, we will begin outreach to inform residents of violations of our existing

municipal code. Our code enforcement team will attempt to talk to residents about possible violations, and at minimum will leave information that lets them know of the violation, what our ordinances require, and how to fix it.

This process of educating and informing will continue, in most cases without an official citation, for three months. Following 90 days of proactive outreach, we will begin with a more formal process of issuing citations and requiring compliance.

When we get to that point, the goal remains voluntary compliance with our existing code. The process, generally, is that our code enforcement officers will issue a notice of violation and allow the resident a couple weeks to correct the problem. If the problem is not fixed, a second notice will be given, noting the amount of the fine in our ordinance. Should the violation remain unaddressed and the resident non-responsive, a citation will be issued.

In this process, our goal is voluntary compliance and we intend to be thoughtful and measured in our enforcement. When residents are responsive to the City's concerns and taking appropriate steps to correct identified problems, we want to work with them toward a solution, not issue tickets. Only when folks refuse to address concerns might we need to resort to fines.

So, in summary, in November, December and January we will be educating and informing the community, and individuals in the community, about specific violations of our municipal code. Then, starting around February, we will begin more proactive and engaged enforcement of our ordinances – especially those related to public health and safety, nuisances, and fairness.

As usual, we welcome your input and feedback. For more background on why we are working toward more proactive code enforcement, see our April 1 column here: <http://tolosapressnews.com/code-enforcement-is-good-for-everyone>. For up to date info, check out our website here: morrobayca.gov/codeenforcement. If you have questions or comments about code enforcement in Morro Bay, send an email to Community Development Manager Scot Graham, at sgraham@morro-bay.ca.us. Or, send me a note at dbuckingham@morro-bay.ca.us. Thanks for working with us as we all work to make Morro Bay an even better place to live, work and play.

Note: This editorial first appeared in Bay News on October 28, 2015.