

## Oakland Code Enforcement Task Force

### Meeting Minutes

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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1. **Introductions/ In attendance:** R. Bennett, M. Bethel, A. Butkus, N. Solic, I. Boggs, S. Koss, H. Cianciosi, P. Sedlack, H. Kappelman, K. Miller, M. Hogue, A. Coyne, L. Robinson, K. Boykowycz, G. Becker, M. White, R. Ranallo, B. Kossis, W. Wilson
2. **Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) Presentation:** Lawrence Robinson of the ACHD's Housing Division spoke to group. The Housing Division started in 1950s. Their code is very basic, and is updated once every 10 yrs> Updates on bed bugs are currently in progress. Changes must go through county council before approved.

Oakland is handled by Kim Ferrero but they prefer that all calls go through the main secretary for proper tracking at **412.350.4046**. Complaints can also be faxed in. When a complaint comes in, a warning letter goes out to the property owner alleging the complaint and asking their help to resolve it. The letter does not say who called it in, but usually they can figure it out. ACHD calls tenants after 30 days to see if issue has been followed up on. If not, then ACHD goes out to look at it. If a situation is extreme (no water, heat, cats, etc) ACHD skips sending letter and visits property right away.

There are 17 inspectors and they each do about 550 a year (includes homes, nursing homes, schools, etc). There is an asbestos and clean air department as well. ACHD has separate plumbing division. Lead paint has separate division as well.

Blair asked about entry rights—ACHD said they follow laws from 1953, which says they can enter anywhere where it is assumed there is a health problem. They can demand that landlords let them in. If violation is not remediated, ACHD starts looking into other things (are they in court battles, are they current on their taxes, etc). If no action is taken after 4 inspections, ACHD takes them to court—all go to same magistrate in Carrick (Judge King). A “civil penalty” of \$2,500 is imposed if no action is taken, and this goes on their credit report. ACHD tries not to give legal advice but advises tenants to go through “rent withholding” program (OPDC has handouts available with more information on this). Lawrence estimates a 70% - 80% success rate of landlords who follow up after four inspections, which is a four month process.

ACHD can address occupancy issues. ACHD standpoint is that overcrowding can lead to health/sanitation issues. What evidence do they collect for occupancy issues? They go in, count the number of bedrooms and number of beds, see how many kitchens are being shared by how many people, and how many bathrooms there are. If they find that four or more unrelated people are in one property, then they start the citation process. Lawrence noted that the Fair

Housing Act was revised so that people with special needs can live together. Maria Bethel asked about what communication exists between ACHD and the BBI's Nuisance Property department regarding overcrowding issues. Lawrence responded there is very little. He informed us that [www.achd.net](http://www.achd.net) has a section of handouts online. Lawrence stated that the issue of many different municipalities in Pittsburgh makes it hard to know exactly what is going on in the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward, but we can target efforts on a handful of properties and work with our inspector. Lawrence is happy to aid the Oakland Code Enforcement Task Force on an ongoing basis and is going to loop his supervisor in.

Lawrence also noted that other community organizations partner with both the ACHD and city council to do walks of the neighborhood to target properties and record information. Oakland might want to think about doing this.

3. **311 reports/ top 10 property tracking:** Geof reminded residents to contact us with property complaints and asked for volunteers to help with ongoing data entry. Blair is working on scheduling a community training with PNCIS (Pittsburgh Neighborhood Community and Information System)—all are welcomed to join us in receiving this free training. Contact Blair or Rebekkah if you're interested.
4. **Housing court:** Matt Hogue often attends these hearings and can attest to the fact that Judge Riccardi, who is an elected official, will show off when people attend the trial. He's seen \$25,000 fines imposed when community members are present for hearing. You can look up court dockets only if you know specific information. Disruptive property issues are still not coming from Pitt Police commanders to Nuisance Property department. Officer Bennett said he would check with powers that be on communicating directly with Nuisance Property department in the future.
5. **Next Meeting:** Group decided to cancel December meeting since it's scheduled the week of Christmas. Group will reconvene at the January 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, at 6pm, location yet to be determined.
6. Meeting adjourned.