

CITY OF ATLANTA

HOUSING CODE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM
POLICY AND PROCEDURE GUIDE

JANUARY 1, 1965

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I. Goals:

- A. "MAXIMUM EFFORTS IMMEDIATELY TO SECURE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOALS AND BENEFITS OF THE HOUSING CODE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM THROUGH USE OF PERSONAL CONTACTS, PAMPHLETS, PRESS RELEASES AND OTHER PUBLIC INFORMATION MEDIA."

Critique

The unfavorable publicity of the newspapers and the constant delegations from various communities indicate little attention has been given to this provision. While there has been considerable personal contact on the part of housing code inspectors, and some handing out of pamphlets, there have been no press releases issued and little or no attempt to use other available press media to gain support and understanding of the Housing Code Compliance Program.

Recommendation

I would recommend that provision be made immediately to utilize the press media. Some positive steps could include:

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1. Get agreement of newspapers to run weekly court calendar of code violation cases with names of defendants. Also run follow-up report on court verdict.
 2. Develop press releases on major Housing Code Division responsibilities and goals to go to city editors, editorial writers and other news media representatives who have shown particular interest in the Housing Code program.
 3. Request WSB-TV to prepare 30 minute documentary on Housing Code Compliance. City could purchase copies of the film for showing to clubs and groups.
 4. Develop public service spot announcements for radio and TV on keeping houses in repair. The Board of Education ETV station could produce the spots.
- B. "MAXIMUM COORDINATION IMMEDIATELY WITH ALL OTHER PUBLIC AGENCIES WHO WILL BE AFFECTED BY, AND NEED TO ASSIST IN, THE CONDUCT AND RESULTS OF THIS PROGRAM."

Critique

Herein lies the major problem with the Housing Code Compliance

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Program. There is a general lack of understanding among City departments of the goals and responsibilities of the program. An even bigger problem is lack of proper cooperation among the various divisions within the Department of Inspections. Some of the key factors which contribute to inefficiency or confusion are:

1. Permit values through the years are used as the main criterion for successful operation of the department. Subsequently, new construction assumes major importance and Housing Code Compliance is relegated to a secondary existence.
2. The Supervisor of Inspection Service is a line supervisor and coordinator of all divisions and units except the Liaison and Architect Divisions. In practice, however, this official is allowed supervisory authority only over the Chief Housing Inspector, Codes Compliance Officer and Rehabilitation Specialist. The result is lack of cooperation among divisions, improper issuing of permits, an almost total disregard of use of central records and less

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than vigorous prosecution of code violations. Specific examples of lack of coordination and/or cooperation include:

- Housing Code Division*
- (a) There are too many cases where the Codes Compliance Officer has issued ^{A request} orders for demolition of an unsound structure and the permit desk has subsequently issued permits for repair of the same structures without the ^{coordination with the} knowledge of the Codes Compliance Officer or Housing ^{Division} Inspector.
- (b) Pre-permit inspections are required before issuance of a permit for rehabilitation of a sub-standard structure. This is not being followed and permits are being issued without consideration of the Housing Code Compliance Program Policy and Procedure Guide.
- (c) Electrical Division Inspectors refuse to sign inspection cards on Housing Code Compliance cases, requiring Housing Code Inspectors to spend considerable waste motion obtaining required signatures. The Electrical Division gives only token cooperation to the Housing Division. The Water Department and Gas Company, on

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the other hand, cooperate to the maximum.

- (d) The Central Records are not located near the permit desk so they can be utilized whenever a permit is issued. The Central Records are maintained strictly as files or archives and no attempt is made to utilize them for permit issuance.

Some of these points were touched upon in the Survey Report "Government of the City of Atlanta, Georgia" by the Public Administration Service in 1965. The following quotations are found on page 34 of the PAS report:

BUILDING AND HOUSING INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT

"IN 1964 ATLANTA TOOK A LOGICAL STEP IN CONSOLIDATING ITS VARIOUS BUILDING INSPECTION AND EXAMINING FUNCTIONS INTO A SINGLE DEPARTMENT. FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS MOVE HAS NOT YET BEEN ACHIEVED AND PROGRESS APPEARS TO BE SLOW. FRICTION REPORTEDLY EXISTS BETWEEN THE FORMERLY INDEPENDENT AGENCIES. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE HOUSING CODE ENFORCEMENT SECTION AND THE BUILDING CODE SECTION HAS NOT YET BEEN FULLY REALIZED. THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN THE HOUSING CODE SECTION CONDEMNNS PROPERTY FOR DEMOLITION OR FOR MAJOR REPAIRS, AND THE CENTRAL PERMITS SECTION SUBSEQUENTLY ISSUES REPAIR PERMITS

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FOR MINOR OR PARTIAL REPAIRS. INTERNAL ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES TO INSURE THE ENFORCEMENT OF HOUSING CODE INSPECTIONS ARE DEFICIENT. THERE IS A BACKLOG OF SOME 4,000 NOTICES TO COMPLY WITH THE HOUSING CODE AND AN AVERAGE OF FEWER THAN 10 CASES WEEKLY ARE TAKEN TO COURT.

"THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT USES A MULTIPLE PERMIT CARD FOR STRUCTURES BEING REPAIRED DUE TO HOUSING CODE ACTIONS. THIS CARD PROVIDES A RECORDING FOR ALL TYPES OF REPAIRS. WHEN REPAIRS ARE INSPECTED AND APPROVED, THE INSPECTOR SIGNS THE MULTIPLE CARD, WHICH IS POSTED ON THE PROPERTY. THIS FORM SERVES THE PURPOSE OF INSURING THAT ALL NECESSARY PERMITS HAVE BEEN ISSUED AND WORK HAS BEEN SATISFACTORILY ACCOMPLISHED. SOME INSPECTORS REFUSE TO SIGN THE CARD. IN ADDITION, THE MULTIPLE PERMIT FORM IS USED ONLY ON REPAIRS ORDERED BY THE HOUSING DIVISION BUT NOT FOR OTHER REPAIRS. THEREFORE, SOME REPAIR JOBS HAVE CARDS WHILE OTHERS DO NOT. THIS SITUATION CREATES CONFUSION EVEN AMONG THE INSPECTORS."

Recommendation:

1. Spell out the duties and responsibilities of the Supervisor of Inspection Services and give this position the authority to coordinate all Inspection Services as the job title and organization chart imply. This would include authority to order cooperation among divisions and changes in procedures of divisions to correct problems.

2. Although PAS reports these 4,000 notices as a "backlog", the great bulk represents the normal work load of currently active cases.

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2. Transfer of the Codes Compliance Officer and the Rehabilitation Specialist to the Housing Division, reporting to the Chief Housing Code Inspector. These two functions cannot be separated from the Housing Inspection functions and the coordination of the Inspectors. Court cases and rehabilitation efforts are vital to the success of a vigorous housing code enforcement program.
3. The Central Records Section should be near the Permit Desk to provide maximum utilization of records in determining whether or not a permit should be issued. The building records lend themselves nicely to a computer application and should be computerized at the earliest possible date.

The work done by the CIP at great expense to the City and HUD in placing records of every parcel and structure on the City computer must not be allowed to become outdated and simply electronic archives. The Building Inspection Department should be charged with the responsibility for updating computerized building codes data, *and procedures established for proper handling*

A remote display station should be planned as a part of the City's new IBM 360 System for ready access by the Permit Desk from central computer records.

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4. An aggressive prosecution policy must be adopted and followed if we expect to achieve even minimum compliance. The backlog of pending Housing Code violations will require the services of a fulltime prosecutor if the Division is ever to hope to become current. A fulltime Assistant City Attorney is recommended.

(Completion of this report is delayed pending revision of ^{Housing} Code Compliance Map. This will be forthcoming with recommended changes and proposed personnel additions to the Housing Code Division)