

CODE ENFORCEMENT

George Obren, Director

The mission of the Code Enforcement department is to remain proactive in identifying and solving code issues in our Mishawaka neighborhoods and responding to our residents' concerns in a very prompt and professional manner. It a great honor to serve our community and to work hand in hand with our residents on a daily basis to maintain our neighborhoods and to improve the quality of life that our citizens have always expected and enjoyed.



Weighing in Code Officer

Roger Shield checks accuracy of a scale

Mishawaka has always been known for having very clean and safe neighborhoods. Our code officers have initiated 4,881 cases in 2010. Of those cases, Code was required to do 11,147 follow-up visits. These numbers represent the amount of time and effort our Code Officers put into their job. It is important to note that the overwhelming

majority of these cases were self-initiated while our code officers were patrolling their respective neighborhoods. The Code Officers are always striving to maintain a common sense approach when dealing with our residents and are always mindful of any financial or physical issues that residents may have.

While Mishawaka has had its share of foreclosed properties due to the economic downturn in 2009, it is important to note that these vacant properties are being purchased quite regularly. New owners are investing their dollars into improving these homes and are either occupying them or putting them back on the market. This significantly reduces blight in our neighborhoods and it shows that investors realize Mishawaka is a very strong and stable community. Mishawaka neighborhoods are second to none.

***...striving to maintain a
common sense approach when
dealing with our residents***

Top 100 Program

The Code Enforcement Department takes great pride in knowing that our citizens and those who visit our city do not see many substandard structures in Mishawaka. Now in the fifth year of the Top 100 Program, during the winter months Code Officers identify the top 100 structures that they feel need the most attention in the coming year. Our Top 100 program has played a huge roll in the great overall appearance of our neighborhoods in the city. In 2010, 67% of these cases were brought into compliance, which is fantastic! Our Top 100 list for 2011 is now being compiled and in the coming spring, Code Officers will begin contacting owners of these properties to establish completion

dates for them. Our Top 100 Program is even more significant when you realize that in a five year period Code Officers have addressed 500 of the worse structures in Mishawaka. The vast majority of these structures have been brought into compliance.

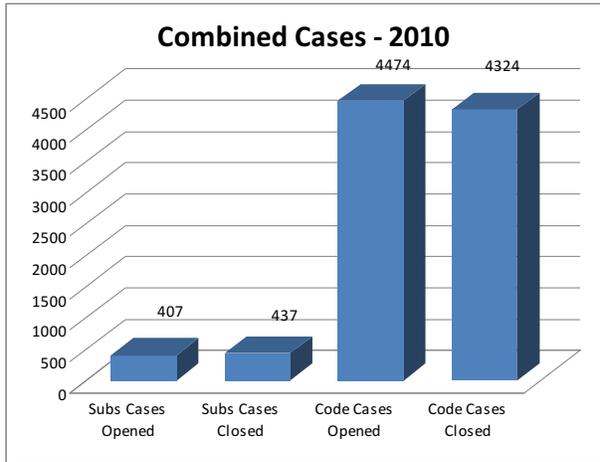
Neighborhood Stabilization Program

This extremely valuable program is being orchestrated by Community Development but Code has been instrumental in providing them with a list of 167 vacant properties, complete with owner information within the targeted area. This list is obtained from the Code Department’s reporting files and also from canvassing targeted areas. The documentation compiled by the Code Department has proven extremely valuable to the Department of Community Development as they progress with the Neighborhood Stabilization Program.

Several of these vacant and blighted structures have already been purchased and demolished with new single family dwellings taking their place. The overall appearance of our older neighborhoods has increased tremendously. The department hopes that the newly constructed and re-modeled houses will serve as an impetus for other homeowners to improve their properties as well, and take even greater pride in their neighborhood.

Public Nuisance Cases

As usual, code officers handled a wide variety of cases in 2010. They include but are not limited to abandoned autos, animal issues, snow removal, noise complaints, and trash. It is important to note that one of the components of the city’s trash contract still calls for all of the trash to be removed at its normal pick up point regardless of the status of a citizen’s account. This has been a huge benefit for code enforcement as once again this year our trash cases have fallen off dramatically. In 2010 we only addressed a total of 24 trash cases, usually for trash not properly contained. This has allowed us to focus on other issues.



From May to October, tall grass cases are the biggest code issue in our neighborhoods and it takes a large amount of our time to keep them in check. These types of cases are usually involving vacant properties. In many cases, properties that have been foreclosed are being maintained by local property maintenance groups hired by the lending institution. Hopefully, they may have the property on a routine mowing schedule which is the best case scenario for us.

*... overwhelming success in keeping
Mishawaka looking clean...*

We have achieved overwhelming success in keeping Mishawaka looking clean through

our Code Officers aggressively patrolling their respective areas and addressing violations that they see. In 2010 we addressed 4,474 public nuisance type cases that required 7,663 follow-up visits. We managed to successfully close 97% of those cases while still looking into the remaining ones.

Samples and totals of the type of we enforce are summarized below.

PUBLIC NUISANCE CASES	
Tall Grass	1,783
Abandoned Autos	394
Snow Removal	360
Animal Issues	41
Trash	24
Noise	23

Our trash cases have been drastically reduced by the fact that our contractor must haul away all of the properly packaged trash regardless of the status of the citizen’s account. This has enabled us to focus our attention to other types of issues.

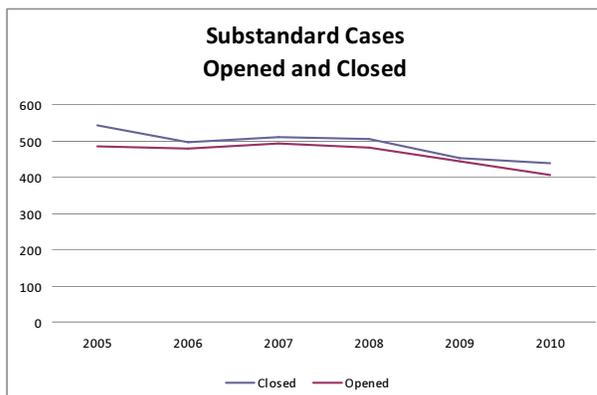
We addressed 407 substandard structures in 2010. This includes the Top 100. We have seen a decline in the total number of substandard cases over the past four years.

SUBSTANDARD STRUCTURE CASES	
2007	493
2008	480
2009	444
2010	407

This is very encouraging as it means our neighborhoods are looking better every year. Even though numbers have been declining we predict that at some point they will level off.

Substandard Structure Cases

Substandard structures still demand a lot of attention from the Code Enforcement



Department, but there has been a decline in the number of houses, garages, and commercial buildings that are in need of repair. The number of substandard cases that have been opened has gone down the last three years. These numbers are very encouraging but the Department feels it will eventually level off. Many residents have done a great job as they promptly began working on substandard issues pointed out to them.

We actually closed 437 substandard cases in 2010, which of course is greater than the amount opened. This is simply because some of those cases were from 2009.

In 2010, the Department took a total of six property owners before our hearing officer. These cases were mainly substandard structures where the owners simply refused to cooperate with us. Several of these cases have been resolved through the initial hearing. These hearings are extremely valuable in bringing the most difficult cases to resolution.

Stewardship

For board-ups and clean-ups a total of \$8,277 was spent in 2009. Most of this was for mowing by our contractor. The department has recouped a total of \$1,448 for 2010 in weed, trash, and lien monies.

Weights & Measures

Roger Shields inspects all kinds of measuring devices such as computing scales, prescription scales, taxi meters, packages, and gas pumps. While he was state certified in 2009, Roger has been getting a lot of on the job training from state inspectors in our area. The department is looking forward to purchasing a new fuel calibration unit to make certifying gas pumps much safer and more efficient. Roger inspected over 970 devices in 2010.

Teamwork

As mentioned earlier, The Code Enforcement office continues to work very closely with other city departments on many neighborhood issues. This includes Planning where we assist on some zoning and signage issues, Community Development (vacant houses), Fire Department (burned structure initiative), and with the Police Department in remedying noise complaints, animal issues, parking, and abandoned autos.



Before and after a vacant Mishawaka with numerous substandard issues is deeded to City for demolition and replace with a Habitat for Humanity house