

**Statement from the City of Dunedin Regarding Code Enforcement Actions
May 24, 2019**

The City of Dunedin has come under recent unfair criticism for a sequence of entirely appropriate actions taken by code enforcement. This criticism incorrectly suggests that the affected homeowner is a victim of sudden and unwarranted action by the City – when, in fact, he is an offender with a repeated history of code violations. A thorough review of the history of this case shows that the City took this final action only after several years of repeat violations that could no longer be overlooked.

The primary purpose of code enforcement is to maintain the appropriate high standards that make Dunedin such a special place, and to maintain property values and the quality of life that our residents expect and deserve. The broad goal of any code enforcement action is to compel property owners to meet the same unified standard as their neighbors – and to bring their property into compliance, as the rest of the community cooperatively and consistently does.

Unfortunately, the property in question owned by Mr. Jim Ficken has a long and chronic history of falling far short of this goal – intentionally. The City has had to intervene 12 times since 2007 to get the owner to properly maintain his property. Each time, the property was brought into compliance – but only after intervention by the City.

On May 5, 2015, after almost eight years of attempting to work with Mr. Ficken to keep the property legally maintained, the Dunedin Code Enforcement Board – a group of volunteer citizens committed to the betterment of the community – deemed the owner of the property to be a repeat offender for overgrowth, reflecting an ongoing disdain for his neighbors and community and for following reasonable rules and standards. The Board's order clearly stated that, as a repeat offender, the owner would be subject to fines up to \$500 per day for future violations. This fine level is standard for most Florida cities in dealing with a repeat violator.

Despite this clear advanced warning and repeated efforts to compel Mr. Ficken's compliance, in early July 2018 the City received another complaint that the property was again overgrown. This led to unsuccessful attempts by the City to gain compliance. On May 7, 2019, the Board authorized the City Attorney's office to file foreclosure actions.

The affected property is one of several owned by Mr. Ficken, and it is not his homestead residence of record. His homestead property in Clearwater has been the subject of 35 cases opened by that city over complaints, from overgrowth and broken glass to abandoned vehicles.

The City of Dunedin has no desire to impose large fines or foreclose on residential property. Our goal has been, and remains, to ensure that Dunedin is a high-quality community for our residents and visitors alike. The law-abiding residents of our wonderful community routinely and regularly maintain their properties consistent with this reasonable goal – as good citizens and good neighbors. Homeownership is a choice and a responsibility, and the owner of the property in this case has repeatedly failed to uphold that standard.

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