



## Community and Economic Development Department

**City of Sweet Home**  
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February 27, 2024

# Code Compliance Investigation Report Violations, Condemnation, and Abatement at 1188 55<sup>th</sup> Avenue

## Introduction

At the February 13, 2024 Council Meeting, the City Council discussed placing a lien on 1188 55<sup>th</sup> Avenue to recoup costs related to the abatement of violations on the property. During that meeting, three people made allegations regarding Code Compliance Officer Blake Dawson and the City's actions in relation to the property that merited investigation. In response, I have conducted an investigation of the enforcement activities at the property, using photos, documents and videos from the City Code Compliance files, including over five and half hours of body-worn camera footage. In addition, I have interviewed City staff members as well as John Origer, owner of Apex Property Clearing & Recycling, LLC, the firm the City hired to abate the property.

## Allegations and Findings

- Accusations of language, calling people "undesirables" who should be "exterminated" or are "insignificant" or "incompetent."
  - I have found no evidence of anything like this. No such language can be heard throughout all the body-worn camera footage. Apex denies ever hearing such language. City Staff deny hearing any such terms out of Mr. Dawson's mouth.
- Accusation of displacement of people by the City or by the Code Compliance Officer
  - This is certainly possible; however, it is not illegal. If properties are not legally occupied, and there is no adequate housing on the site, then yes, people are displaced from occupying the property. There is no exception to the City's ordinances that would allow illegal occupancy of a property in order to avoid displacing people.
- Accusation of Insufficient Notice
  - The City's records show plenty of notice. Numerous verbal warnings, warning letters, and condemnation notices were posted on the property. Unfortunately, the only mailing address on file for the property is the property itself, and all official notifications must be written to the owners, who are deceased. The City mails notifications, but has no way of knowing if they are opened or not. We make an effort to deliver them in person but have no way of knowing if they are getting to anyone who has authority over the property.
  - Not all visits to the property are documented, (for example, Mr. Dawson regularly patrols the City and does not detail every property he visits whole on patrol) however, the record shows documentation of the following imeline of notices issued to the property, and the Code Compliance activities that were conducted:
    - May 24, 2023: Courtesy notification of violations mailed.
    - June 14, 2023: Notice of violation mailed, which included a warning that the City would commence abatement if violations were not corrected.
    - August 25, 2023: City Staff exercised an administrative search warrant to verify violations on the property. Officers visited the property to investigate and gave additional verbal warnings to those present.
    - September 26, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, who gave verbal warnings to those present.



- September 28, 2023: A condemnation notice was posted on the "guest house."
- October 3, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present.
- October 5, 2023, Condemnation notice of "west accessory dwelling structure" mailed and posted, occupants given 7 days from posting date to vacate.
- October 19, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present.
- October 23, 2023, condemnation notice of all buildings on property mailed and posted, occupants were given 21 days from posting date to vacate the buildings. This 21-day warning period applied to people in the buildings, not the abatement of exterior violations.
- October 30, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present.
- October 31, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present.
- November 2, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present. Initial abatement took place, removal of covered trailer that was leaking sewage and cleanup of exterior garbage, removal of contaminated soil.
- November 3, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present. Initial abatement continued.
- November 6, 2023: Follow up visit by code officer, verbal warnings given to people present.
- November 13-17, 2023: Abatement of remaining structures and violations.
- Allegation that the Code Compliance Officer refused to work with residents.
  - No responsible party stepped forward during the entire abatement process, no responsible party responded to any warnings, condemnation notice, or abatement notice. No one on the property could claim ownership or provide any documentation of any legal right to be on the property. The Code Compliance Officer had no way of determining who on the property was legally occupying it, and who was simply squatting.
- Allegation of removal and taking of property
  - The property was abated, which required cleaning up and disposing of the entire exterior of the property. Apex Property Clearing did the abatement, they are required to dispose of everything. Nothing is saved by their workers or transferred to personal vehicles. When Apex cleans a property, everything appearing to be a violation is considered garbage, and must be disposed of properly. This often involves sorting items to dispose of them safely, which can appear like placing things aside to benefit from them personally, but no evidence has been found of anything being removed that was not then disposed of at a transfer station, recycling center, or other proper disposal method. Apex denies any of their team members taking anything from the site that was not subsequently disposed of, and reports that no one on their crew witnessed Mr. Dawson take anything from the property. No evidence was found of anyone taking anything for personal use.
- Allegation of destruction of property
  - When clearing trash, junk, and vehicles from a property, they must necessarily be sorted so that they can be disposed of properly. This would result in things



that appear to be trash treated like trash. My investigation found no evidence of anything intentionally destroyed. Landscaping was ripped out in order to gain access to the full property and to abate the violations (such as removing ground contaminated by sewage and burned garbage and spreading gravel in order to facilitate the abatement.). I have not found any evidence of petrified wood being placed on a vehicle, but if this happened, it was because all of it was considered garbage by the abatement crew. Our code officer does not operate any heavy equipment, and therefore could not have used any equipment to place petrified wood on a vehicle. The Apex crew may have done something similar to this as part of their sorting, however, the vehicle would have been considered a junk vehicle, and would not have been protected from damage during sorting.

- Alleged disregard of “mandated 21-day notice period.”
  - There is no mandated 21-day notice period. City Staff give a variety of deadlines for different warnings and violations. The only 21-day period I found was in the condemnation notice for the house and all the remaining structures on the property. That period was for vacating the property. It was not a notice period for abatement of exterior violations. Abatement of the exterior began before this period ended, but exterior abatement was already noticed previously, and started well after those notices.
- Allegation that enforcement actions happened while Mr. Calvin Ames was gone on a “Mushroom Circuit.”
  - Notices and warnings have been issued for the property by mail, physical posting, and in person since May 2023. This is more than enough time for someone to get notice and clean up the property, even if they do go on an extended sabbatical.
- Allegations that City Code Compliance Officer used a bulldozer to destroy property.
  - Mr. Dawson does not have a CDL, the City does not have a bulldozer that he can use. Abatement crews likely used a bulldozer as part of the cleanup effort.
- Allegation that the City Code Compliance Officer twisted the tongues on trailers.
  - No evidence found to support this allegation. The City does not have equipment to do this. Apex reports that they did not do anything of the kind, moreover, they report assisting occupants of the property with towing trailers off of the property.
- Allegation that garbage was dumped off of trailers.
  - No evidence found of this; however it may have happened. Apex has to sort garbage so that it can be disposed of properly, and this may have involved dumping accumulated garbage off of a trailer so that it could be property sorted.
- Allegation that the trash on the property was brought there by other people.
  - This is perfectly possible, but no evidence has been presented to support this. Part of the responsibility of owning and controlling property is deciding who and what is permitted on the property. If illegal dumping has taken place, the affected parties should file a police report.
- Allegation that there is nothing wrong with the house, therefore it should not be condemned.
  - Structurally, the house is probably fine, and it would not take a lot of work to bring it up to code. The house was condemned because it was a public nuisance, attracted squatters who had no legal right to be there, had inadequate sanitary facilities, missing or broken doors and windows, no adequate heating, a missing chimney and hole in the roof, an illegal attic bedroom, and no water service. Water was previously supplied by a pump, however it was powered by the derelict trailer that was leaking sewage, and with the removal of that structure, the pump no longer functioned. It would probably not take much to bring the



property into compliance with building codes, however, at this time it violates several.

- Allegation that the power meter box removed.
  - The power has indeed been disconnected from the house and other structures on site. This is necessary when condemning a structure, to ensure that no crews are harmed during abatement, and to ensure that no one entering the property is injured. In addition, live power to a condemned structure is a fire hazard, as per City ordinance.

## Conclusion

Contrary to the allegations, my investigation of the City's actions regarding 1188 55<sup>th</sup> Avenue, as well as my investigation into the conduct of the City's Code Compliance Officer, Blake Dawson has not revealed any wrongdoing, violation of policy, or even name-calling. The only allegations that are supported by the record are matters that are simply a part of the normal and legal code compliance process.

Blair Larsen  
Community & Economic Development Director  
City of Sweet Home

Hello Blair,

Per our conversation, I'm sending this email to confirm my best recollection of the days of these jobs that occurred on or around November 2023 at the listed address. My experiences with Blake Dawson have always been extremely professional. I find him to be very knowledgeable about the laws regarding distressed property clean ups and dealing with difficult individuals. He has always dealt with these people in a very courteous and professional manner despite their unstable & unpredictable demeanor and their antics being very tough to negotiate. I have asked all of my employees about their observations of Blake and they also concur with my assessment. I'm happy to give an in person interview and so are my employees. My employees and I have never observed him using derogatory language toward any of these people.

Sincerely,

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John Origer, Owner, Apex Property Clearing & Recycling LLC

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