

Portsmouth City Health Department City Cleanup Proposal
Peggy Burton, R.S., Health Commissioner
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**1. Hire One Additional Fulltime Position and One Seasonal Worker
(HIGHEST PRIORITY)**

a. Duties:

i. **Land Reutilization Program: (ESSENTIAL).** The program requires that the properties obtained by the city are maintained, including cleaning up any solid waste, keeping the grass cut twice per week, boarding up vacant properties, and conducting minor repairs. The Health Department must have these positions to ensure the success of the program. We now have four properties but will soon have an additional 20 and that number will grow quickly. We will not be able to depend on the Service Department to meet these needs.

ii. **Animal Control Backup:** At this time the Police Department must fill in for our animal control officer when she is sick or on vacation. The Police Department does not have the time, training or equipment to properly address animal complaints that leads to very upset citizens. The additional employees will be hired with the ability or the potential to be properly trained in animal control, after hour calls.

iii. **Rat Baiting:** At present the Health Department uses Sanitarians to bait the sewers for rats. An additional employee would enable us to more quickly address the rat problem in the city that is a major source of citizen consternation.

iv. **Utilizing court workers:** One of the major problems with utilizing court ordered community service is the lack of supervision. The Service Department does not have the time or personnel to provide oversight to the workers to meet the health department's needs. Utilizing these workers to clean up allies clears the worst of the issues, so that the code enforcement officer can work with the worst offenders to correct the remaining issues.

v. **Minor Complaints:** There are many complaints that can be taken care of very quickly by sending the work crew out to address the problem. Examples include, an attic window with pigeons being boarded up at a vacant house, trimming bushes at a vacant house, picking up a tire in an alley, or disposing of a couch left on a vacant lot. The citizens would have a much better view of the city if these complaints could be taken care of immediately as opposed

to spending countless hours tracking the owners down and taking them to court.

- vi. Major Complaints: Unsolved complaints could be cleaned up by the work crew, so as to eliminate the problem and satisfy the complaint. A small pile of solid waste can quickly turn into an illegal dump as more and more people deposit items.
- vii. Boarding up Houses: At present the city contracts out the boarding of the houses through the Engineering Department. This is costly and takes too much time. Our work crew could quickly and cheaply eliminate the issue.

b. Revenue

- i. Besides greatly improving the citizens view of the city government, the additional employees salaries can be subsidized through the assessing of taxes (requires ordinance change) for clean up of personal property and through the sale of property through the land reutilization. The savings of boarding up houses will also help to defer the costs. Additionally, a successful citywide cleanup will increase tax revenue generated by our tax base.

c. Justification

- i. At this time, the Health Department only has legal tools at its disposal. The Health Department needs a physical labor component to address the complaints that cannot be taken care of through the court system. Both the engineering and Service Department are busy with their own work and do not have the time or resources to address the priorities of the Health department. **THE HIRING OF THESE POSITIONS IS ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS CLEAN UP PROGRAM.**

2. Rental Licensing Program

- a. Justification: This program is needed to address the high level of rental we have in the City of Portsmouth. Almost half of all rental property in the city is rental. There is also a great shortage of rental property in the city, leading to the ability of some landlords to rent substandard properties at prices they normally could not get in a more competitive market. This program is needed to protect tenants, to ensure that they are receiving a habitable rental unit that is up to code. Shawnee State University brings in students from all over the county, and they judge us by the rental units they live in, we need to ensure that our citizens are protected. Our community also suffers from a high rate of house fires that have lead to many deaths. Proper code enforcement and ensuring working smoke detectors within rental units will save lives. Landlords will also benefit from the inspections, in that they will have independent verification of the

condition of properties before renting the unit and the yearly inspections there after. As this program will be self sufficient, our regular code enforcement will be freed up to deal with property owners. Overall the program will help the city, the landlords and all citizens by improving our property values and making Portsmouth a community that people want to move into. We have great schools, an excellent hospital and a thriving university; we must provide our citizens with equally good living conditions.

- b. Revenues: The fees collected from landlords would be very minimal, possibly only raising the rent of tenants by under \$5 per month. These fees would be deposited into a specific Rental Licensing Program Fund to be used solely by the Health Department for the operation of the program. Cost methodologies would be followed to ensure that the fees collected were properly utilized. The Health Department has experience with this type of operation through licensing restaurants, and would be able to manage the program professionally and transparently.
- c. Details: There are many details to be worked out through a collaborative effort between the Health Commissioner, the City Government, the landlords, and citizens. Much research has already been conducted, and a workable program is possible that would benefit everyone involved.

3. **Revamp of City Ordinances**

- a. Justification: Our City Ordinances regarding the Health Department, Nuisances, and Property Maintenance have changed slowly over the years, A comprehensive update to these ordinances is needed to take in to consideration the changes proposed in this document and to modernize our ability to quickly resolve complaints and meet our ultimate goal of providing our citizens with a clean, healthy living environment.
- b. Example of Proposed Changes:
 - i. Solid Waste Complaints: At this time, if we are unable to get compliance through normal enforcement action, the complaint goes unresolved, further frustrating the complainants and greatly harming the city governments reputation. An ordinance needs to be written that just like the weed ordinance, allows us to go on private property, abate the solid waste issue and assess it to the property taxes. The idea of assessing the cost to the water bill is also promising, buy many legal issues would have to be addressed.

4. Ability to Mail Tickets

- a. Justification: there are many property owners that live out of town or will not answer their doors. If we are unable to make physical contact with these violators, we are unable to issue citations. Essentially, the complaint becomes unsolvable. This is an ongoing issue with many of our worst properties. The Health Department desperately needs to have the ability to mail tickets proof of mailing or post it on the door of the property. There

are legal issues with these tickets not being properly served, so bench warrants cannot be issued if the people fail to respond to the citation. However, the Health Department still needs the ability to attempt contact with the property owners through this method and what we need is the courts support in dismissing the tickets if the violators do not respond.

5. Employee Training in the Court System

- a. Justification: the Health Department employees do not receive training in citation writing or the court system like the police receive. We need to hold a training session with the assistance of the Municipal Court to ensure our employees are meeting the needs of Courts and they are meeting ours. This would be mutually beneficial and encourage our employees to write more citations.

6. Summary

- a. These proposals are meant to enhance our programs. The Health Department is still committed to approaching these problems with a three-tiered approach: Education, Enforcement and Abatement. The cost of all these proposals is well under \$100,000 and we feel that most of this expense would be deferred through collecting of fines, assessment of taxes, the land reutilization program, savings on boarding up houses, less cost of demolition at city expense, and less properties to be cut by the service department, and most importantly by improving the property values of the homes in Portsmouth, and encouraging new residents to move here, thereby raising our tax base. We feel this would be a great investment in the future of our city, and the Portsmouth City Health Department is committed to ensuring that we meet our goals and objectives, if provided the proper tools.