

CODE

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The department has been in touch with the owner and had a structural engineer go in.

“When will the awning come down? I don’t know,” Marcum said. “The property owner is still waiting for the insurance claim.”

The city has had a code enforcement officer for years, with Marcum, a former HPD sworn officer, in the role since 2012. The responsibility has bounced back and forth between different departments in the city. Since July, the police department took it over again from parks and recreation, and has added a second part-time code enforcement officer, former OSP Sgt. Tom Spicknall.

Marcum said while his job is to get people to follow city rules, he doesn’t want to babysit.

“We want to educate people first,” he said, adding that many times, a person won’t even know they’re in violation. Although a person is supposed to correct a violation within seven days, Marcum said on average it takes him three times of contacting violators before they take action. Even then, he said, if people ask for extensions, he’s willing to grant them. A citation is the last step. Even if a person is cited, he said, a judge will usually give them a chance to remedy the problem.

Officers said the goal is to make the area more safe and livable — in addition to being unsightly, run-down properties can also attract crime and other



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Code Enforcement Officer Mike Marcum tells a man that he needs to move along from a vacant lot where he had set up a tent.

problems.

“We don’t like to tell people to cut their grass,” said Capt. Travis Eynon. “People believe these are pushing the envelope on personal rights — but somebody’s overgrown lawn may affect the neighborhood, creating a fire hazard or a rat harborage.”

Other violations can include parking a boat or camper on the street for too long, having a basketball hoop in the street, or trees growing over the sidewalk.

Ultimately, if the person does not complete the task, the city has a contractor that will do the work for them. The person gets charged for the cost of

the work, plus a 10 percent fee, and the city will place a lien on the property.

Some violations are more glaring than others. Marcum will often walk through vacant lots littered with trash, or large items like shopping carts and appliances that people have dumped.

“We try to get a hold of any property owner with large vacant lots, to keep them cut down,” Marcum said. “By keeping them cut, we can see what’s in there, and they can see what’s in there. A lot of homeless people are looking for places where no one can see in.”

One such area is a vacant

lot behind Taco Bell, with several trees and bushes creating a shelter. Noticing a makeshift tent under a low-hanging tree, Marcum walked up and found someone inside.

“Good morning,” he said, introducing himself, before informing the man he was breaking city rules by being there, and needed to move along.

Though Marcum knows people won’t usually be happy to see him knocking on their doors, he said he tries to make positive interactions with people.

“We’re not trying to break anyone’s bank,” he said. “We’re just trying to make them responsible so the city looks better.”

Many times, Chief Jason Edmiston said, the problems are on properties where the landlord does not live in Hermiston.

“At some point with chronic landlords, we may go straight to a citation,” he said. “It’s a waste of time for everyone to have to continue to babysit certain properties.”

The ordinances lay out specific violations, and are all publicly available on the city’s website.

Edmiston encouraged residents to call the city or police department if they have violations to report.

“If we wanted to be 100 percent proactive on code enforcement, there would be a lot of unhappy people,” he said. “We’re trying to balance between being proactive and being complaint-driven. But at the end of the day, the goal is to make sure the city doesn’t have hazards and look unappealing.”

SENIORS

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She said the new building was “just super” and she hoped that some opportunities for games, such as pinochle, would be available.

Her daughter, Emily Mellick, said she loved the new building as well, and appreciated the extra room for meals and other events.

Colleen Moe and Elly Smith were sitting across the table from each other Thursday and both pointed out things they liked about the new center, which includes breakout rooms, a front desk, offices, commercial kitchen and a great hall with a gas fireplace.

“It’s really nice the way it’s arranged here,” Smith said.

Their only complaints were that Smith wished it were more out in the country and Moe said the acoustics in the building made for a very noisy lunch — something others noted as well.

Walter Liebe said it was his first time in the new building, which he called “awesome” and “beautiful.”

“I’m just happy it’s finished, finally, and we’re here,” he said.

He said he hoped to attend some of the classes and clubs being offered at the center as well. A card club was planning to meet after lunch.

Beebe said that center has been used for Tai Chi, yoga, Bible study and other classes since its opening a few weeks ago. She said they have been asking for donations instead of charging a set fee for groups to use the facility and so far that had been working well.

While someday the city hopes that it can use the building for evening activities that don’t interfere with the seniors, for the next five years the rules of the \$2 million federal grant that helped fund the building state only activities for senior citizens are allowed. Beebe said the building is open for general use by seniors from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, and she was pleased to see earlier that two men were there drinking coffee and playing board games together.

“In the afternoons we would love to see people come in and do board games, puzzles, quilting, things like that,” she said.

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