# Vallejo Code Enforcement Goes -- 6/15/12 Public -- 6/15/12

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By Hatfield McCoy6/15//12

On June 11th
the Vallejo Code Enforcement Division held a community forum at the Joseph Room of the downtown main Vallejo library. Approximately fifty people were in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was a little bit of information, and a lot of public relations. The meeting was opened by the Assistant City Manager Craig Whittom who introduced the Code Enforcement staff manager and some staff members. The Vallejo Code Enforcement department staff, along with its manager, Ms. Nimat Shakoor-Grantham, report directly to the Assistant City Manager, Mr. Whittom. “

Ms.
Grantham first gave an overview of the Vallejo Code Enforcement’ and its overall responsibilities. She then explained the breakdown of ordinances with attached fees and fines. The agenda included the current staff priorities which are as follows: a.) Weed abatement (both city properties and those in unincorporated areas b.) Abandoned buildings (such as those due to fire) c.)Accessible pools d.) Temporary homeless encampments e.) Other miscellaneous hazardous properties. Grantham also informed the public that Code Enforcement has designated a few Vallejo properties for an injunction of receivership wherein the owner will forfeit all rights. The properties include two located at 816 Branciforte St., as well as properties located on Ohio, Tennessee, Marin, Falcon, Georgia and Idora Streets. The staff further covered their need for volunteers, and explained some of the current volunteer programs. “We need to hear from y’all,” Grantham said. As City Hall scrambles for more money, it seems that Code Enforcement just does not have the time to do it all. So, they beg for volunteers.  Some propose that if
Code Enforcement staff would tag, fine, and collect the fees they have

outlined, the department could become more than self sustaining; it could even make money. It was recently elected Councilmember Robert McConnell who campaigned on this issue. On the campaign stump he continuously repeated: “Some cities actually make big money on their Code Enforcement departments.” But, arguably, the Vallejo city Code Enforcement department just doesn’t do enough to achieve that goal. That fact was well illuminated by an extensive 2009 Grand Jury report which outlined all of the things they should be doing, and have not been doing subsequent to the report release. (Click on Solano County Grand Jury/Vallejo Code Enforcement report). In fact, Ms. Grantham somewhat admitted this fact when she stated: “There is a property on Capitol Street which the City Manager had to bring to my attention, as I did not even know about it,” Grantham said. “Of all of the listed problematic properties, that is probably our ‘crown jewel’ case,” she continued.

The meeting’s audience was a very sophisticated, informed segment of Vallejo’s population. There were at times during the meeting when it seemed that the audience had more suggestions, and more answers than Ms. Grantham. In fact, at one point Ms. Grantham read a well articulated email sent to her earlier that day by one attendee, Mr. Mustafa Abdul-Ghanee (Chair of the Human Relations Commission). After she read the email to the audience, she remarked: “Ain’t that great?” she asked, “I don’t know what it says, but it sure sounds good, but most of it went way over my head,” she quipped. One of the attendees had a question about the term ‘Receivership’ which was partially answered by another guest. And another participant had a question about the concept of a ‘Property Registration program’ in conjunction with the banks. The same gentleman explained that as well. Grantham explained, however, that the concept of ‘property registration’ had been brought before the city three times before, but the attorneys have “torn it apart, because of SB1137 and a lawsuit in Chicago brought on by Fannie Mae & Freddie Mac. Someone else asked her who is responsible for broken sidewalks to which she replied: “This is an ongoing problem, Code Enforcement demands that it is the Public Works Dept., and they demand that it is the reporting responsibility of Public Works,” she stated in frustration.

On the upbeat side, Ms. Grantham noted that they now have a new phone system which should “make communication and other things much easier for the general public,” she said. “I am also so happy that we now have about 300 neighborhood watch programs I also enjoy working with GVRD, Rebuild Vallejo and other such organizations. Of course we are always happy to work with Fighting Back Partnership,” she continued. She praised the new ‘Temporary Shelter Administrative’ rule which will greatly enhance the quality of life and potential for the homeless. Grantham also praised Vallejo citizen Doug Darling for his hard work with the homeless. She offered kudos to the over 300 established neighborhood watch programs, and gave a special nod to the staff of the Lamplighters Network Newsletter (a newsletter which goes out to the neighborhoods with updates and happenings). Grantham further praised the city manager for the good foresight in the future hiring of attorneys who will dedicate legal advice to the Code Enforcement division which could save the city thousands of dollars in potential lawsuits or problems. She also promoted the volunteer program which helps to paint out graffiti quoting Councilwoman Stephanie Gomes who once said: “Graffiti is vandalism unless you get permission to do it.” Nimat Shakoor-Grantham ended the meeting by again asking for volunteers, and touched upon the volunteer training piece of her department. “I would like to see a new staff member in my department who would be paid maybe $17.00 an hour who could be our ‘Volunteer Coordinator’ in helping to assign citizen volunteers,” she said. Arguably, there should be enough money generated by Code Enforcement, with all of the abandoned homes and commercial buildings in Vallejo, to generate enough income for three new staff members, certainly at $17.00 and not at the upwards of $200,000 (including benefits) that Ms. Grantham is being paid. For some reason,

up until now, the Vallejo Code Enforcement has not received the attention and accountability oversight that other departments may have been given. The Grand Jury report all but went unnoticed. Perhaps, in future, the new Vallejo City Manager will find more than just comments about derelict houses on Capitol Street to give to Ms. Grantham.