

Recent Legislative Changes Designed to Improve Quality of Life

By Mike Barhorst

Every two years following the election of a new Council, Councilmembers meet to discuss their priorities for the City. Utilizing a retreat format, there is an informal review of the previous Council's priorities, an evaluation as to whether they were accomplished, and discussion about the future of the community.

When City Council met in February for its biennial retreat, the members identified as one of the City-wide priorities the rigorous enforcement of existing City codes. It's the enforcement of these codes and the growing area of nuisance abatement that helps to keep Sidney visually pleasing, but also works to improve quality of life for residents and reduce safety issues within the community.

Recently, City Council enacted two pieces of legislation targeted to keep Sidney looking its best. The first piece of legislation pertains to the height at which grass and/or noxious weeds must be cut. The present City code requires the property owner of record to cut any grass, noxious weeds, or untended, rank, and unmanaged growth or vegetation when it reaches a height of twelve inches.

Effective March 1, 2017, the height at which a violation occurs will be lowered to eight inches. In addition, if the property owner or tenant fails to address the violation, the fees associated for the City's contractor to cut and/or remove the vegetation will increase.

A fine of \$75 will be assessed for the first remedial action of the calendar year. A fee of \$150 will be assessed for the second remedial action at the same parcel in the same calendar year; and, each additional remedial action will be assessed a fee of \$250. These fees are in addition to the actual cost the City incurs to provide the mowing or removal services.

Not only are unmanaged grass and vegetation unsightly, they can cause respiratory problems, especially in children. People can suffer serious allergic reactions, such as dermatitis and rhinitis or asthma on contact with plants and their pollen.

In addition, recalcitrant property owners have long stated that it is less expensive for the City to mow their property than for them to contract for it to be maintained. Hopefully the increased fees will reduce the number of repeat violators.

The second matter that Council addressed was the storage of solid waste and recycling containers, when those containers along with yard waste and big items should be placed at the curb for pickup, and when the empty containers should be removed from the curb after collection. Current City code fails to address these issues.

The legislation recently enacted now requires that containers, bags, yard waste and big pick up items must be set out by 7:00 a.m. the day of pick up, but no earlier than 12:00 noon the day before scheduled pick-up. In addition, the containers must be removed no later than 12:00 noon the day after scheduled pick-up.

Furthermore, the legislation regulates where containers should be stored when not curbside for collection. The new legislation states that containers should be stored in an enclosed structure if the dwelling has a two-car or larger garage.

If the residence has less than a two-car garage, the containers must be placed behind the front set back of the house and screened from view. Screening could be in the form of natural features, shrubbery or fencing.

If the residence has less than a two-car garage, and proper screening is not possible, the containers, bags, yard waste and big items shall be placed in the rear or side yard at least 25 feet back from the front set back of the house to make them less visible from the street. Lids on the containers must be closed at all times. In short, all containers should not be visible from the street, except on collection day.

For those areas of the community where topography makes it virtually impossible to comply with these new regulations, the Assistant City Manager/Public Works Director can approve a variance. This variance will be available only to those with topographical hardships.

City Councilmembers envision Sidney as a vibrant community that is competitive in its pursuit of additional economic development opportunities. We believe strongly that Sidney has a lot to offer to new residents, businesses and companies. However, making the best first impression can be extremely critical to the final location decision.

In addition, other communities in Ohio have been taking extraordinary steps to eradicate disease carrying animals that thrive on eating improperly disposed of garbage. If properly closed, the new containers are designed to eliminate an animal's ability to open them. Without additional expenditure of resources (money that can be better spent elsewhere), we can reduce and hopefully eliminate "critter" populations that feast on garbage.

Some of us adapt to change more easily than others. When each of use takes small steps to help in creating a lasting positive community impression, we can help make a tremendous difference in the long term economic vitality of the City of Sidney.

City Council welcomes public feedback. Our meetings are held the second and fourth Mondays of each month. The meetings begin promptly at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall (201 West Poplar Street).