

## Decoding Municipal Code Violations

May 29, 2019

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Have you received a letter from your City stating that you are in violation of their code? It can cause much anxiety, especially as the letter may not be written in a way that makes sense. It probably also mentions that you will start accruing fines and liens will attach to your property unless you bring it up to the city's standards. You may have even been proactive and reached out to the code inspector on the notice; at this point, you are probably even more confused than before. Code and building

violations can sneak up on you, as fines accrue daily. Left untouched, you can easily rack up hundreds of thousands of dollars within a year of delinquency. That is why you need to contact an attorney who is familiar with the municipal Code, processes and justifications, and knows how to work expediently within the labyrinth of city staff and procedures to achieve a positive outcome for you.

If you have received a letter, but fines have not started to accrue, you are in the best position. We have had great success in working with code inspectors and city attorneys to delay special magistrate hearings until you can "cure" the violations. This way you will not begin to rack up costly fines.

If fines have already started accruing, it is crucial that you hire an attorney who can advise you of your options - cities take into serious consideration the amount of time it took a violator to respond, when they begin actions to bring the site into compliance, and whether or not you hire an attorney or other expert to represent your interests. You may not know this, but cities are within their rights to attach liens to other properties you own within the municipal boundaries, so it can be a greater headache for you than you imagine. It may be that portions of your site (house, condo, business) are "legal non-conforming" and thus do not need to be brought up to code. It may be that you simply need an after-the-fact permit. Or, it may be that you must hire the appropriate consultants or become handy and work to fix your property. Code violations are a specialized field, combining knowledge of the land development code, quasi-judicial procedures, and good relationships with key city officials (code inspectors, city planners, city attorneys) such that you can resolve the

violations quickly and efficiently.

I've seen too many attorneys who don't practice in this area of law make their case to the special magistrate, but fail to achieve the most desirable outcome because they did not understand the nuances of the work that must happen before the hearing. We have achieved excellent results for our clients; in one case, we even saved a house from demolition by working with our network of brokers to find a buyer who agreed to cure the violations within a certain period of time and entered into a stipulated settlement with the city. We can ensure that your fines become pennies on the dollar. If you have a code or building violation, please reach out to us - we look forward to assisting you!

*As a land use attorney, [Jeremy Shir](#) guides clients through all facets of land use and zoning issues including code compliance, enforcement hearings, and negotiations with local government among other matters. Mr. Shir can be reached at [jshir@beckerlawyers.com](mailto:jshir@beckerlawyers.com).*