

Official stresses property upkeep

By John Zucal
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Valerie Jackson, Orange's director of planning and economic development, issued a statement to remind property owners and occupants of their responsibilities under the city's property maintenance code.

Under city ordinance, said Jackson, building exteriors are to be kept clear and clean to ensure the physical and health safety of residents and passersby.

Among the items property owners and residents must control, said Jackson, are natural growth, such as plants and bushes; garbage, such as trash and debris; and decaying matter, such as dead or dying natural growth or deteriorating items.

Jackson said trees and bushes should be trimmed to prevent out-of-control conditions to develop.

City officials for years have expressed concern about vacant properties. Jackson said the city code has specific requirements for vacant lots.

"When any lot has been vacant for 30 or more days, or it becomes vacant as a result of demolition of any structure, the owner of the vacant lot shall erect and maintain a fence around the perimeter of such lots," said Jackson, quoting the ordinance. This ordinance has been highlighted as a way to provide legal and physical safety by potentially limiting outside access to the property.

Jackson said residents who have concerns about the condition of a property should contact the Office of Code Enforcement at 973-266-4098. She said a staff member will investigate the complaint, and, if warranted, notify property owners of required actions. Jackson said code inspectors can issue summonses, which means an owner would face a municipal court hearing and possible legal sanctions.

Jackson said in the worst cases — usually when no work follows a court's imposition of fines and remediation orders, city crews clean the property. A lien for the cost is placed on the property.