

Owners of vacant property in Orange warned on upkeep

By John Zucal Managing Editor, Orange Transcript

Owners of vacant properties have been issued a warning: clean up or face sanctions.

An effort to get owners of vacant or abandoned properties to rehabilitate them for potential residency began last week with the issuance of notices requiring the owners to maintain and secure their properties.

The recipients were given 10 days to register their tracts with the city planning department and begin work to satisfy the details of a recently adopted ordinance.

The council approved an ordinance July 7 which established the new policy. It calls for a registration fee of \$250, with fines of \$250 to \$1,000 for each violation.

Valerie Jackson, director of planning and development, said the ordinance was designed improve the appearance of neighborhoods.

"This ordinance is part of our strategy to keep Orange healthy and well maintained in the face of hard times," said Jackson.

Under the measure, property maintenance means to clean the ground to make it attractive for neighboring residents. It includes removal of weeds, dead bushes and vegetation, debris and building material.

Trash also must be removed and graffiti on walls must be eliminated. The outcome, said city officials, should result in attractive proper ties within sight of neighbors.

The second part of the ordinance covers the securing of properties. This includes the closing and locking of windows, then securing with glass or board covering, and lock ing of doors, including the garage.

The planning department also must be given owner information, including a telephone contact number should problems arise.

With an understanding that the recession might hinder owners from securing finances to renovate their properties, Jackson said the city has programs to help them.

"With our programs to assist struggling owners in avoiding fore closure and our efforts to purchase, rehabilitate and resell already fore closed properties, we are working to prevent neighborhood blight and deterioration."