

# From blight to bright

## Norfolk's derelict structure ordinance gets results

**B**OARDED UP PROPERTIES that stood dormant and decaying over the last decade are now seeing new life in the city of Norfolk. Acting as a catalyst for positive change in several Norfolk neighborhoods is the Derelict Structure Program coordinated by the Department of Neighborhood Development's Division of Neighborhood Quality.

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A derelict structure per the Code of Virginia and the Code of the city of Norfolk is a residential or non-residential property that has been vacant, boarded, and not lawfully connected to a utility service provider for a continuous period in excess of six months.

### Getting owners to take action

Neighborhood Quality has created a unique program to activate the code and the results are re-energizing neighborhoods. The program includes:

- Developing a simplified message to explain why a property has been designated as a derelict structure and what steps the property

"We are hopeful as the community continues to revitalize, that the homes that become derelict structures will drop in numbers and be retained for renovation," said Taylor Gould,

owner must follow to remove the designation of a derelict structure from the property.

- Setting a timeframe for completing rehabilitation or a demolition to a property. A property owner has no more than six months to rehab a property or three months to demolish a property. Requiring property owners to submit a letter from a financial institution stating that they have the funding available to either rehab or demolish their property.
- Requiring once the property has either been demolished or rehabilitated that the property owner pay all fines that have been incurred on the property during the time the property has served as a nuisance to the city.

With these new parameters, Neighborhood Quality has seen a 98% response rate from property owners in FY 16, and 61% of the designated 51 properties have either been rehabbed or demolished and rebuilt by owners.

### When the city intervenes

Property owners who have not responded go through the legal process. In these cases, the court has either ordered the property owner to rehab or demolish or has granted the city the right to demolish the property and have the property own-





**Before**

**After**

This renovated home is a great example of the city's continuing efforts to revitalize the Ballantine Place neighborhood.

er pay the fees associated with the demolition. Even financial institutions that hold property are responding and rehabilitating the structures.

“I am encouraged by what I have seen this program do for neighborhoods,” said Christina Jackson, Codes Team Leader for Neighborhood Quality and Lead Inspector of the Derelict Structure Program. “Working closely with homeowners, the city of Norfolk has been successful in encouraging renovation instead of demolition to produce the desired outcomes for neighborhoods served by the city.”

Making this process even more successful are the internal controls that are set-up to ensure the process is objective and efficient. These internal controls include:

- Designating one code enforcement officer to be responsible for implementing and overseeing the derelict structure process.
- Designating only 50 to 60 of the most troublesome properties per year. From June to August, Neighborhood Quality collects prospective derelict structures from each inspector. Derelict structures found throughout the year that have not been submitted during the recommendation period are added to the upcoming fiscal year list.
- Utilizing a designation rubric to classify properties as a derelict structure based on the criteria: ordinance requirement, code enforcement, and property impact. In addition, to be officially designated, the property must receive a score of 70 or higher and must have three levels of approvals.
- Working with the City Attorney’s Office, the Treasurer’s Office, and City Planning Department to efficiently and effectively implement this program.

“This is a wonderfully effective program. It provides a framework to establish clear and achievable benchmarks for property owners,” said Cynthia Hall, Deputy City Attorney. “It is truly amazing what can be achieved through cooperative

partnerships with stakeholders.”

Now in FY 2017, Neighborhood Quality is continuing the momentum from last year and utilizing the program to assist the Department of Neighborhood Development with its multi-faceted, place-based strategy for making neighborhoods in the city of Norfolk safe, healthy and inclusive. 

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## May is Building Safety Month

BUILDING OFFICIALS from across Virginia will be celebrating Building Safety Month. This year’s theme is “Code Officials – Partners in Community Safety and Economic Growth.” The weekly focus topics are:



- May 1-7**  
**Mentoring the Next Generation of Building Professionals**
- May 8-14**  
**Building Design Solutions for All Ages**
- May 15-21**  
**Manage the Damage – Preparing for Natural Disasters**
- May 22-28**  
**Investing in Technology for Safety, Energy & Water Efficiency**