

Enterprise article for 06.19.2012

For the past several months, especially since the warm weather arrived, the village administration, council members, and I have been contacted on numerous occasions concerning un-mowed properties, never ending garage/yard sales, and nuisance violations. In staying true to my convictions and the general purpose for which I sought the mayor's office, the village administration and I have made attempts to address every complaint brought forth. Sending letters to non-compliant residents and having to take action is not pleasant for any of us, but necessary to maintain the village and proper order. It is my hope and my goal to bring a new sense of pride to the Swanton community, and if you have been reading my past articles, you have hopefully understood my intentions. We cannot attract new families and new businesses that will benefit our community and provide employment if the community itself is not attractive.

My view is the same as social scientists George Kelling and James Wilson who developed the "broken window theory" in 1982 which addressed the perception that signs of blight in a neighborhood trigger more blight, thus causing the behavior to spread. The theory was developed in regard to crime prevention, but it is just as applicable to local land use code enforcement. If one property in a neighborhood is allowed to consistently go unkempt, other residents may lose the desire to keep up their properties, and the entire neighborhood will eventually decline and thus property values will plummet. The "broken window" theory suggests that it is much easier to prevent this effect if it is addressed quickly. At the first sign of neglect, the local government must be proactive with notification and enforcement actions versus waiting for neighbors to complain and then being reactive. The "broken window" theory further suggests that communities adopt fair uncomplicated land use codes and zoning ordinances, address violations of those codes quickly and consistently, educate residents as the best compliance tool available, partner with neighborhood groups, and solicit for labor and materials to help residents comply. I think all of these are practical common sense suggestions.

The village administration will continue enforcing our current codes and may occasionally add new ones to address other problems. One such new ordinance recently had the second reading setting guidelines for garage and yard sales. Additionally, we have been notifying residents of code violations. I encourage residents to be mindful of their duty to maintain their properties and be respectful of their surrounding neighbors. If you see a neighbor who may have trouble keeping their yard and structure maintained, wouldn't it be better to offer help rather than complaining? In order to attract good neighbors, one should strive to be a good neighbor.

Of course, we do want to hear from you if a problem is not resolved. We will follow the practices mentioned here to rectify each issue. The village codified ordinances can be located on the village website at www.villageofswantonohio.com. We appreciate everyone's cooperation.