

IMPACT REPORT

# PRESERVING TALLAHASSEE



# 2021



CITY OF  
TALLAHASSEE

**CODE ENFORCEMENT**



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

The City of Tallahassee's Code Enforcement Division presents the 2021 Code Enforcement Impact Report. This report provides a glimpse into another year of change and progress and highlights the team's commitment to help foster a beautiful, safe, and resilient community. One of the year's changes included the merging of the Sustainability and Community Preservation Department with the Housing and Human Services Department to create a diverse and versatile team whose roles are complementary as they collaborate to meet the needs of the community.

Code Enforcement is an integral part of this larger team that focuses on positively impacting the community as we engage with residents to advance public safety, environmental stewardship, economic vitality, safe housing, and more. As you read through the report, you will have the opportunity to see how the team is organized, learn about their caseload, and find out more information about the many City programs that are aimed at fostering strong and resilient neighborhoods.



## SHARED MISSION AND VISION

The City of Tallahassee's mission is to be the national leader in the delivery of public service. The City's vision is to be a creative capital city that supports a strong community with vibrant neighborhoods; an innovative economic and educational hub serving diverse and passionate people, protecting our natural resources and preserving our unique character.

Code Enforcement supports this mission and vision by coordinating with neighborhoods and residents to educate them about the City of Tallahassee codes and ordinances and by enforcing those codes and ordinances to improve public health and safety, to protect our natural and built environment, and to sustain a high quality of life in our community.

# YEAR AT A GLANCE

Although 2021 came with many challenges, it also brought opportunities to further support the community. The continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic led to process changes, such as virtual hearings and remote staffing. During 2021, the City also added two new Code Board members. To better meet community and neighborhood needs, the City began a Code Enforcement Trainee Program. The City also launched the Code Enforcement Fine and Lien Amnesty Program in January 2021, which offered fine and/or lien forgiveness to eligible applicants in order to provide financial relief and prompt property owners to correct code violations.

## MEET THE TEAM

The City's Code Enforcement team is comprised of officers and administrators who are passionate about building a safe and vibrant community.

**Chief Resilience Officer** leads the Code Enforcement Division and other department staff in the long-range planning and implementation of initiatives related to community resilience and sustainability.

**Resilience Officers** inspect properties to ensure compliance with City codes to improve public safety, environmental health, and quality of life.

**Code Enforcement Supervisor** manages the day-to-day field operations associated with the enforcement of City codes.

**Code Enforcement Trainees** have recently joined our team to support the efforts of Resilience Officers.

**Compliance and Abatement Coordinators** prepare cases to appear before the Code Magistrate or Municipal Code Enforcement Board.

**Customer Service Representatives and Community Advocates** are frontline staff that receive citizen requests and engage neighborhoods and stakeholders on how to keep their properties up to code standards.



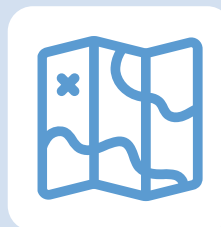
**3,714**  
Total number of officer inspections in 2021

**5** Full-time Resilience Officers

**5** Full-time Code Enforcement Trainees

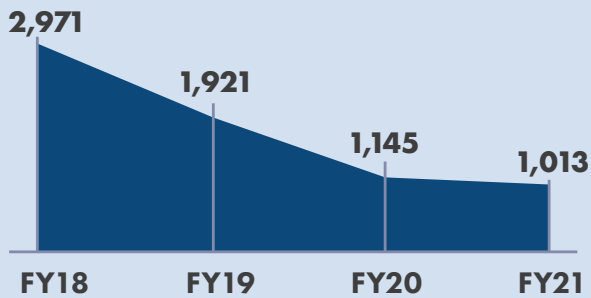


**388**  
Total number of cases per officer



**104.5**  
Total square miles within the City

## TOTAL NEW CASES



## COMMUNITY INVESTMENT



**\$820,000**

FY21 Operations

**\$4.10**

Approx. cost per citizen

## ABATEMENT ACTIONS



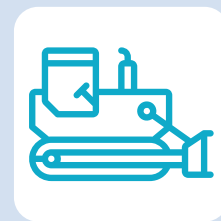
**3**

Murals to abate graffiti



**2**

Emergency boardings



**17**

Lot clearings

## PROACTIVE ENFORCEMENT



**68%**

All new cases brought into compliance this FY



**81%**

Of complied cases voluntarily resolved (before a hearing)



**57**

Median number of days to achieve compliance



**6**

Average number of days from complaint to first inspection



**1%**

Percentage of properties with active code violations

## CODE ENFORCEMENT FINE AND LIEN AMNESTY

More than **250** property owners applied for the Code Enforcement Fine and Lien Amnesty Program. This has resulted in over **390** cases being cleared through the program.

# RESILIENCE OFFICER SPOTLIGHT



*Lesla Vause, Resilience Officer*

“If you know your neighbor, then you can help your neighbor.” That’s the sentiment echoed by City of Tallahassee Resilience Officer Lesa Vause. As a 15-year veteran employee with the City, Lesa Vause connects residents with important programs to help them bring their properties up to code. “My focus as a City Resilience Officer is to serve as a valuable resource coach, connecting tenants, landlords and owners with programs that help them correct code violations and properly maintain their property,” Lesa said.

The Code Enforcement Division is focused on the community’s priorities of public safety, environmental stewardship and economic vitality through the enforcement of codes and ordinances. To accomplish this, Resilience Officers take a proactive, holistic approach to help mitigate vulnerabilities and build strong neighborhoods.

“During an investigation into a complaint about an overgrown lawn, it became clear that the property owner, who was elderly, alone and suffering from mental health issues, couldn’t cut her grass,” Lesa said. “With some creative collaboration, I was able to connect her with a local church that volunteered to cut her grass on an ongoing basis, bringing the property into compliance and helping the whole neighborhood shine.”

To maintain the health and safety of our community, the City offers programs to help address hazards and assist property owners with correcting violations. See page 13 of this report for more information on these and other programs/resources.



You might not realize it, but every single day, the City of Tallahassee's Code Enforcement Division plays a critical role in protecting the health, safety and welfare of our community. Comprised of 13 staff members, including five Resilience Officers (previously known as Code Enforcement Officers), this division is responsible for ensuring that our city is safe, vibrant and healthy for residents.

City Resilience Officer Martin Atorresagasti spends his days ensuring properties meet the standards set forth by the City's codes. Martin works with property owners on everything from lawns and fences to smoke alarms and swimming pools. "I serve a very important role within the community by helping to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our residents is protected through the adherence to City codes," Atorresagasti said. "I enjoy helping landlords, tenants and owners see that their property offers healthy living conditions."

On any given day, Atorresagasti wears the hat of problem solver, communicator, mediator, researcher and educator. In some cases, issues can be overcome easily through education about City codes. For example, alerting the owner of the need to maintain a residential swimming pool in a clean condition with an enclosed fence at least 4 feet high with a self-closing and self-latching gate.

"I helped a renter work with her landlord to mitigate a fire hazard by ensuring that the windows in her rental property opened and closed properly," Atorresagasti said. "Together, we sought quotes from contractors and eventually saw the faulty windows replaced. In the end, everyone was happy and, most importantly, safe. That's why I love my job. I help people." In every action Atorresagasti performs as a City Resilience Officer, he keeps in mind that his job goes beyond enforcement. His main focus is to be a conduit of connection – connecting with property owners, connecting property owners to helpful programs and connecting as a neighbor himself to his fellow neighbor.



*Martin Atorresagasti, Resilience Officer*

# COMMON VIOLATIONS AND TIPS

While Code Enforcement inspects for and enforces many codes and ordinances, the following are the most common violations reported.

## Open Storage

Equipment, materials, or furnishings that would ordinarily not be used outdoors may not be stored outdoors.

## Fences

Approved fencing materials must be used and kept in good repair.

## Swimming Pools

Residential pools must be maintained and enclosed by a fence at least 4 feet high with self-closing and self-latching devices on gates or doors.

## Junk, Trash & Debris

Such items are prohibited from being left in the yard and must be disposed of properly.

The applicable regulations for all violations may be found at [Talgov.com/Code](http://Talgov.com/Code)

## DID YOU KNOW?

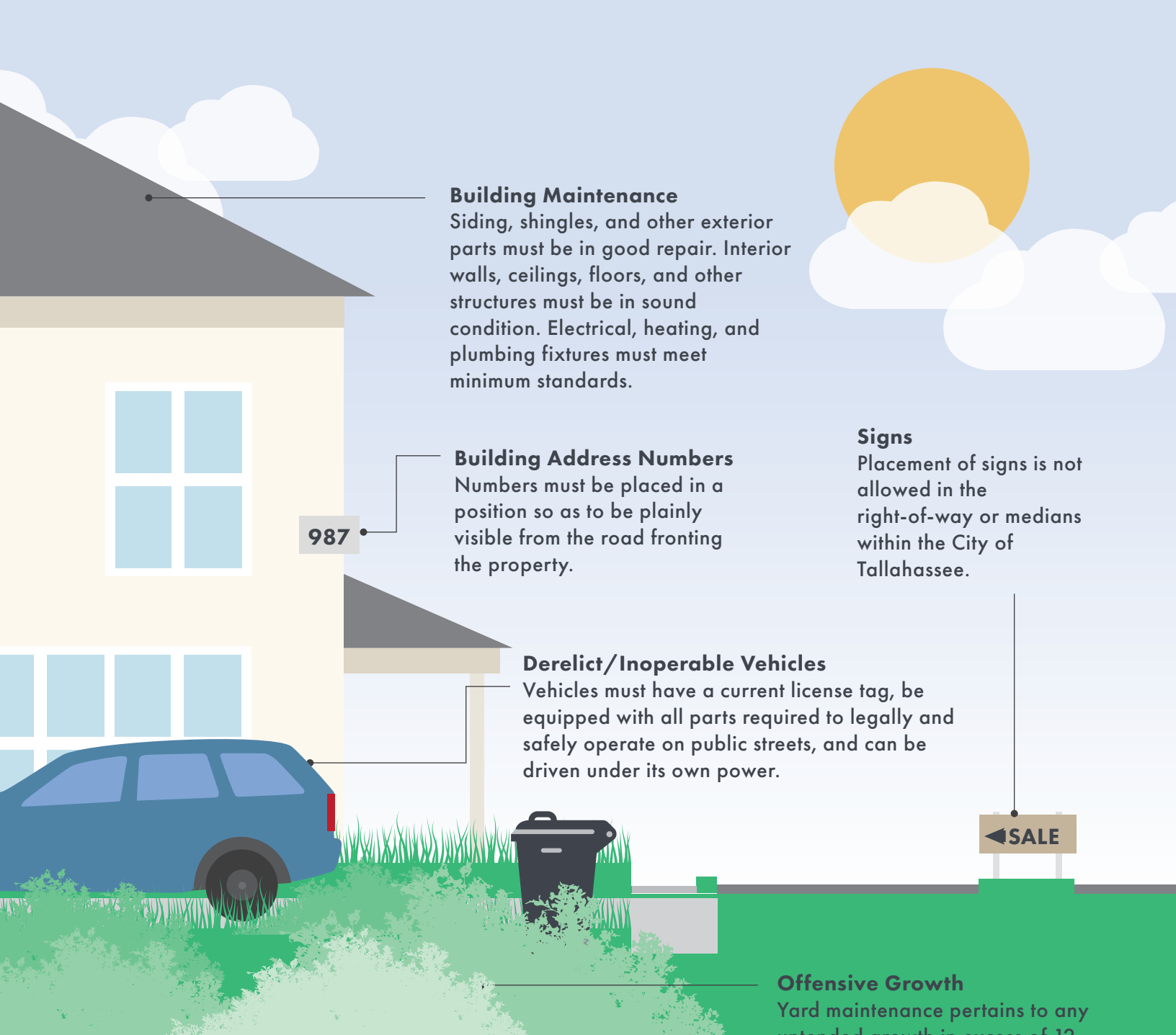
Some common issues that are NOT handled through Code Enforcement:



**Tree removal services**  
(contact a local certified arborist)



**Parking violations and broken meters**  
(contact the City's Customer Operations at 850-891-4968)



### **Building Maintenance**

Siding, shingles, and other exterior parts must be in good repair. Interior walls, ceilings, floors, and other structures must be in sound condition. Electrical, heating, and plumbing fixtures must meet minimum standards.

### **Building Address Numbers**

Numbers must be placed in a position so as to be plainly visible from the road fronting the property.

987

### **Derelict/Inoperable Vehicles**

Vehicles must have a current license tag, be equipped with all parts required to legally and safely operate on public streets, and can be driven under its own power.

### **Signs**

Placement of signs is not allowed in the right-of-way or medians within the City of Tallahassee.

SALE

### **Offensive Growth**

Yard maintenance pertains to any untended growth in excess of 12 inches in height.

## **REPORT AN ISSUE**

You can report a violation by calling the Code Enforcement Hotline at 850-891-CODE (2633) or by downloading the DigiTally app on your phone.



**Food safety concerns**  
(contact Leon County Dept. of Health at 850-895-8360)



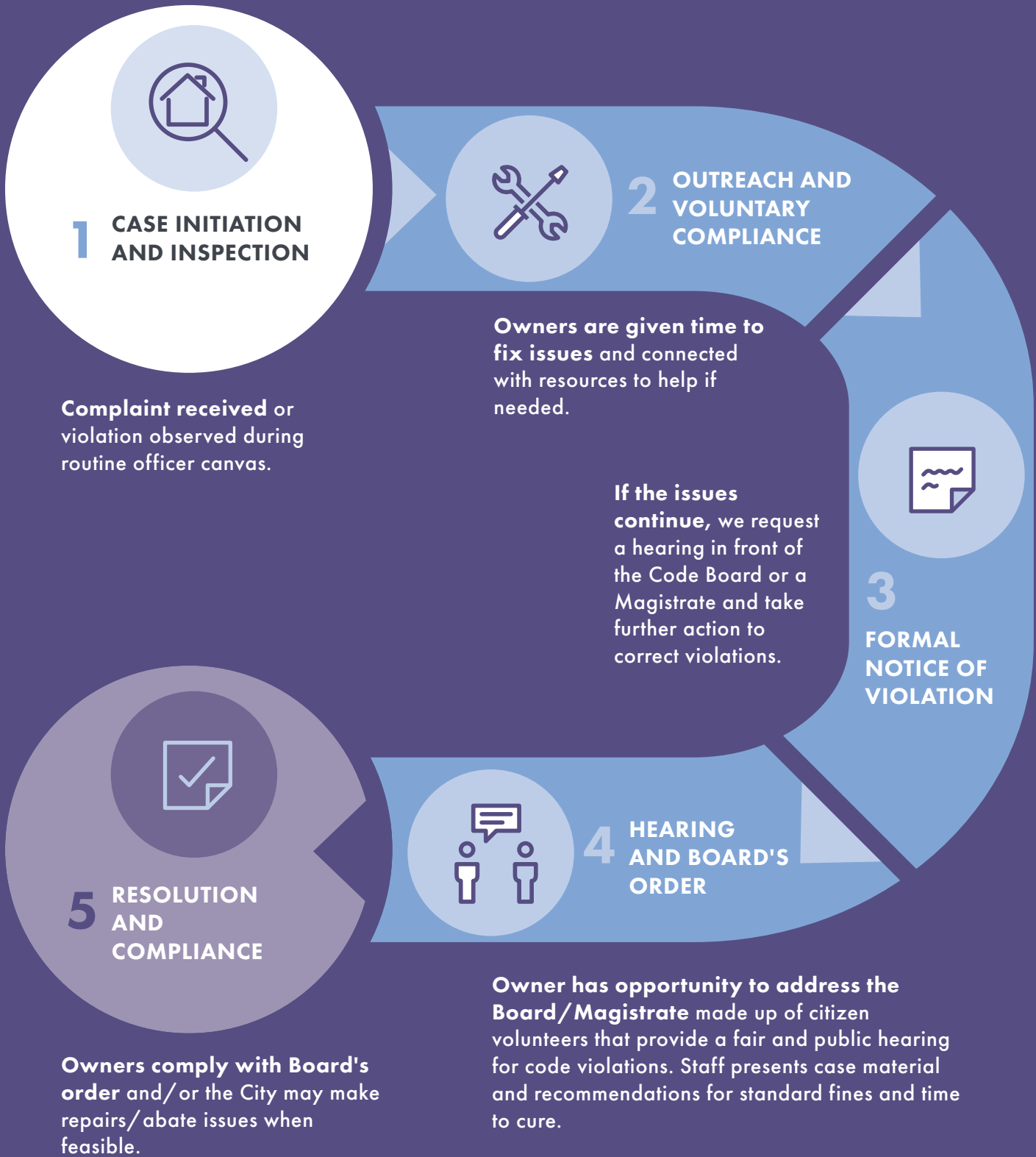
**Fire safety and venue overcrowding**  
(call Tallahassee Fire Department at 850-891-6600)



**Emergency life safety issues** (call 9-1-1)

# CODE ENFORCEMENT CASE FLOW

Our common goal is to keep our community safe, resilient against threats, and beautiful. Therefore, our approach is to work with residents to voluntarily bring properties into compliance without an extensive legal process. We give owners the chance to fix issues and connect them with resources to help if needed.



# PROPERTY OWNER RESOURCES



In the interest of public health and safety, the City may correct hazards directly but also connects homeowners with resources to assist in correcting violations.

## Home Repairs

The City of Tallahassee's Housing Division supports the preservation of neighborhoods through the repair and rehabilitation of current housing stock using a variety of programs for low-to moderate-income homeowners through its Homeowner Repair, Rehabilitation and Accessibility Rehab Programs. The purpose of these programs is to improve the living conditions of low-income homeowners by:

- removing health and safety hazards,
- correcting exterior code violations,
- removing architectural or structural barriers,
- conducting repairs to storm-damaged structures or to help secure the home against future damage, or
- addressing major rehabilitation like roofs and HVAC systems.

Funding is provided as a zero interest, forgivable loan that requires no monthly payments so long as the owner remains in the home.

## Board and Seal

Structures left open and unprotected as a result of broken doors, windows, or other disrepair are required to be temporarily secured or boarded to prevent further damage to the structure and to prevent unauthorized entry. Structures may be boarded to

City specifications for up to one year or as ordered by the Municipal Code Enforcement Board. If an owner does not comply with the Board order, the City is authorized to board and seal the property and assess the associated costs to the property owner through a special assessment lien.

## Demolition

The City can address unsafe residential buildings through demolition. When a structure is determined to be dangerous and not suitable for rehabilitation, Code Enforcement may order a review and recommend that the Municipal Code Enforcement Board issue an order for demolition. If the owner does not comply with the order, the City may implement demolition and assess the associated costs to the property owner through a special assessment lien.

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

These resources may be helpful for neighborhood leaders who are looking to build and strengthen neighborhood engagement.

## Community Garden Program

The City of Tallahassee is happy to assist citizens in the development of community gardens. From victory gardens during World War II to the creation of the Florida A&M University Orange Avenue garden, Tallahassee has a long history of urban agriculture. Today, a new energy about local food and healthy living has swept the nation.

The City encourages citizens to work with their neighbors to build, cultivate, and maintain gardens on public lands. The benefits are numerous, from strengthening community relationships to enhancing public safety.

## Neighborhood Cleanup

Neighborhood cleanup projects can be the first step in ensuring all residents recognize the importance of community maintenance. This can improve the quality of life for residents. The City of Tallahassee's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs Department will help you organize a neighborhood cleanup and provide garbage bags and pickup sticks as requested. Any City-registered Neighborhood Association can participate in this program as long as there are at least 10 volunteers that will participate in the cleanup.

## Lot Mowing

The City is authorized to correct the uncontrolled growth of weeds or grass on a private property by clearing vacant lots after the required legal notification is made to the owner. Associated costs are assessed against the property through a special assessment lien.

## Adopt A Street

Since 2010, the City has partnered with Keep Tallahassee Beautiful, a local non-profit organization dedicated to keeping the community litter-free, to implement Adopt A Street. Community volunteers

including groups, businesses, and organizations, drive the program's efforts. Community participation helps keep litter off City streets and out of rivers, lakes, and streams where it can affect wildlife and the water we use.

Volunteers are a vital part of Adopt A Street's efforts to keep our area clean and attractive. The dedication that volunteers show to the program and the leadership they demonstrate makes the Adopt A Street program a true community endeavor.

To register your organization, visit [KeepTallahasseeBeautiful.org](http://KeepTallahasseeBeautiful.org) and click on the Adopt A Street link under the Resources tab. Once your organization is signed up, you will be provided with a starter kit of supplies including safety vests, trash grabbers, and trash bags. An Adopt A Street sign with your organization's name on it will also be provided at the end of the street you adopted .



## Vacant to Vibrant

The City partners with neighborhoods and property owners to turn blighted vacant lots into vibrant new community amenities that support neighborhood beautification, discourage crime, promote healthy environments, and spur economic development. Projects come in different forms such as urban farms, community gardens, green infrastructure or passive recreational areas. These exciting new opportunities can be implemented through volunteers and community partnerships.

## Graffiti Abatement Program

The City's Graffiti Abatement Program is designed to remove graffiti while preventing future tagging. In Tallahassee, graffiti abatement is coordinated across several departments. Removing graffiti helps address its negative impacts on our community, neighborhoods, and property values while also reducing the spread of blight. As part of our abatement efforts, the City also partners with owners and community agencies to transform walls that are frequently tagged into colorful reflections of the community through the Graffiti to Mural Program. To date, three mural installations have been completed, including the "Magnolias" mural on Macomb Street shown below.



# THE HORIZON

As the City strives to be the national leader in the delivery of public service, Code Enforcement is a critical component of building a healthy, safe, and resilient community. Together with our partners, we can help ensure that our natural and built environments are preserved as we collaborate to meet the challenges brought about by a changing climate, economic vulnerabilities, and public safety concerns.



## Future-proof Environments

We will encourage the community to future-proof our built environment through proactive hazard mitigation and by incorporating sustainable and resilient design standards into new buildings.

This will help our community to:

- **Reduce our vulnerability** to climate-related threats.
- **Reduce the assistance needed** after disasters and reduce burdens placed on individuals and households.
- **Reduce environmental impacts** associated with traditional construction and development while helping to conserve resources and provide safer, healthier, and more productive environments.
- **Support stronger social and cultural resilience** through initiatives aimed at preserving existing buildings and assisting low-income households with hazard mitigation.



## Organizational Effectiveness

We will build our team's capacity to meet the needs of the community with fair, efficient, and cost-effective services. We will use every tool at our disposal to increase timely code compliance.



## Impactful Engagement

We will continue to educate neighbors about Code Enforcement's role and the many programs that are available to help residents and business owners with their properties. With a focus on the poor and vulnerable, we will connect residents with resources to remove economic barriers.



## Creative Collaborations

With a shared sense of responsibility and leading with integrity, we will continue to work with residents and other agencies to make Tallahassee a creative and inclusive community with beautiful spaces.



## Public Safety

We will support the City's holistic approach to a safer, resilient, and inclusive community. Training on crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) equips Resilience Officers with the knowledge and certification to help property and business owners implement landscape and design solutions to reduce public safety risks.



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CODE ENFORCEMENT

[Talgov.com/Code](http://Talgov.com/Code)