



Department of Community Development

City of Duncan, Oklahoma - August 2016

From the Director's Desk:

I get asked weekly how I like Oklahoma and if I miss living in Indiana. Without hesitation I always reply that I love Duncan, Oklahoma or that the only thing I miss about Indiana is mom's fresh apple pie (which I am visiting mom over Labor Day Weekend so hopefully I will get my fill of fresh apple pie). And when I make these comments I am very sincere. There are a lot of positive things going on in our community that we all need to be proud of!

I believe the City of Duncan has three solid pillars when it comes to "community" development, as defined as being the process where a community comes together to take action and generate solutions to common problems. These pillars consist of our schools, churches and hospital which all work to address various health, social and economic concerns. I am witnessing our churches coming together to help address the social needs of our community, schools are shaping the young minds to become our future leaders, and the Duncan Regional Hospital is working towards making Duncan a healthier community! These pillars are the basic components that future developers look for when choosing a community to call home.



In addition to the noted "pillars" of our community, we have groups like the Duncan Beautification Committee, that through private fundraising efforts is helping to beautify our community and assisting in the promotion of our Main Street District. On Tuesday, August 30th this organization saw the hanging of two new Main Street signs at the intersection of Highway 81 and Main Street. These signs are much larger than the previous signs and help promote our downtown district. Again, this was accomplished through private fundraising efforts. Our Main Street Duncan is one of the most active main street programs that I have ever had the pleasure to working with.

This organization hosts monthly events that has helped to create a "destination" in our community. Developers are becoming more interested in our community because they see an active downtown, our beautification efforts, and our community pillars working to make Duncan a better place to live, work and play.

Branding the City of Duncan

I have been listening to the comments about our community via social media and how branding a new image for the City of Duncan is needed. Many of our citizens spoke of heritage in livestock and agricultural production, oil history, our lakes, and crape myrtles as being important components of our image. These same citizens expressed that our current city seal is outdated or is not inviting to our community and would like to see our city incorporate a logo that draws positive attention to our city.



In my discussions with potential developers looking at the City of Duncan, a common question is "what is Duncan doing to become a younger community?" Branding can assist in this, along with our efforts to provide amenities that younger generations are now seeking when choosing a place to live and work. As humans beings are visual creatures, a proper logo can help market our community. This logo should acknowledge our community's history as well as provide direction for our future.

So as you read through the rest of this newsletter, I challenge you to think of ideas that you feel Duncan's brand and image should incorporate in design. I hope to work with local talent in our community to prepare some drafts of a new Duncan logo that expresses who we are. So please, share with me your thoughts at nschacht@duncanok.gov or call me at (580) 251-7715.

“It is Human Nature to Not Do What Is Expected Until We Know We Are Going to be Inspected.”

During a recent inspection of a property located here in Duncan, Oklahoma, a contractor apologized for items at the construction site not being up to code. He then went on to say that “it is human nature to not do what is expected until we know we are going to be inspected.” He further noted that everyone at the construction site knows what the rules and regulations require, but also noted that these get overlooked by the contractors many times until the local fire department or the building inspector show up and note the violations. As the Director of Community Development, this comment got me thinking about all the lives lost over the years that may have resulted from property owners and/or developers throughout the United States that did not implement proper fire safety into the design of the buildings and why we know have volume after volume of fire and building codes that are adopted by nearly every community across the United States.

One of the functions of issuing building permits for new construction, remodeling of interiors of existing buildings, and the reuse of existing buildings for new purposes is to review the proposal for compliance with adopted Fire and Building Codes. The Department of Community Development is aware that this will likely be an added cost to the property owner or land developer, but it is an extremely important component. Below you find a list of some of the major incidents that have happened in the United States that have spurred both new requirements in the code as well as necessary amendments to existing codes:

- In 1903, the Iroquois Theater Fire in Chicago - 602 Deaths
- In 1911, the Triangle Shirt Waist Company Fire in New York - 146 Deaths (mostly women)
- In 1940, the Rhythm Club Fire in Mississippi - 209 Deaths
- In 1942, Coconut Grove Night Club Fire in Boston - 4920 Deaths
- In 1946, Winecoff Hotel Fire in Atlanta, GA - 119 Deaths
- In 1949, St. Anthony Hospital Fire in Illinois - 119 Deaths
- In 1958, Our Lady of Angels School Fire in Illinois - 95 Deaths (mostly children)
- In 1977, Beverly Hills Super Club Fire in Southgate, KY - 167 Deaths
- In the 1980s the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino and the Dupont Plaza Hotel & Casino Fires - Combined 182 Deaths
- In 2003, Station Nightclub Fire in Rhode Island - 100 Deaths with numerous life altering injuries

These tragic events in American history helped officials establish and adopt various fire and building codes that have reduced the occurrence of death in such events. The Iroquois Theater Fire saw the implementation of maximum seating capacities for buildings and included requirements for exit signage, exit doors, and sprinkler systems. The Triangle Shirt Waist Company fire, where many of the women works died because they could not escape, saw new requirements for providing high-rise exits (the doors opened inward throughout this building and many employees were trapped and crushed by coworkers as they could not escape the flames) and the development of NFPA 101 - Life Safety. The Our Lady of Angels School Fire saw that automatic fire alarms were to be mandated, the use of firewalls in construction was to be used, and emergency lighting was to be required. The Beverly various clubs and nightclubs lead to legislation for sprinklers to be used in assemblies of certain capacities, improved and/or additional emergency exits, and emergency lighting amendments were made. The various casino and hotel fires saw requirements added that dealt with fire alarms and suppression.

These requirements are expensive to implement, especially when we are working on a remodel project or trying to house a new use within an existing building. However, we have seen where the implementation of these codes and requirements have saved lives and buildings here in Duncan already. Most recently, the fire that destroyed the Tea Room on Main Street could have been much worst. The required fire walls between buildings allowed neighboring property to be saved, and there were no losses to life because there were adequate means of egress from the buildings. We can all agree that any loss of building is a tragic event to a community like Duncan, Oklahoma. But we are also extremely thankful for the codes and requirements in place that have saved lives during these same tragic events.



Fires, like the one that occurred in Downtown Duncan, can be a traumatizing event to any community. Thankfully, there were no lives lost in this recent event. We can also see that the required firewalls that were designed and built between the commercial uses allowed the neighboring buildings to be saved from this fire's destruction with minimal damage. These firewalls are required by adopted fire and building codes.

Plan Commission and Board of Adjustment Updates

The City of Duncan Plan Commission met on Tuesday, August 16th to discuss two amendments to the Land Use Code as they relate to various propane uses. Our City Code only allowed for the small propane tank type sales, typically used for gas grills, of propane in our C-4 (commercial) district as a permitted use and only allows bulk storage and wholesale of propane in out I-3 (industrial) district as a use permitted on review. The Department of Community Development has received five permit applications/inquires for propane dispensaries in our community but the current code has no provisions for such use. The first amendment proposal was to add some definitions to our current City Code that will help guide future officials in assisting the development process, and this proposal was sent to City Council with a favorable recommendation. City Council adopted this amendment as presented.

The second amendment proposal began to look at what districts are suitable for a propane dispensary to occur. Safety, traffic flows, population densities, and other uses within districts was considered in the preparation of this amendment. It is also worth mentioning the Chief Burnside with the City Fire Department assisted on this amendment by researching what other communities are doing for propane dispensaries. The Department of Community Development decided to follow the examples of other communities in proposing that these propane dispensaries only occur in our industrial districts as permitted uses. The Plan Commission members discussed this and heard comments from the public and decided to add propane dispensaries as a use permitted on review in out C-4 (commercial district) and sent the amended proposal to City Council with a favorable recommendation. City Council adopted this amendment as presented.



Common example of what a typical propane dispensary may look like. All units will be installed to NFPA requirements and reviewed by Plan Commission members at a public hearing prior to installation.



The City of Duncan Board of Adjustments also met in the month of August to hear two requests. The first request was to allow a residential, in-ground swimming pool to encroach into a utility easement. It was noted that the neighboring property had gone through a similar process years ago and was permitted to remain (this neighboring pool failed to apply for proper permits prior to beginning construction). The Board of Adjustments found that the proposal should be permitted noting that care must be taken during the construction phase to not damage any of the utilities buried in the easement. It was also noted that if any of the utilities should need repaired in the future, then there could be a chance that the proposed swimming pool could be damaged and any repair to the pool would come at the homeowner's expense.

The second item heard by the Board of Adjustments was to convert an existing alley in the 1000 block between Maple Avenue and Willow Avenue to one-way. This proposal was part of the overall plan for a new parking lot that is being planned to service the Stephens County Courthouse. Members briefly discussed the proposal and how it would aid in vehicular and pedestrian traffic safety in the area and also approved this request as presented.

Community Development Activity for the Month of August

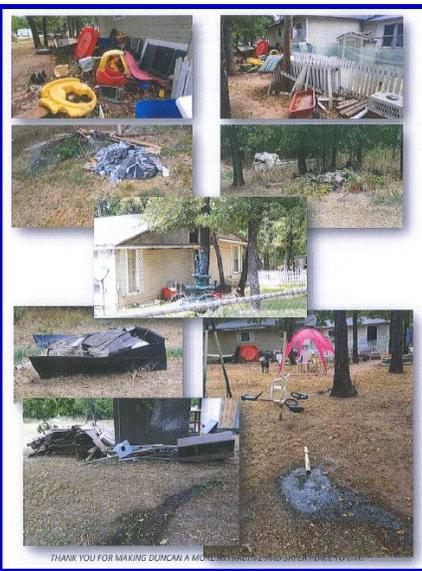
As of August 29, 2016, The Department of Community Development has issued 94 permits for total of \$4,765.30 fees collected. The majority of these permits issued were for residential re-roofs. It still appears that the re-roofing permits account for the greatest percentage of total permits issued. However, there has been a slight increase in the number of permits issued for commercial projects as well, and the Department of Community Development hopes that this trend continues.

As of August 29, 2016, The Department has issued 120 violation notices for tall grass/weeds, grass covering curbs/gutters, abandoned vehicles, and dilapidated/unsafe structures. This includes 26 of the 59 lessees of Clear Creek Lake properties for similar violations. It should be noted that violations are down from the past few months due to having dryer weather and yards not growing as quickly. As this trend continues, the Department is going to begin documenting abandoned and unsafe buildings with the intent of creating a database that can be used for the upcoming Community Development Block Group (CDBG) grant cycle.

Clear Creek Lake Code Enforcement Update

The Department of Community Development has been working with the City Clerk's Office and the Department of Public Works to address concerns raised by Duncan citizens regarding various lake properties owned by the City of Duncan. The Department's Code Enforcement Officials started with Clear Creek Lake by reviewing lease agreements, mailing addresses, and to determine if there were any delinquent tax and/or lease payments. This initial step illustrated that any lessee of lake property is required to meet all City of Duncan City Code regarding property maintenance, storage of vehicles and equipment, and general maintenance of structures. This process also illustrated that 9 of the 59 leased properties were delinquent on their lease payment of more than \$100 for a grand total of \$10,806.51 owed to the City of Duncan.

As noted in the signed lease agreements with the City of Duncan, those leasing properties are required to meet all City Codes. As the Department's Code Enforcement Officials began looking at each lease property, it was determined that 26 of the 59 properties (or 46%) had violations ranging from tall grass/weeds, abandoned vehicles, unsecure and unsafe structures, leaking septic systems where sewage was running to the surface, and properties that appeared to be stealing electricity. It is important to note that the Code Enforcement Officials never entered any home or building on any lease properties, and only walked the properties. All noted violations were easily visible while walking the property owned by the City of Duncan and leased by the citizens.



Once each property was inspected, reports of violation were sent to those properties with specific items that needed to be addressed to bring the property back into compliance with City Codes. The Code Enforcement Officials went beyond the standard letter form that is typically sent to citizens living inside the corporate limits as these letters to lessee holders included pictures of each violation that was noticed on the subject property. The letters also included a date and time for a public hearing in the event that a property owner was not able to complete corrections to the property. As with all properties that are deemed to be in violation, the Department is willing to work with the lessees to assist in providing adequate time to make corrections. Many of the lessees expressed their gratitude to our Code Enforcement Officials, and began working on corrections immediately.

In addition to the code enforcement activities, the Department of Community Development has also been assisting other departments in identifying potential improvement projects that will make our lakes more inviting to the general public in years to come as we believe the lakes are a valuable asset to the City of Duncan.

Department Works to Improve Permitting Process While Building Duncan's Vision

The Department of Community Development is working on preparing several handouts and brochures that can be provided to all interested parties wishing to develop, redevelop, and/or remodel properties throughout the City of Duncan. Over the years, the Department has fallen short in reaching out to the public to provide detailed information explaining when building and fire codes have been updated, when permits are required, and why certificate of occupancy permits are issued. The Department hopes with the current staff will be in a position to better communicate with the developers and citizens of Duncan to further grow our economy, provide better housing opportunities, and promote higher quality of life.

In addition to these handouts and brochures, the Department will be working on a major overhaul of the current Land Use Code section of our City Code. In review of this section, it is difficult at best to navigate and many developers have expressed changes and amendments that will better reflect the City of Duncan's long-term vision. Some items that developers have requested, beyond a more user friendly Land Use Code, is landscape requirements and guidelines, sidewalk design standards, modified parking requirements, and use of form based zoning to name a few suggestions that have been made.

