

**2011
Building and Planning Department
Annual Report**

Planning

Planning Board

The Planning Board acted on 19 requests for approvals. Most items included subdivisions and special-use permits. The larger projects included 65 Canvass Street – a proposal to reconstruct an existing warehouse building into 20 apartment units; and Dollar General at 100 Columbia Street. Sixty-five Canvass Street is still pending and although the Dollar General received approval the developer has not pulled any permits.

Zoning Board of Appeals

The Zoning Board of Appeals considered and approved 20 variance requests. Several more were denied. Only two use variances were considered. The first was to permit a multi-family unit in the former convent at 76 Adams Avenue, which the board approved; the second was for constructing a two-family on the vacant lot at 52 Park Avenue which was denied by the board.

Historic Preservation and Architectural Review Board

The Historic Board reviews façade alterations and signage for buildings in the historic district. In 2011, the Historic Board considered 19 applications and drafted a guidance document. The majority of the applications dealt with changes in siding, windows, front steps and signage for businesses.

Building

Code Enforcement

1. MRIs

In 2010 the Building Inspectors completed MRIs on all multi-family structures: two, three and four or more units. Therefore 2011 brought only a minimum number of MRIs as a measure to ensure compliance on properties that were either vacant or are now experiencing problems and had an ROP inspection in 2010.

2. ROPs

The Code Officer's schedules are comprised almost entirely of ROPs. Payment prior to scheduling continues and we continue to build a database of tenant names. The Cohoes City School District relies on our ROP records and the Cohoes Housing Authority relies on our inspection results.

3. Building Permits

Ron Monast (Code Officer) and Garry Nathan (City Engineer) reviewed and monitored several large projects: Watersview Apartments, the Community Center for the Eddy, Kelman's addition, Admirals Walk, Harmony Mills north end, 31 Ontario Street, Saratoga Street Apartments and Krug Place.

In addition, 550 building permits were issued in 2011. Seven of these building permits constituted new single or two-family homes. Twenty-eight permits were issued for additions and alterations. One new multi-family dwelling received a permit in 2011. The remaining 514 building permits were for a variety of work. The most common included: roofs, siding, windows, fences, porches, and plumbing.

Patty Bishop handles the building permit paperwork, including contractor's insurance. The Assessor continues to rely on plans from the building department to determine square footage and extent of rehabilitation on existing properties.

4. Vacant Building Registry

Many of the tickets issued in 2011 concerned vacant buildings. The list contains roughly 100 properties at any given time. We glean addresses from a zero usage reading provided by the Water Department as well as neighborhood complaints. Many of the properties listed on the zero usage list have either one vacant unit (with two water lines) or are owned by residents who are out of the area during the winter months.

Therefore, in an effort to tighten up the process, Code Enforcement works with Sean Connors from the Water Department. Once the zero read list is issued, Sean checks the properties and a Code Officer rides with Sean to photograph the properties and inspect for exterior violations. The Code Officer then tickets those properties that exhibit exterior violations.

Of the 120 properties currently on the vacant building list, 28 paid the \$500 annual fee. Most of these are bank owned foreclosures. The City received over \$19,000 in registration and annual fees for the properties currently on the VBR. Twenty properties previously listed in 2010 have since been resold or reoccupied.

5. Complaints

Code Enforcement received 1,152 complaints in 2011, which is an increase from the 916 acted on in 2010. There are currently five of these complaints pending in court while are closed. The remaining open complaints are being monitored; some of those include exterior violations owners have put off until spring.

Grass and high weed complaints ranked highest at 156. Code Officer John Shea makes regular rounds during the warmer months to find high grass complaints. Neighboring residents also provide insight into complaints. Renting without a permit ranked as the second most common complaint at 114 complaints. Miscellaneous complaints ranked third at 105 complaints. Due to code enforcement efforts to clean up the exterior of downtown properties, 67 owners received violation notices for exterior violations such as rotting soffits or cracked windows. We responded to 51 tenant complaints; 44 sidewalk complaints; 34 unsecured buildings; 31 vacant buildings; 30 unsafe structures; 22 working without a permit; 21 chipped paint complaints; 17 fire routing slips; and 15 police routing slips. The remaining complaints are divided between everything from dog feces to water meter bypasses.

In addition to those complaints listed in Municipality, the Code Officers continue morning garbage duty. Their efforts resulted in approximately 500 garbage violations. Many property owners rectify the matter prior to DPW pick-up.

6. Demolitions

Two properties have had public hearings regarding demolition and include 33 Lark Street and 48 Main Street. Bid packages for demolition were sent out for both properties. In addition, engineering provided the structural report and bid packages for an emergency demolition of 57 Central Terrace. DPW continues to monitor progress as some hidden asbestos became evident during the demolition. New York State Department of Labor issued a variance and work will recommence after the first of the year 2012.

7. CSO Inspections

Code officers recently began CSO inspections in response to a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation violation. Most of the inspections will take place every other week. Code officers will need to complete and save reports as well as notify DPW of any findings. Re-inspections will take place on any CSO that requires clean-up.

8. Tickets

Patty handled more than 200 tickets in 2011. Most tickets were withdrawn or dismissed once the violations were rectified. However, Corporation Counsel has been excellent in pursuing difficult defendants who refuse to comply. We have been trying to do our part in carefully documenting through notices and photographs. Three incidents concerning sidewalks prompted Code to issue notices of violation to property owners and required follow-up coordinated with Corporation Counsel's Office.

9. Office Changes

In 2012 the code office will be losing one support staff person. As a result, the department will look to rely on staff in other departments for additional support and code officers will take on more responsibility for completing paperwork and answering phone call questions. The Treasurer's Office will schedule ROPs and DPW will assist with building permits.