

Code Enforcement Mission Statement:

To provide Sparta residents with the highest quality of service and to uphold and enforce codes and standards established to protect the Public Health, Safety and Welfare of all residents, businesses owners and visitors based upon priorities which are consistent with established standards. Courtesy and professionalism will serve as guiding principles which will permeate the character of the Code Enforcement Officer, thereby ensuring that our determination to deter blight within the Village is tempered with sensitivity and reason. Code enforcement is not only re-active, but also pro-active. Re-active enforcement is complaint based, whereas pro-active enforcement is used as an educational mechanism. Pro-active enforcement is used to educate the public on existing ordinances and ordinances that are frequently violated. The Village actively engages in pro-active enforcement as a way to resolve issues without using punitive measures.



Throughout all code enforcement encounters, the Village seeks to educate the public about the Village’s codes and ordinances while seeking voluntary compliance. While most code enforcement efforts are similar and end with voluntary compliance, some cases deviate from the normal process due to various factors. In those instances, staff may skip steps within the code enforcement plan to achieve compliance quicker.

As stated above, staff seeks to educate the public to help achieve voluntary compliance. The Village publishes the tall grass and noxious weed ordinance annual in March or April in the Sparta Today newspaper. The goal of this is to educate the public about the tall grass ordinance within the Village. Second, staff has introduced the use of postcard mailers to help educate residents about actual or potential code violations.



Though the Village has many codes and ordinances, there are some that occur more frequently than others. The following is a guide to the codes and ordinance most frequently noticed or documented within the Village:

- 1. Tall Grass and Weed:** [Sec. 78-75](#) of the Village of Sparta Code of Ordinances. During the growing season, mainly April 15 – October 15, weeds and grass in excess of eight (8) inches is a violation of the Village’s code. Annually, the Village publishes this ordinance section in the Sparta Today Newspaper to help educate residents. By publishing this notice annually, the Village *can* have tall grass and weeds removed *without* notification of the offending property owner. **However**, the Village strives for voluntary compliance. Staff will send a postcard to all properties where tall grass and weeds have been observed granting the property owner an

opportunity to correct the issue. Should the property not be brought into compliance, then the Village will take action.

2. **Yard Parking:** [Sec. 70-9](#) of the Village of Sparta Code of Ordinances, which prohibits motor vehicles being parked in the front, side or rear yard **unless it is on an improved driveway** constructed in accordance with the requirements of the Village Code of Ordinance. Violations of this ordinance can result in a \$10 ticket by the Sparta Police Department for each violation.



3. **Inoperable Vehicles:** [Sec. 26-64](#) of the Village of Sparta Code of Ordinances. An inoperable vehicle is defined as a motor vehicle by reason of dismantling or disrepair or other cause, is incapable of being propelled under its own power; and a motor vehicle which does not display a current valid license plate which is registered to that vehicle, and any motor vehicle which, due to condition, cannot be lawfully operated upon a public street.



Vehicles that are clearly disable or dismantled that are **not** stored in an enclosed structure will receive violation notices from the Village seeking voluntary compliance. Vehicles that are unregistered and not stored in an enclosed structure will also receive violation notices.

4. **Accumulation of Junk, trash and Rubbish:** [Sec. 26-112](#) of the Village of Sparta Code of Ordinances. “It is determined that the unregulated storage or accumulation on private property of building materials, junk, rubbish or trash, garbage, or the dismantling of vehicles or machinery, is detrimental to the general welfare of the public in that such practices cause or contribute to the deterioration of neighborhoods and promote neighborhood blight”. Blight is a blank term used to describe junk, trash, yard and household waste. The Village has been, and will continue, a proactive approach to blight elimination within the Village. The Village and Sparta Township hold an annual cleanup day to allow for residents to dispose of household and yard waste and large items.



5. **Season Services:** The Village of Sparta provides season services to the residents. During the fall months, the Village offers curb-side leaf removal. Curb-side leaf pickup generally runs from mid-October until the end of November or the first heavy snowfall, which ever is earlier. Residents are asked to rake leaves into piles **between the curb and sidewalk** or the area next to the street. Raking leaves into the gutter pan or street can cause flooding when it rains by clogging the catch basins. Raking leaves directly into the street or gutter pan could result in a friendly reminder from the Village.

The Village also offers curb-side brush and limb chipping during the spring and summer months. This service beings in April and runs through the first week in October. Brush and limbs must be four (4) inches in diameter or less to be removed by the Public Works crews, limbs and brush larger than four (4) inches could damage equipment. **Brush must be placed curbside by 7:00 AM** on the first Monday of the month or it will not be taken by the Public Works crew. Residents are reminded to place brush and limbs between the sidewalk and the curb parallel with the roadway. Brush placed out after the monthly chipping will not be picked up and residents will receive a friendly reminder to remove the brush until next month.

The Department of Public Works also accepted drop offs of residential yard waste and brush all year. Village residents can drop leaves, garden waste, grass clippings and brush not larger than 4" in diameter behind the Village of Sparta DPW Building at 276 W. Division Street during regular work hours. Please place material next to the larger existing pile and not in the parking lot. **NO commercial dumping. NO stumps.**

6. **Camper and RV Parking:** [Sec. 82-130](#) of the Village of Sparta Code of Ordinances. *(Please note, this ordinance section was recently updated by the Village Council and the online version of this code may not reflect the recent changes until the next code update. Please see Village offices for the most recent updates.)*



Recreational vehicles, RVs and campers, may not be stored within a driveway for more than fourteen (14) days in any ninety (90) day period. However, during the summer months, the Village does understand campers and RVs are used frequently and Village officials take a moderate approach to enforcement of this code during the spring and summer. Once the summer months have passed, staff will send reminders to residents regarding proper storage, including removal from driveways. **Reminder notices will begin to be sent at the beginning of October every year.**

Enforcement Procedures:

Step 1:

- Violation Observation:
 - o When an alleged violation is observed, the Code Enforcement Officer (EO) is to document the following:
 - Location
 - Type of violation
 - Major or urgent violation
 - Record a date stamped image of the alleged violation
 - o Code Enforcement Officer is to observe alleged violation for a minimum of three (3) days prior to preparing violation notice.
 - o Notate above in Code Enforcement Tracker.

Step 2:

- Address and Owner Verification:
 - o Code Enforcement Officer is to verify the address and owner via Village of Sparta Tax Record or Kent County Property Search, this is to be noted in the Code Enforcement Tracker.

Step 3:

- Review observed violations with Village Manager weekly; either case by case or weekly summary.



- Manager and Code Enforcement Officer will review each case and associated evidence/observation and determine next course of action.

Step 4:

- Code violations for occupied/active businesses:
 - Make contact with business owner or site manager in-person or via phone.
 - Send follow-up letter summarizing conversation, observed violation, compliance steps to owner/manager and building owner if possible and/or needed.
 - Should voluntary compliance not be achieved, review violations with Village Manager.

Step 5:

- Code violations for residential homes – single family.
 - Notification of Violation. First notification.
 - Should a notice of violation need to be sent, Code Enforcement Officer will utilize non-formal contact method, i.e., postcard, for non-major/urgent cases.
 - Should a letter need to be sent, ensure to include office contact information and cite Village Ordinance section and language.
 - All non-major/urgent, informal notices shall be open-ended and without timeline for cure. The goal is voluntary compliance with notice.
- Notification of Violation. Subsequent notifications.
 - Should additional notices need to be sent regarding the same or repeated violation(s) to a single property, business or residential, they shall include a timeline for compliance. Timelines for compliance shall be no less than ten (10) days. This allows for notice delivery via USPS First Class Mail. Should stringent timeline be required, notice is to be sent via Certified Mail.
 - Code Enforcement officer will strive to allow a compliance timeline, generally, of two to four weeks depending on the severity of violation.
 - Violation compliance that is repair of structure will be granted long-term compliance timelines, provided a plan of action is put into place with the Code Enforcement Officer.
 - I.e.: large scale structure repair, issues obtaining materials, cost, and other like factors.



Step 6:

- Enforcement:
 - Should enforcement action be required a final notice with enforcement date shall be sent to the registered owner of the property via USPS First Class Mail or Certified Mail.
 - Should citation be required the Code Enforcement Officer or an officer from the Sparta Police Department shall completed the necessary ticket(s). Tickets shall be posted at the address of the violation by a member of the Sparta Police Department and images shall be taken of the posted ticket.
 - In an appropriate case (such as where there have been repeated violations, or where it appears that the notice is unlikely to serve a reasonable purpose, or where notice is otherwise inappropriate) the appropriate citation may be issued by the officer or official immediately upon discovery of the violation.
 - A “Stop Work Order” may be issued for projects started or under construction without the proper permits issued by the Village. A meeting should normally be established within 24 hours to show cause as to why the “work” should not be stopped. The reviewing enforcement officer will be required to attend the meeting. If the meeting does not provide a satisfactory resolution (i.e., compliance), the stop work order will remain in effect.
 - Employees should make every effort possible to handle similar cases in a uniform and consistent manner.

Confrontation Situation:

If involved with a person in a confrontation situation:

- Use proper language and communication skills at all times – do not use profanity, threats, or abusive language.
- Recognize that if a situation is escalating, remove yourself from the situation.
- Direct irate and/or uncooperative persons to your supervisor or Manager.
- All employees must know that calling for assistance or back up is not a sign of weakness, but an effective Officer Safety tool. Do not think you can handle every situation by yourself, call for help or a witness whenever you think you need it.

The Village of Sparta understands code enforcement can be frustrating, however, we encourage any member of the public with questions to reach out to the Code Enforcement Officer or the Village Manager. Staff at the Village will be more than happy to assist.

The Village of Sparta is committed to maintaining our community to the highest standards and create a place our residents are happy to call home.