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VCNA Valley Center Neighborhood Association

Neighborhood unity and pride

5880 Hollyhurst Way
Sacramento, CA 95823

June 15, 1998

City Councilmembers
915 I Street, #200
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: ACT PROPOSAL FOR HOUSING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT
JUNE 16, 1998, 1PM AGENDA, ITEM 4.1**

Councilmembers:

VCNA supports ACT's proposal for housing and code enforcement abatement.

This proposal is well thought out and would give City resident's another tool in fighting nuisances and blight.

We would especially be interested in seeing the reinstatement of the social nuisance budget and the City enforcing the social nuisance code by prosecutng and fining repeat offenders, to the fullest extent of the law.

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Further, we would like to see the Sacramento Police Department be more aggressive in cost recovery on POP/NPO on-going problems.

I would personally be interested in participating in the neighborhood nuisance task force.

Thank you in advance for your support in keeping our City a safe place to live.

Respectfully,

Vickey Scott-Ostil

Vickey Scott-Ostil
President

**SACRAMENTO AREA CONGREGATIONS TOGETHER (ACT)
PROPOSAL TO THE SACRAMENTO CITY COUNCIL
FOR HOUSING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT**

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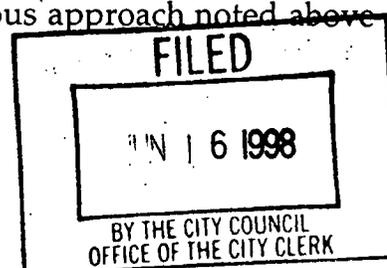
May 27, 1998

Sacramento families are seeing far too much blight in our neighborhoods. Throughout the city, we are beleaguered by drug dealing, vandalism, assault, and prostitution. Too often, the common thread running throughout each of these is absentee and/or irresponsible landlords. These property owners have little or no interest in maintaining their properties in clean, habitable, and safe condition; either they let their abandoned properties sit in ruin, inviting drug and criminal activity, or they rent their properties to drug dealers or other criminals. With approximately 1000 abandoned/dangerous buildings currently in the city and a rate of only 300 resolved cases per year, we are at least three years away from eliminating the blight that currently exists. When we include the additional buildings that are added to the list year after year, we are faced with a backlog that will never be resolved under the current system. Considering the staff and police time invested in each of these cases, it becomes clear that prevention is by far the more cost effective and sound approach.

Unfortunately, city housing and nuisance abatement codes are poorly enforced, and the city's housing and code enforcement departments are in systemic disarray. This allows absentee owners to manipulate the codes in such a way that they are rarely held accountable for the problems their properties and their tenants are causing in our neighborhoods. Meanwhile, our seniors cannot retire without fear, and our families struggle to raise happy, healthy children in this environment.

Through our outreach with hundreds of residents and our research with numerous city representatives, ACT has identified two major, yet related, problem areas which we would like to see changed:

- An overly cautious approach to dealing with slumlords. Certainly, one the roles of the city attorney's office is to protect the city from litigation. However, we believe that the current city attorney too often does so at the expense of residents. ACT wants to see the city attorney's office pursue slumlords more aggressively, keeping residents' rights at the forefront, as Sacramento County and other cities around the state are doing.
- Slumlords' rights to "due process" seem to be given priority over residents' rights to healthy neighborhoods. Clearly, all landlords have the right to "due process"; however, too many slumlords abuse this right and claim a "good faith effort" year after year after year. The cautious approach noted above



only serves to encourage this abusive behavior. The city must aggressively pursue a more stringent timeline for slumlords to comply with the law.

As a first step in addressing Sacramento's overall housing and code enforcement problem, ACT is proposing a two-phase strategy encompassing enforcement, rehabilitation/demolition, and re-sale.

Phase I: Enforcement

ACT's priorities for enforcement include a shift in organizational structure and emphasis, backed up by a commitment of funds to implement these changes. We propose that the funding be incorporated into the budget for the upcoming fiscal year (1998-99).

1. Form a Code Enforcement Team: ACT would like to see a new interdepartmental code enforcement team formed made up of personnel from code enforcement, housing and dangerous buildings, the police department, and a dedicated deputy city attorney or an outside contracted attorney and be under the direction of a dedicated Deputy City Manager (see attached chart).

- *Function:* The function of this team would be to meet on a weekly basis to aggressively and cohesively target identified violations of housing and nuisance codes. The team should maintain clear, timely, and two-way communication with the liaison from each district's Neighborhood Nuisance Task Force (see below and attached chart). In addition, ACT believes that it is critical for this Team to engage the services of other city and county agencies such as the Fire Department, Child Protective Services, Animal Control, etc. when necessary. We also believe that training for neighborhood police officers in how to issue code violation citations would greatly increase the number of citations issued.

- *Accountability:* To ensure two-way accountability between residents and the Team, Task Force liaisons should meet with the Team once a month to provide and receive updates on identified properties. Accurate records should be maintained regarding how many problem properties are brought to compliance monthly and yearly. Accurate records should also be maintained regarding the number of fees levied monthly and yearly; these fees should be tracked from time of levy to time of collection in order to facilitate efficiency analysis of this process. Similarly, we encourage periodic self-evaluation of the Team and Task Force, and expect timely action should problems or bottlenecks arise.

- *Funding:* Based on our research with city councilmembers and city staff, we estimate that \$300,000 will cover the costs of these changes, including new

positions for a Deputy City Manager, a Deputy City Attorney, and other administrative and support staff.

- *Timeline:* Organizational changes should begin immediately and be firmly established by September 1998.

2. **Establish Neighborhood Nuisance Task Forces:** Along with the city, residents should play a key role in enforcing housing and nuisance codes. ACT would like to see Neighborhood Nuisance Task Forces established in each of the eight city council districts, following the prototype established by Councilmember Rob Kerth in District 2.

- *Function:* These Task Forces should meet monthly to identify the most severe problem properties in each of their neighborhoods, and communicate this information to the Code Enforcement Team. Each month, a representative from the Code Enforcement Team should update each Task Force on the progress of their cases against the identified problem properties.

- *Accountability:* Accurate records, in conjunction with the Code Enforcement Team, should be maintained regarding problem properties in each neighborhood. We encourage periodic self-evaluation on the effectiveness of the Task Force and its relationship with the Code Enforcement Team.

- *Timeline:* Task Forces should be put in place immediately and be firmly established by September 1998.

3. **Reinstate Social Nuisance Budget:** We estimate that, because of its sunset clause, approximately \$400,000 was removed from the social nuisance code enforcement budget. ACT would like to see these funds replaced in the 1998-99 city budget so that new or existing personnel can investigate violations and enforce penalties of social nuisance codes. We support reinstating a "door charge" in addition to a fee recovery process to create a long term funding source for the social nuisance strategy. The City also needs a policy to penalize heavily repeat offenders who often are responsible for a great percentage of problem houses. We expect aggressive and timely enforcement of these codes.

4. **Speed up and Strengthen the Fee Recovery Process:** The current collection rate of twenty cents of the dollar with a three year time lag is unacceptable. The City needs to explore using external debt collectors and ways to shorten the notification process through methods other than registered mail. Another strategy would be to make fees, associated with violations, personal liabilities as well as accessing liens against properties.

Phase II: Rehabilitation/Demolition and Re-Sale:

ACT believes that the city's priority should be on rehabilitation of homes and other buildings and on re-sale to owners who will occupy the homes. As a first step for Phase II, ACT would like to see the following:

- ACT urges the Council to make a policy decision to set aside at least 25% of the Housing Fund for rehabilitation or demolition of buildings. It makes no sense to continue to invest all of these funds in market-rate housing downtown when there is such a great need for housing renovation in surrounding neighborhoods. The incredibly rapid sale of the Metro Square Townhomes raises the question of whether such units need any subsidy at all.

ACT will be engaging in intensive research on how best to achieve our goals regarding rehabilitation and home ownership. Some of the areas we will be looking into include the following: facilitating owner compliance of codes, repossessing properties by judicial or non-judicial means, incentives for non- or for-profit developers to purchase and rehabilitate or demolish, and the availability of incentives for homebuyers who are committed to live in and contribute to the health and stability of the neighborhood.

Over the next few months, ACT will be requesting meetings with City Council, SHRA, and other city staff to gather information on current practices regarding rehabilitation/demolition and re-sale. In February 1999 ACT will be presenting our Phase II proposal to be included in the 1999-2000 budget.

