

City of Emporia Virginia



Guidelines for Property Maintenance In the City of Emporia, Virginia

Department of Inspections



**City of Emporia
Department of Inspections**

Property Maintenance Program

MISSION STATEMENT

It is the mission of the City of Emporia Department of Inspections to require strict adherence to City ordinances and the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code by continuing systematic on-going Property Maintenance inspections and addressing problems identified by citizens in an expedient manner.

Goals and Objectives

- Ensure public safety, health, proper building maintenance repair, use and the continued adherence to minimum standards of building construction, energy conservation, and accessibility for the physically handicapped and aged.
- Reduce the number of structure fires.
- Establish an environment capable of supporting a desirable quality of life, recruitment of potential tourism and new business, and the maintenance of existing property values.
- Instill a strong commitment and desire within our community of property owners, tenants, landlords, property managers and realtors to partner in a common goal to help the City of Emporia achieve its full potential as a city and choice of residence.
- Support residents committed to establishing a high degree of neighborhood pride by working to keep property in good condition.

Guidelines for Property Maintenance in the City of Emporia, Virginia

Section 14.76.1 of the Code of the City of Emporia adopts Part III of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) as Emporia's Property Maintenance Code. This portion of the USBC known as "The Virginia Maintenance Code" (VMC) provides administrative guidelines for the enforcement of maintenance standards set forth in the International Property Maintenance Code. Standards contained in the USBC and City ordinances are applied to all structures and properties, regardless of use, occupancy, or location within the City. The Department of Inspections is responsible for enforcing these standards in the City of Emporia.

Most of the ordinances and standards are common sense rules, and a thorough look at a building and its surrounding property will usually indicate where repairs or maintenance is needed. The information contained herein addresses many areas inspectors will observe when conducting an inspection. These guidelines address the basics and are meant to be informative in helping the owner or occupant ensure that a property is in compliance. They are by no means all inclusive of the entire code.

Older structures built prior to the enactment of the Property Maintenance Code are not exempt from its requirements. Enforcement of the VMC may result in required improvements, upgrades or maintenance repairs to some structures. Generally, this occurs if an inspection finds life safety concerns or significant lack of maintenance. Some of these conditions are identified in this guide such as missing/inoperable smoke detectors, faulty electrical service, changes to means of ingress/egress, etc.

Inspections are conducted to protect the inhabitants of the structure and the public by ensuring code compliance. A structure may be condemned for unsafe or unfit conditions. These conditions include but are not limited to; lack of required utilities, a vacant, open structure, alterations or conditions that affect the structural integrity of the building, or improper use or occupancy creating an unsafe condition. All occupied structures must have proper electric service, hot and cold running water, proper bathroom facilities and heat in the winter. Failure to meet these requirements could cause condemnation as "unsafe or unfit for human habitation."

Other conditions that could cause condemnation are improper fire separation, suppression or signaling systems. In such cases, the conditions must either be corrected or the occupants must vacate for their own safety. Depending on the circumstances and seriousness of the condition, the occupants may be allowed to remain for a short period of time if temporary safeguards are put in place. In worst case scenarios, the Code Official may order immediate termination of occupancy.

This guideline, as its name implies, is to provide new property owners, new tenants and rental property owners and managers guidance with regard to the expectations for maintaining property in the City of Emporia.

The City of Emporia's Department of Inspections' staff will gladly answer any questions you may have. They may be contacted at: 201 South Main Street, Emporia, Virginia 23847. Office: 434-634-6315, FAX: 434-634-0003.

Exterior Features

Exterior property areas shall be kept in a clean, safe and sanitary condition. Some of the most frequent exterior problems are:

1. Improper garbage and rubbish storage

- ❖ Improper storage and accumulation of garbage and rubbish attracts rodents, animals and vermin, produces noxious odors and creates potential health hazards. Garbage stored outside should be placed in approved, leak proof, covered containers. Accumulation of rubbish such as ashes, paper, cartons, boxes, wood, tree branches, yard trimmings, tin cans, metals, discarded appliances, and inoperable mechanical equipment are required to be disposed of properly in a timely manner.



2. Overgrowth of grass and tall weeds

- ❖ Grass, weeds and other uncontrolled growth must be maintained below twelve (12) inches on developed lots/parcels and eighteen (18) inches on undeveloped lots/parcels. Each owner is responsible for his or her property.



3. The improper storage of inoperable motor vehicles:

- ❖ Abandoned, inoperable vehicles are unsightly, clutter the neighborhood, provide harborage for rodents and are an attractive nuisance for children. These vehicles are required to be stored in a completely enclosed building or totally screened or shielded from view. A car cover does not satisfy the screening requirements. An inoperable vehicle is one that fails to display both valid inspection and license plate decals or which has had parts removed or which is in such condition that prohibits operation. Residential property may only have one inoperable vehicle in a fully enclosed building. Commercial property must have screen fencing with slats.



4. **Vacant Structures** are often ignored and deemed a fire hazard/unsafe when unsecured or open. Vacant structures are to be secured from public entry and maintained in a clean, safe and sanitary condition with no exterior violations. The fact that a structure is vacant does not exempt it from proper maintenance of the exterior.
5. **Standing Water** next to a structure can cause damage to its foundation, wooden members and creates breeding areas for nuisance insects. Yards should be graded to drain water away from the building foundation or slab and to prevent the accumulation of stagnant water.
6. **Walkways and driveways** should be kept in a proper state of repair and be kept free of trip hazards.
7. **Accessory structures** such as detached garages, utility sheds, fences and outside walls must be structurally sound and meet the requirements of the primary structure.
8. **Swimming Pools** must be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition and be in good repair. All required gates, fences, closing and locking hardware must be maintained to prevent unauthorized entry and accidental drowning.
9. **Buildings shall have assigned address numbers** posted on the structure in a position plainly legible and visible from the street or road fronting the property. These numbers shall contrast with their background, be 4 inches high with a minimum stroke width of ½ inch and be Arabic numeral or alphabet letters.
10. **Foundation Walls** should be free from cracks, openings and breaks. Small cracks (settling cracks) are common on old houses and are typically acceptable. Large cracks, missing bricks and deteriorated mortar must be sealed or repaired. Foundations that do not properly support the building may cause the entire structure to be condemned.
11. **Exterior Walls and Trim** should be free from holes, breaks, loose and rotting materials, weatherproof and properly surface coated to prevent deterioration. This includes window and door frames. Siding, brick veneer and other wall finishes should not have any openings that allow rain or moisture to penetrate.
12. **Roofs, flashing and gutters** should be maintained in good repair. Roofs must be sound, tight and have no defects that allow rain into the interior. Leaks may cause walls or ceilings to collapse, resulting in the structure being declared "Unsafe for Habitation." If installed, gutters must function properly and have all parts intact. Water must drain in a manner as to not cause a nuisance.
13. **Chimneys** should be structurally sound and in good repair. Deterioration may prevent proper operation and obstructed chimneys may cause carbon monoxide poisoning. Older chimneys frequently have loose bricks or mortar that may cause a safety hazard.
14. **Porches, stairs and decks** should be maintained, structurally sound, in good repair, with proper anchorage and capable of supporting imposed loads. Handrails and guards should be firmly attached and capable of supporting imposed loads.
15. **Exterior doors and hardware** should be maintained in good condition. Doors should close tightly and hardware should latch securely, lock and unlock from the inside easily. Egress doors that use a key or other special device on the inside for locking and unlocking are prohibited.

16. **Windows** should be kept in sound condition; good repair and not admit rain or wind. Every openable window should be operable and capable of being held open by window hardware. Cracked glass is not a violation, but holes, sharp edges and areas that admit wind or rain are. Storm windows are not required but if installed must be maintained.
17. **Insect screens** are required between April 1 and December 1 on every window and door that is required for ventilation in habitable spaces. The screens should be no less than 16 mesh per inch to keep out insects. Screen doors must be self closing.

Interior Features

1. **Interior Surfaces** (walls, ceiling, floors, windows and doors) should be structurally sound, clean and in sanitary condition. Peeling, chipping, and flaking paint should be repaired, removed and covered. Cracked or loose plaster or other defective conditions should be repaired. Interior surfaces that contain lead based paint can cause serious health hazards to children.
2. **Structural Members** shall be maintained in good repair and capable of supporting the imposed loads designed to support.
3. **Stairs and Handrails** should be sound, in good repair and capable of supporting normally imposed loads.
4. **Common Areas** such as public hallways and stairs in structures other than one and two family dwellings must be illuminated at all times.
5. **Minimum Dimensions** of habitable spaces should be no less than 7 feet in any direction. Dimensions less than these standards may be acceptable if circumstances prohibit correction and safety of living conditions is not significantly compromised.
6. **Sleeping Rooms** must have a minimum dimension of 70 square feet. Sleeping room load is calculated by 70 square feet for one occupant or 50 square feet for each occupant, if more than one. Bedrooms should be arranged so that occupants do not have to pass through a bedroom to get to another bedroom, bathroom or living space.
7. **Overcrowding** can create serious health and sanitation problems. The residential occupant load is based on sleeping room load and living/dining/kitchen load. The square footage of bedrooms limits the number of occupants allowed in a residential unit.

Minimum Area Requirements			
Space Required	Minimum Area in Square Feet		
	1-2 Occupants	3-5 Occupants	6 or more
Living Room	No requirements	120	150
Dining Room	No Requirements	80	100
Kitchen	50	50	60
Bedrooms	70 square feet for single occupancy or 50 square feet per person multiple occupants*		

*Other requirements may also apply

8. **Required emergency escape openings** must be operational from the interior without special keys, tools or knowledge.
9. **Smoke detectors** are required in all rental dwellings and shall be operational and properly installed. Detectors are required on every floor level, including basements, and in the immediate area of the bedrooms. Required interconnected detectors must operate as designed.
10. **Fire resistive ratings** must be maintained in all rated walls, floors, doors, stops and shafts. All fire suppressions and early warning systems installed must be maintained at all times regardless of building occupancy, unless approved by the Code Official or Fire Marshal.

11. Plumbing and Sewer Systems must operate as designed with all bathtubs, showers, sinks and toilets supplied with hot and cold water or enough volume and pressure for the fixture to operate properly. All fixtures must be securely anchored and have adequate clearance. Drains should drain freely. Water heaters should have a combination temperature/pressure relief valve with proper discharge piping and should supply adequate hot water of at least 120 degrees F to every required faucet. Fuel-fired water heaters must be installed properly (including the fuel supply line and exhaust vent) and should not be located in any bathroom, bedroom or other occupied room that is normally closed. Proper backflow prevention must be maintained at all times.



City of Emporia-Property Maintenance Work Priority Matrix



The following, listed in order of priority, determines Property Maintenance resource allocation:

Note: Property Maintenance enforcement consists of two areas of focus:

- ◆ Enforcement of the Virginia Maintenance Code
- ◆ Enforcement of City Ordinances related to the maintenance of property.

Level of Priority with 1 being the highest	Description of the work
1	<p style="text-align: center;">Complaints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Complaints phoned in by citizens ◆ Complaints received in writing and signed ◆ Complaints received by citizens in person in the office or in the field ◆ Complaints received on the Property Maintenance Issue Complaint Form ◆ Complaints from City Departments (EPD, EVFD, PW, PU, GVRS)
2	Non-compliant conditions identified during Complaint Investigation inspections.
3	On a continuous basis, police address any items observed, which constitute negative curb appeal, during routine inspections of all major thoroughfares in the City of Emporia.
3	On a continuous basis, general policing citywide, to provide visibility of Code Enforcement personnel in effort to encourage voluntary compliance with city property maintenance ordinances without the issuance of citations.
3	Proactively addressing through the citation process items identified on general policing and thoroughfare tours.
4	As time allows, focus on upgrading the condition and insuring code compliance of rental property throughout the city. This activity is to be addressed and tracked; starting with streets in alphabetical order until all rental properties in these areas has been addressed.



CITY OF EMPORIA

Department Of Inspections

REGARDING: IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPERTY MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

Citizens of Emporia;

The City of Emporia Department of Inspections ensures compliance of City ordinances and Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Codes for new construction and property maintenance of existing homes, properties, buildings and structures in our community.

The intent of compliance with these codes and ordinances is to ensure public safety, health and welfare through proper building maintenance, repair, use and the continued adherence with minimum standards of building construction, energy conservation, and accessibility for the physically handicapped and aged. Other desirable benefits of compliance are the reduction in the number of structure fires, establishing an environment capable of supporting a desirable quality of life, recruitment of tourism and business and the maintenance of existing property values.

In summer of 2009, following Building Safety Week and the City's annual Spring Cleanup in May, Emporia's Department of Inspections will implement a Property Maintenance Program targeted at both raising and ensuring the level of compliance with City ordinances and state building codes. The primary focus of the program will be increasing inspections on exterior maintenance of existing homes, properties, buildings and structures in our community. Program success depends on a plan of systematic on-going inspections of existing properties and structures throughout the City.

The purpose of this notification is to provide an opportunity before program implementation to be proactive in evaluating your home or property for items that may not be in compliance and subsequently correcting or eliminating them. After implementation, should a noncompliant item be identified during an inspection, a formal notice of violation will be provided and a designated time for problem resolution given.

Below are some examples (non-inclusive) of items that violate city ordinances and the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code:

Grass, weeds or other foreign growth: Must be maintained below twelve (12) inches on a developed lot or parcel of land in the City and eighteen (18) inches on an undeveloped lot or parcel.

Inoperable vehicle: Vehicles rendered inoperative for a period of 60 days or having parts removed or failing to have a valid license plate or inspection decal.

- Residential: One (1) vehicle permitted in a fully enclosed building or structure
- Commercial: Vehicles shall be fully screened from view via fencing with slats

Trash and debris: Property must be maintained free of discarded material, refuse, rubbish, large collections of recyclables, auto parts, appliances and other items in inoperable or non-working condition

Exterior storage: Lumber, scrap metal, construction materials, machinery components, inoperable equipment and appliances. Properly stacked, covered building material is acceptable so long as it is a part of an ongoing project and not continually stored. Discarded pallets, lumber and wooden signs used for wood burning furl appliances must be neatly stacked and covered.

Exterior home: Damaged and exposed wood must be maintained, painted and free from maintenance holes and rotting. Roof, trim and walls must be secure and not allow water or animals to penetrate. Screens, doors, porches, steps, handrails and windows must be kept in good repair and free of damaged material and glazing.

Accessory structure and fence maintenance: Accessory buildings, fences and other outbuildings must be structurally sound, maintained and painted when required to prevent deterioration. This includes detached garages, sheds, pool enclosures and walls.

During your efforts to correct or eliminate potential violations, please be aware that in accordance with the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code the following activities **require** building permits and inspections:

- Adding new/additional outlets or lights, replacing electrical wiring and panel boxes
- Adding new/additional water, sewer, waste and vent lines
- Adding new/additional heating systems, gas lines and water heaters
- Adding or making structural repairs to additions, porches, decks, storage buildings (depending on size), roofing and siding replacement

Items that **do not require** building permits and inspections include:

- Replacing existing outlets and light fixtures
- Replacing existing plumbing fixtures
- Replacing existing heating systems and water heaters in a home so long as the fuel line, appliance vent or electrical supplies do not require a change

We are hopeful that this information assists in better understanding the City's Property Maintenance Program and code requirements. Please contact the Department of Inspections should you have any question, comment or concern at: 434-634-6315.