FOCUS ON
The Quality of Life Unit: Enforcing the Standards

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President Reagan once said, “It’s time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his actions…” this saying also sums up the purpose of the Gwinnett County Quality of Life Unit.

Also known as code enforcement, this 24-member group enforces County ordinances covering such things as property maintenance, signs, solid waste, and vacant property in unincorporated parts of Gwinnett.

Last year, they investigated 10,796 complaints, issued 10,799 notices of violation, issued 502 citations, and removed 6,016 illegal signs. “To me, illegal signs are like litter and pollution – they make the community ugly and unsafe,” said Code Enforcement Officer Renee Brack.

The laws they enforce “set minimum requirements and standards regarding property and structures to promote and protect the public health, safety, convenience, order, and general welfare” of all residents in order to “preserve and improve the quality of life… and promote a sense of community, preserve the sanctity of the family, facilitate quiet and peaceful neighborhoods, limit congestion of motor vehicles, and control transiency.”

Officially, the Quality of Life Unit is part of the Gwinnett Police Special Operations Division, led by Major John T. Strickland, along with the SWAT, DUI, accident investigations, hazardous devices, crime prevention, crime-free multi-family housing, motorcycle, aviation, and K-9 units.

Civilian code enforcement officers far outnumber sworn police officers in the unit. Many have backgrounds in the Planning and Development department. The unit’s police officers literally help clean up high-crime neighborhoods. They’re all based at the One Justice Square building across from the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center, but officers work in assigned geographic territories and normally spend the day in the field. They respond to reported violations and initiate new cases.

Typically, they’ll issue a violation notice with a compliance deadline. If the violation still exists after the deadline passes, a citation will be issued and the case will be heard by the Environmental Division of Recorder’s Court. Each ordinance sets its own prescribed penalties. For example, property maintenance violations draw a minimum $250 fine, not to exceed $1,000 per day, and each day the violation continues is a separate offense. Habitual violators are subject to 60 days in jail.

Property maintenance standards cover such things as grass and weeds, fences, walls, driveways, parking, junk vehicles, outdoor storage, and overcrowding. The sign ordinance regulates the size and placement of signs, flags, banners, and some outdoor lights.
“Gwinnett has become a more densely populated, urban county with people living much closer together than they did decades ago when it was mostly rural. That prompts the need for common standards in the form of ordinances to establish quality-of-life expectations for the community,” said Quality of Life Unit Commander Lt. Jason Rozier.

The poet Robert Frost said, “Good fences make good neighbors.” Rozier agrees – as long as the fence is properly located, constructed, and maintained in accordance with Gwinnett County ordinances.

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