

MEMO FROM EMMETT MAYOR GORDON W. PETRIE

SUBJECT: IS A CLEAN-UP DAY IN EMMETT REALLY NECESSARY?

While the question posed is rhetorical, the answer, judging from the complaints received in recent months by our Code Enforcement Officer is a resounding, yes! In fact, as a community, all of us should ensure our property looks tidy *every* day, not just once a year. Several months ago, a newcomer to our Gem Community blamed me for the “unacceptable appearance” of our town. Let’s call this newcomer Mr. X (not his real name). In part, this is what he had to say:

For neighborhoods to have such an unacceptable appearance, I feel is a representation of you, the Mayor of Emmett, because you do have a duty to keep our/your city a nice, aesthetically appealing city and a respectful city.

As a former prosecuting attorney, then a trial judge and now a mayor, I’m used to being blamed for the dysfunction of others. *Ad hominem* attacks go with the territory of public office. Yet, Mr. X is only partially right, while mostly wrong. I don’t have the *duty* to keep Emmett clean and neat and aesthetically appealing—except for my own property—*that duty* belongs to each property owner. Nevertheless, I do bear the responsibility of ensuring our codes get enforced. Mr. X goes on:

I take pride in the home I live in and feel that we all should take pride in this town of Emmett that we all live in.... Thank you so much for listening to me Mr. Mayor, this was something I needed to express to get it off my chest whether it means anything or not to you.

Thank you, Mr. X, for your directness. I appreciate straight talk and I agree one hundred per cent with your statement, “[W]e all should take pride in this town of Emmett.” I also assure you this issue has always meant something to me, both personally and professionally; particularly when I had the privilege of serving as Gem County’s first chambered Lawyer Magistrate. I learned from that experience going on thirty years ago there exists a long tradition here, particularly in certain neighborhoods, where property owners have concluded they don’t have to bother with city code requirements addressing their responsibilities concerning sidewalks or junk.

So, Mr. X, this is what code enforcement has accomplished with unsightly property since your correspondence to me. Please bear in mind, the city’s philosophy is not to be draconian. First, we educate. Second, we cooperate. We give offending property owners an appropriate amount of time to make the necessary corrections. Only as a last resort will we cite the offender.

Since February through May, 21 abandoned/junk vehicle complaints have been resolved and no outstanding complaints existed through May. Prohibited accumulations, however, present a challenge at this time. Beginning in February, a backlog of eight existed. Since then, seven new ones came in, while six were resolved, leaving a backlog of nine through May. Yet, the biggest challenge is in the weed arena, especially this time of year. At the end of May, our Code Enforcement officer had 84 open cases of weeds or overhanging tree violations.

Code enforcement is a never-ending function. As humans, we have a nasty tendency to resist authority and to shirk our drudgery duties. It manifests itself in each of us at about the time we learn to say “No” sometime between 1 and 2 years of age. To paraphrase James Madison, “If [people] were angels, no government would be necessary.” Be a *good* neighbor. It’s infectious.