



The Code Enforcement Performance Audit evaluates whether current code enforcement management, policies, procedures, and practices promote consistency, transparency, and accountability. In addition, the audit analyzed Code Enforcement's compliance with laws, regulations, and procedures; its prioritization, investigation, and tracking of cases; and its communications with property owners.

We found several areas in which Code Enforcement can improve. Revised policies and procedures will help the section address inconsistencies in Code Enforcement Officers' approaches. Additionally, the section should expand its educational materials and improve its written communications with property owners. In order to strengthen management controls, the section should implement stronger records management practices and performance reporting. Finally, the development of a strategic plan for Code Enforcement will provide the section with a mission and goals that articulate the section's priorities and with performance measures that allow the section to evaluate its success in meeting its objectives. The Executive concurred with all of the audit's recommendations, and Code Enforcement has begun implementation of several recommendations.

### **Background**

The Code Enforcement section of the Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDes) investigates allegations of violations of King County Code related to zoning, building, shorelines, site development, and critical areas in unincorporated King County. Code Enforcement operates on a complaint-driven basis. The section receives complaints of violations and deploys Code Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to investigate the complaints. Through a series of site inspections, face-to-face meetings, and written communications, CEOs encourage property owners to comply with county code. If that approach does not bring properties into compliance, CEOs may pursue legal options.

### **Operations**

The Code Enforcement section has not been meeting the goals reflected in internal policies and procedures. Additionally, we determined that CEOs approach several areas of code enforcement inconsistently. Many of the stakeholders who spoke with the auditors reported improvements in Code Enforcement's responsiveness to violations and said that CEOs are available to answer questions and provide information. Others emphasized the need for greater outreach and education efforts. Additionally, we found that Code Enforcement's written letters to property owners frequently contain inaccurate information and, in some cases, do not comply with legal requirements.

### **Management Controls**

Code Enforcement's current policies and procedures overemphasize timelines – including timelines that are not actively tracked – rather than providing substantive guidance about case management. We also found that inconsistencies in

code enforcement was tied to an absence of clear policy direction. In the area of records management, we found that Code Enforcement's data files were missing key data and contained inconsistently entered data. Code Enforcement's performance reports did not provide sufficient information for evaluating the section's outcomes.

### **Strategic Planning**

Although previous audits recommended improvements to Code Enforcement's mission and goals, the section has not developed a strategic plan that integrates the principal components we suggested. Without an integrated strategic plan, the section lacks a framework that articulates its priorities and provides a means for tracking its performance.

### **Recommendations**

The report recommends several steps to improve consistency, transparency, and accountability in Code Enforcement. For example, Code Enforcement should:

- Develop educational materials and distribute these materials throughout the community. Include educational materials with letters to property owners.
- Provide better direction for records management and review samples of case files to ensure they are accurate and complete.
- Establish clear guidelines for Code Enforcement Officers in those areas where the audit identified inconsistent approaches.
- Develop a strategic plan, including a mission statement, goals, performance measures, and performance targets.

### **Executive Response**

The Executive concurred with the all of the report's recommendations.