



Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program

Enforcement or *Mediation* ?

When should they be used?

“My neighbors are not taking care of their property and I’m worried about my property values and the look of the neighborhood... What can the city do?”

Here at the Mediation Program, we often hear this kind of question. Rarely is there a simple answer.

The City of Bellevue’s Planning and Community Development Department offers two approaches to addressing issues that arise between neighbors. Both programs are free and confidential.

Enforcement-The Code Compliance program can:

- enforce the code when there is a city code in place to address your concern.
- give you information about city codes so you can be informed before contacting your neighbor.

Mediation - The Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation program can:

- help you to strategize about how best to approach your neighbor with your concerns.
- act as a neutral third party to help you talk to your neighbor and reach a mutually agreeable resolution.

When to choose the Code Compliance program

The City’s Code Compliance Section investigates violations of Bellevue’s Land Use, Noise, Nuisance, Building, and Sign Codes. There are specific guidelines as to what constitutes a violation of these codes. Examples may include such things as an accumulation of trash and debris on the property, building activity or clearing that doesn’t have permits, a Home Occupation without a permit, a single family home rented as a duplex, noisy air conditioning/heat pump machinery, business signs in a residential area, accessory sheds in the setback, inoperable vehicles parked in public view, or a recreational vehicle or boat parked in the front yard area.

The Code Compliance Section will be glad to discuss any concerns you have regarding situations in your neighborhood which you believe may be violations of the Code. Situations which cause concern yet are not violations of the Code, cannot be addressed by Code Compliance. These issues are excellent candidates for mediation.

When to choose the Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program

We often talk with citizens who are surprised to learn that the code does not address their issue, for example landscaping, tree and shrub debris, non-mechanical or construction related noise during allowable hours, property lines, easements, and others. In these situations, mediation allows the neighbor to take some action with the assistance of a neutral third party from the mediation office.

Even in situations where the Code does apply, it may be worth exploring mediation before requesting Code Compliance to take action. Requesting an enforcement action may result in unintended consequences. First, neighborly relations can deteriorate if your neighbor views calling Code Compliance as a hostile act. Worse, your neighbors might retaliate, for example they may call Code Compliance over an issue they have with your property. Neighborhood feuds can rapidly snowball in this manner.

Another possible problem with the enforcement approach is that the remedy provided may not be the one you want. For example, let’s say you’re a night owl who gets up at 10 AM. If you have a noisy neighbor problem, you are not going to be helped by the standard “quiet time” provisions in the Code. Or, you may want your neighbor to move that old rusty truck parked on the street, but a call to Code Compliance may only result in making your neighbor prove to Code Compliance that the truck is operable. After a visit from Code Compliance, your neighbor may be even less willing to accommodate a

request to move the truck than he might have been before such a visit.

Choosing mediation over either confrontation or ignoring the issue can also allow both neighbors to maintain their current relationship, whether it is simply a ‘good morning’ on the way out the door, or regular get-togethers between households. Directly confronting an issue with a neighbor sometimes leads to misunderstandings and a breakdown in communication. And ignoring an issue can lead to resentments building over time and, as a result, a deterioration of neighborly relations. Mediation can be a better option because it allows neighbors to really talk through the issues, resolve them together, and get back to a comfortable day to day life.

Contacting the mediation office may simply mean talking through an issue with one of our trained conciliators. The majority of our calls end with the citizen

deciding to address the issue themselves, with the assistance of our tips on how to resolve conflict. Another group of our callers may request that our conciliator call the other household, to help clear up misunderstandings, and address simple issues. When appropriate, neighbors may be invited to come to our office to meet together with two mediators to address the issues. The mediation meetings account for only five percent of our calls, but can be extremely useful. Seventy five percent of these mediations end with agreements.

A hallmark of mediation is that people make fully informed choices. Whether you are gathering information from Code Compliance or talking with a mediator, you will be paving the road for making a thoughtful decision about your situation. We must all live together, and creating more peaceful neighborhoods may be a small step toward creating more peace in our world.

Code Compliance: 425-452-4570
Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation: 425-452-4091



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