



**Congratulations! Graduates of the 2007 Basic Mediation Training:** Raquel Inchauste, Catherine Duffy, Omollo Gaya, Phyllis Phillipetti, Gwen Jones, Donna Stafford, Henry Smilowicz, Priya Raghav, Joan Middleton, Carol Friedman, Steve Walton, Dave Tallent, Sonny Shin, Hani Rachidi, Betty Cruz, Alex Acosta, Gayle Khaled.



City of Bellevue Department of Planning and Community Development  
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**Bellevue  
Neighborhood Mediation Program**

425-452-4091

**Update**

May 2007

## **Car parts, weeds and tarps: Does the City regulate ugly?**

By Michele Stanelun and Andrew Kidde

Let's say you are putting your house on the market, and your realtor says that getting a good price for your house depends a lot on "curb appeal." So, you pull out the blackberries by the drive, replace them with shrubs and beauty bark, and repaint your front door. These improvements help, but they also give rise to a depressing and growing awareness: your neighborhood looks terrible! It never bothered you much before, but now it seems intolerable. The couple next door doesn't seem to care that their yard is overgrown with weeds, tall grass, and sprawling bushes; and their compost pile is attracting rats. Plus they need to repaint the trim on their house (what an ugly shade of mauve). To make matters worse, the house down the street is an eyesore -- junk scattered in their front yard, including a rusty old refrigerator. They also have an old car with a flat tire parked in the drive, and you just bet that it doesn't even run. It looks like they could push the car into the carport—if they moved the stuff out first. At least they could put up a tarp, but that isn't going to make the neighborhood look any better.

Is there anything you can do about all this? Are there laws governing these eyesores? Who do you call? Can anyone help you communicate with these people? This article is written to answer these questions, and offer some guidance on dealing with messy neighbors.

First, Bellevue does have laws that deal with some of these "eyesores," but not all of them. These laws are located in the Bellevue City Code. Several sections of the Code do apply to the situations described above.

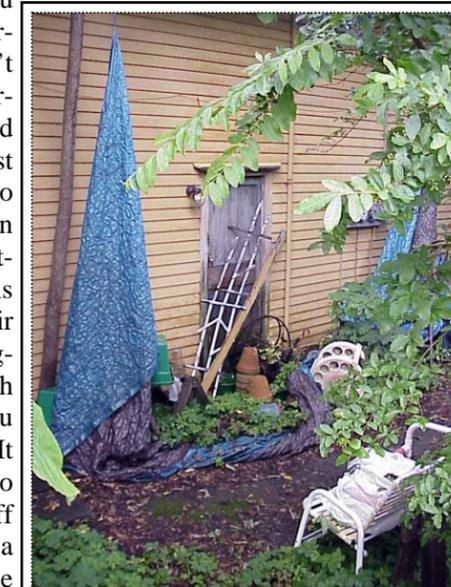
For example, Chapter 9.11, the *Anti Litter Code*, says that "The owner, occupant, or person in control of any private property or public place shall at all times maintain the premises free of litter..." The neighbor down the street may well be violating this part of the code with their "junk scattered around the yard." But this law may not apply to the neighbor with the compost bin, since com-

post bins are specifically exempted (we'll get back to the compost bin later, on account of the rat issue) Another section of the code, Chapter 9.09, *Abatement of Junk Vehicles*, may apply to the neighbor who has an old car with a flat tire. This law requires that vehicles need to be "operable," or they need to be properly screened from view.

So, some of these neighbors may be violating the law. "Well," you think, "what are they waiting for?... Isn't the law supposed to be enforced?" It turns out that these sections of the code are "complaint driven," meaning that nothing happens unless someone reports it.

But wait... before you run to your phone, let's think this through a little more. Remember, some of those

eyesores are addressed by the law, and some of them are not. Your neighbor with the overgrown and weedy yard - - sorry, no law to prevent that. The Fire Department may find that tall, dry grass is a fire hazard and order the owner to cut it, but that won't do you any good in the wet springtime. Some overgrown shrubs may be deemed traffic hazards if they block a view of a sign or driveway, but that's not likely to help either. It turns out that it's perfectly legal to have a yard-o-weeds. And that ugly



*Just some of my stuff... or horrible eyesore?*

shade of mauve that your neighbor's house is painted? ... as they say in code compliance, "we don't regulate ugly."

So, before you file a complaint with Code Compliance, you might want to talk things over with your neighbors to see if you can persuade them to deal with the legal eyesores as well as the illegal ones. It may be pretty hard to have this discussion after you have called Code Compliance on them. Even if you have only one concern, and it is clearly addressed by the code, the Code Compliance process may not get you what you want. Remember the neighbor's rusty old car? It may just need some air in the tires, and... *voila*... legal.

Negotiating with your neighbor could well result in a better solution for you than getting Code Compliance to enforce. There are three main reasons for this. First as we have noted with the old car, the Code Compliance solution may not address your concerns. You don't care if the car is operable, you care about the appearance. In a negotiation, you can be clear about what you really care about, and make sure it doesn't get lost in how the issue is addressed. The owner of the rusty car might be willing to park it in the car port, or the back alley. Second, negotiating a solution gives you an opportunity to invent solutions that benefit both parties. For example, you might suggest to your neighbor with the tall grass that you'd be willing to have your landscaper cut their grass for a couple of months, if they would be willing to repaint their trim. Remember, your realtor says that curb appeal may translate into thousands of dollars, so offering to cut their grass could be a real bargain. Third, a negotiated solution is more likely to maintain neighborly relations.

While this may not be a significant factor for someone moving away from a neighborhood – it is usual for people who aren't moving, and some of them also have concerns with the appearance of their neighbors' property.

Despite all the reasons for pursuing negotiation, perhaps you are not comfortable approaching your neighbor. In that case, call the Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program at 452-4091. We can coach you on how to negotiate with your neighbor, or we could provide a mediator who would facilitate a face to face meeting with your neighbor.

Do remember though, some things are not negotiable – especially concerns about health and safety. Remember that old freezer in your neighbor's front yard? That might be interesting to curious children—and being old and lockable, could result in a child being locked in the freezer and potentially suffocating. According to the City Code (in Chapter 9.10.030 part 3 Paragraph F) the freezer is an "attractive nuisance" and "dangerous to children." If you talk to your neighbor about that hazard and he or she doesn't deal with it promptly, you should report that violation to Code Compliance for everyone's sake. And what about that rat infested compost pile, what if your neighbor won't deal with that? It turns out that Bellevue City Code has a relatively new ordinance on rat

infestation that imposes heavy fines for those who do not comply with a notice to abate a confirmed infestation. That situation may also be a non-negotiable item for you, and you may choose the enforcement route fairly early in the game.

If you want to find effective solutions to neighborhood eyesore problems, it helps to think through the options. First investigate these questions:

- Does the Bellevue City Code address this eyesore?
- If so, does the remedy that the City will impose address your concern?
- What if you have several concerns with this neighbor and the City Code only addresses some of them?
- Might there be some solutions that would benefit both parties?
- What kind of relationship would you like with this neighbor in future?
- Are there health and safety concerns or other concerns that are not negotiable?

Once you have answered these questions, you can plan how to address your neighborhood eyesore problem in a way that is most likely to get you the result you want.

#### **Contact information:**

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

### **Resolution Washington: Success in Olympia!**

Resolution Washington, the statewide organization of Dispute Resolution Centers, was successful in getting legislation passed that will provide \$1,000,000 in state general funding over the next biennium. The Governor is expected to sign it any day now as the final stage in the appropriation process. This will be the first additional source of funding provided by the state for dispute resolution centers in over 20 years. Thanks to all of you who wrote e-mails in support of this effort! And thanks to the legislative committee of Resolution Washington for all their hard work.



## **Parent—Teen Update**

By  
Cathy Goldman

I am saddened by the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech. As mediators, we have a very powerful skill, the skill of empathic listening. We can be compassionate listeners inside as well as outside of the mediation room. Although I have no control over the violence created by people in extreme pain, I can be there to listen to people in my life who need empathy. Many people are suffering from the impact of this event, locally, nationally and throughout the world. I know I will use my gift of listening wherever I can in an effort to contribute to the well-being of the people around me. I invite you to listen to those in need too.



On Tuesday May 15<sup>th</sup>, we will have a guest presenter for our in-service training. Marc Steiner coordinated the Parent-Teen Mediation program for the Dispute Resolution Center of New Mexico and has recently moved to the Seattle area. He will share his knowledge and insights about working with parents and teens in conflict. He will lead us through many interactive exercises to let us explore the mediator/client relationship.

I hope you will be able to attend this in-service!

*"One can become angry; that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose – that is not easy"*

–Aristotle

## **Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators**

### **BNMP In-Services / Trainings**

#### **Parent Teen Mediation Training**

June 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29.  
Call Cathy for details

#### **Parent-Teen In-service**

Family Values and the Mediator as a Neutral  
Marc Steiner  
May 15th, 6:00 PM Room 1E-120

#### **Book Group**

*Breaking Roberts Rules* by Susskind and Cruikshank  
May 23 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, room 1E-118

#### **Mediator / Conciliator Peer Consultation Group**

June 13th, 5:30 in room 1E-118. Open to all conciliators and mediators.

### **Compassionate Listening Project**

#### **Compassionate Listening Workshop**

Bellevue: Eastside Friends Meetinghouse  
June 22nd and 23rd  
For more info call 360-297-2280

### **Public Conversations Project**

#### **The Power of Dialogue Workshop**

Seattle: Mountaineers Building  
July 26-28  
For more info visit: [www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org)

### **King County Dispute Resolution**

- Advanced Skills for Effective Communication, May 15
- Basic Mediation Training, June 21, 22, 26, 27, 29

#### **Program Staff:**

Program Co-Manager:	Cheryl Cohen	-	452-5222
Program Co-Manager:	Andrew Kidde	-	452-5288
Parent-Teen Coordinator:	Cathy Goldman	-	452-4091
Peer Mediation Coordinator:	Laurie Slater	-	455-1625

City of Bellevue website: <http://www.bellevuewa.gov>  
(Look for the Mediation Program under "Neighborhood Information")