

**Colerain
Township**



2011 Annual Report



Colerain Township Planning & Zoning Annual Report 2011

About the Planning & Zoning Department

The Planning & Zoning Department provides short- and long-range planning services for the Township as well as zoning permitting and enforcement. In addition, the Planning & Zoning Department provides enforcement for nuisances, junk cars, and the property maintenance code.

The Planning & Zoning Department also works in conjunction with the Director of Development with businesses seeking to locate or expand in the Township. We work closely with both commercial and residential developers and with business owners to design projects that will add to the Township's economic, environmental, and social well-being.

Staff

Susan H. Roschke, Ph.D. – Planning & Zoning Administrator
Amy Bancroft – Land Use Planner
Becky Reno – Secretary
Jerry Quinn – Inspector
Patrick Dilbert – Inspector
Wes Klein – Inspector
Angela Vance – Sharing Hope Coordinator

2011 Goals

In 2011, the Planning & Zoning Department focused on continuing high-quality customer service, while seeking ways to do more with less. Many of the 2010 goals also carried over into 2011 and will continue into 2012.

- Improve PR/information-sharing with the public

The Planning & Zoning web pages continue to expand with additional content. The email listserv continues to grow, now with over 100 subscribers. We use this list, as well as Facebook postings, to send out notices of hearings, surveys, and other events to subscribers. Surveys on zone amendments and other topics continue to be posted regularly.

- Continue to improve technology use:

- Publicize website more/better – newsletter, etc.

Regular reminders are posted on Facebook and at Trustee meetings.

- Continue to add features to Department's web site to facilitate public information and interaction.

Additional content has been added to the web pages. Regular checks are made to ensure that content is up to date.

- Participate more in Neighborhood Watch efforts.

Planning & Zoning staff have participated in some neighborhood watch meetings. We also continue to coordinate with the Neighborhood Resource Officers.

- Seek Land Use Plan recognition at Hamilton County.

All updates have been completed, recommended for approval by the Zoning Commission, and approved by the Board of Trustees. Next, the full Land Use Plan will be presented to the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission.

- The addition of the Transition District to the *Zoning Resolution* remains on hold pending direction from legal counsel.
- Each member of the zoning department staff will attend at least one relevant training program.

All full-time personnel attended at least one training or seminar.

- Department will seek a relevant grant and apply.

Several grants were sought to support the Sharing Hope program, but no awards have been received. Many grants are available to 501(c)3 organizations only.

2011 Projects and Programs

Neighborhood Stabilization Program

Colerain Township received an allocation of the funds awarded to Hamilton County under the Federal Housing and Economic Recovery Act – Neighborhood Stabilization Program in 2009. The \$585,000 is to be spent to acquire and either demolish, rehabilitate, or rebuild vacant foreclosed properties in low to moderate income census tracts in the Township. Once rehabbed, the properties are to be sold to owner-occupants who earn up to 120% of the median income. These new owners must also complete home ownership training. The proceeds, less a developer fee, return to the program to be used on additional projects.

The Township has contracted with two partner organizations to complete these rehabilitation projects: Homesteading and Urban Redevelopment Corporation (HURC) and Cincinnati Habitat for Humanity.

In 2011, rehabilitation work continued on five properties. Two were completed by Homesteading and Urban Redevelopment Corporation (HURC) and sold to new homeowners and two were completed for Habitat for Humanity partner families. Work continues on one of the properties, which should be completed and sold in early 2012. Another house purchased in 2011 had to be

demolished, as damage turned out to be too severe once our contractor was able to enter the premises. This property, as well as the one demolished in 2010, will have a new home built by Habitat for Humanity once funds become available. A portion of the Township's allocation has also been set aside to demolish another unsafe property, pending completion of legal notice requirements in early 2012.

Sharing Hope Volunteer Program

The Sharing Hope in Colerain Township program began in 2009 as a response to community needs. A part time coordinator began in the fall of that year. The history of the program follows.

Colerain Township began a property maintenance program in May of 2007. In conjunction with this program, the Township also set up a Compliance Fund as a part of the Community Development Block Grant for the area. The Compliance Fund is available only to those residents meeting the CDBG income standards. Many residents do not meet these income limits, but still are unable to take on the cost of repairs. Others are physically unable to complete exterior repairs or yard work. The Planning & Zoning Department occasionally received requests for assistance from these individuals who did not meet the limits for funding. In response, we were sometimes able to match them with volunteers or other resources. Volunteers would also contact Planning & Zoning to offer help. But, no one had the time to effectively review the residents' needs or to organize volunteer projects. Rather than hiring an additional part time inspector in the summer of 2009, Dr. Roschke suggested a volunteer coordinator to help facilitate volunteer support of residents in need.

Dr. Roschke approached two local business people interested in community service to brainstorm, and Sharing Hope was born. A fund held by a local church has been established to receive donations so that materials needed to complete some projects may be purchased. The coordinator works with residents in need to set up work projects and brings together volunteers to complete the projects. Typically, work days are scheduled one Saturday per month. All projects are exterior maintenance or repairs.

In 2011, seven projects were completed. These included several yard cleanups, removal of tree limbs and brush, paint, and minor exterior repairs such as railings, minor roof repairs, ramp repairs, eaves, and shutters. In addition, a ramp was completed, in cooperation with volunteers from Habitat for Humanity, for a family in need of wheelchair access. Also, a driveway was installed for an elderly woman unable to walk from her alternate parking to her door. An ongoing online auction is now in place to raise funds through the sale of donated items. Additional cash and in-kind donations are regularly received as well. Lowe's and Home Depot have become valuable partners in Sharing Hope efforts.

Sharing Hope continued to grow in 2011, leading to the Sharing Hope Coalition. The Coalition includes many local churches, businesses, and the Northwest Local School District. The Coalition connects Township residents with additional services such as after-school tutoring, counseling, firewood, food pantry, clothing, etc.

GIS Mapping

The Planning & Zoning Department uses the Cincinnati Area Geographic Information System (CAGIS) to study various land issues, produce site plans for residents, and maintain the Township zoning and land use maps. The Department also assists with mapping for many other Township departments. Such maps in 2011 included fireworks planning, subdivision maps and commercial site maps for the Economic Development Director's use, Fire Department infrastructure locations, and maps for Parks Department grants. CAGIS also facilitates the use of ownership data for applications and mailings.

Litter Program

Planning & Zoning coordinated Colerain Township's participation in the Hamilton County Sheriff Community Service Work Detail Litter Collection Program in 2011. Inmates pick up trash along designated roadsides every two weeks, weather permitting. Parks & Services then picks up the bags of trash. Planning & Zoning completes the paperwork, coordinates with community input to designate the cleanup locations, and provides the details to the program office. This program typically collects about 1,000 pounds of litter in the assigned areas of Colerain Township each quarter.

General litter education and impact information is also included among the Planning & Zoning web pages.

Board and Commission Activities

The Planning & Zoning Department staffs the Land Use Advisory Board, Board of Zoning Appeals, Zoning Commission, and Landscape Advisory Board. These boards, made up of citizen volunteers appointed by the Board of Trustees, review and make determinations or recommendations on planning and zoning matters assigned to them. The Land Use Advisory Board maintains the Township's land use map and provides informal recommendations on zoning regulations. The Board of Zoning Appeals is a quasi-judicial body that hears requests for variances to the strict application of the *Zoning Resolution*. The BZA also hears requests for conditional uses and changes to nonconforming uses. The Zoning Commission provides formal recommendations to the Board of Trustees on amendments to the *Zoning Resolution* text and the zoning map. The Landscape Advisory Board reviews landscape plans for development projects and some appeals cases, providing recommendations to the appropriate boards. These citizen volunteers provide a valuable service to the Township by sharing their expertise and perspective.

The **Land Use Advisory Board** completed the scheduled five-year land use plan update in 2010. In 2011, this Board was mostly idle, awaiting its next tasks with future updates and potential zoning map amendments. Recognition of the full land use plan update will be requested from the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission in early 2012.

The **Board of Zoning Appeals** heard 21 cases in 2011, as follows:

BZA2004-14	conditional use for recreational/retail structure – <i>final review</i>	granted
BZA2011-01	variance to allow a taller accessory structure	granted
BZA2011-02	variance for oversize signage	granted
BZA2011-03	conditional use for recreational use in residential district	granted
BZA2011-04	conditional use for temporary office trailer at church	granted
BZA2011-05	variance for additional outside lighting	granted
BZA2011-06	variance for an addition in the front setback on a corner lot	granted
BZA2011-07	conditional use for an accessory building for a church	granted
BZA2011-08	variance for oversize signage – <i>temporary approval</i>	granted
BZA2011-09	variance for oversize fence in front yard – <i>current owner only</i>	granted
BZA2011-10	conditional use for temporary office trailer at school	granted
BZA2011-11	variance sign location	granted
BZA2011-12	variance for 6’ privacy fence in side yard – <i>partial approval</i>	granted
BZA2011-13	variance for over-height privacy fence	granted
BZA2011-14	variance for over-height open fence in front yard on corner lot	granted
BZA2011-15	variance for over-height fence in all yards	granted
BZA2011-16	variance for oversize signage	granted
BZA2011-17	variance to side setback for residential addition	granted
BZA2011-18	variance for oversize signage	granted
BZA2011-19	variance to parking surface in residential district	denied
BZA2011-20	variance to setback for veterinary use	denied

The **Zoning Commission** heard 14 cases, as follows:

ZA1998-01	Minor Amendment – Show Me’s – 9343 Colerain Ave
ZA2001-04	Forevergreen Landscaping – Revised Preliminary Plan
ZA2001-04	Forevergreen Landscaping – FDP
ZA2005-03	Stone Creek – Salon Concepts – Minor Amendment
ZA2005-03	Stone Creek – AT&T Store – Minor Amendment
ZA2010-06	Liberty Nursing Center of Colerain – FDP
ZA2011-01	7161 Eagle Creek – American Scaffolding – PD-B Preliminary
ZA2011-01	7161 Eagle Creek – American Scaffolding – FDP
ZA2011-02	Commercial Lighting Text Amendment
ZA2011-03	Minimum House Size Text Amendment
ZA2011-04	Northgate Mall – New Preliminary Plan
ZA2011-04	Northgate Mall – FDP Signage

ZA2011-04 Northgate Mall – TGIFriday’s – Minor Amendment

ZA2011-04 Northgate Mall – Cheddar’s – FDP

In addition, the Commission approved extensions for FDPs for ZA 91-2, Lot 10, 11325 Dallas Blvd and ZA2009-01 Prechtel Rd/Veranda.

The **Landscape Advisory Board** reviewed landscape plans for the Zoning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals cases as listed above. They have also responded to some citizen inquiries regarding landscape installations on these and prior-year cases.

Property Maintenance Compliance Fund

The Township established a fund in 2007, utilizing a portion of its CDBG allotment, to assist low-income property owners in meeting the requirements of the property maintenance code. The fund provides a reimbursement grant to qualifying owners for work done to address a property maintenance code item. In 2011, we processed eight applications. Three of the homeowners did not have sufficient matching funds to go through with their projects and one did not turn in all the necessary paperwork. Four owners were granted a total of \$1,866.84 for repairs at their homes.

Open Space and Subdivisions

No new major subdivisions or open space subdivisions were processed in 2011. A few minor revisions were reviewed.

Permits

The Department processed 412 permits, distributed as shown in Figure 1 below. Figure 2 shows the pattern of permits over the period 2005 to 2011. As you can see, fence and driveway permits are down after peak numbers in 2010, accessory structure and deck permits are down after increasing for the past 3 years, and commercial building additions, residential additions, and single family dwelling permits have hit all-time lows. No commercial parking lot permits were issued in 2011. Other permits had an all-time high and sign permits are increasing once again after their first decrease since 2005. Overall, permit numbers since 2002 are continuing to drop off. While permit numbers were fairly steady from 2005-2009, the numbers have dropped from 499 in 2009 to 455 in 2010, and now at an all-time low since 1999 with 412 permits in 2011. See Figure 3 below.

The Department also processed seven zoning verification requests and two cell tower acknowledgement requests in 2011.

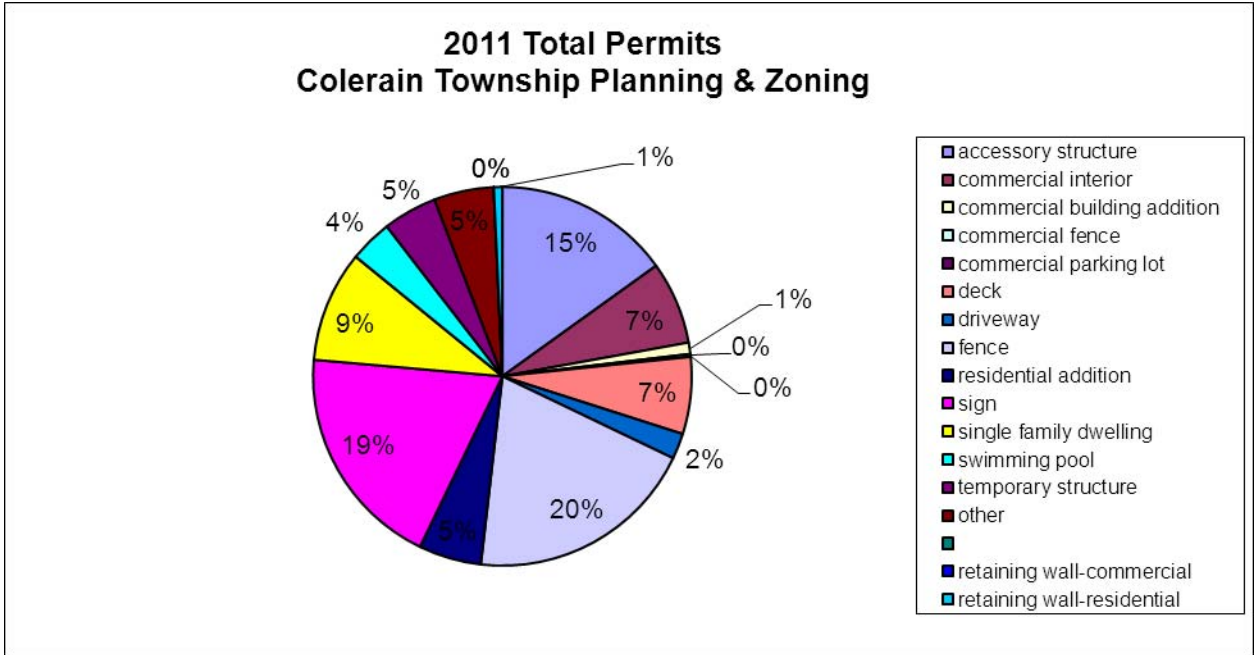


Figure 1

Permits 2005 - 2011

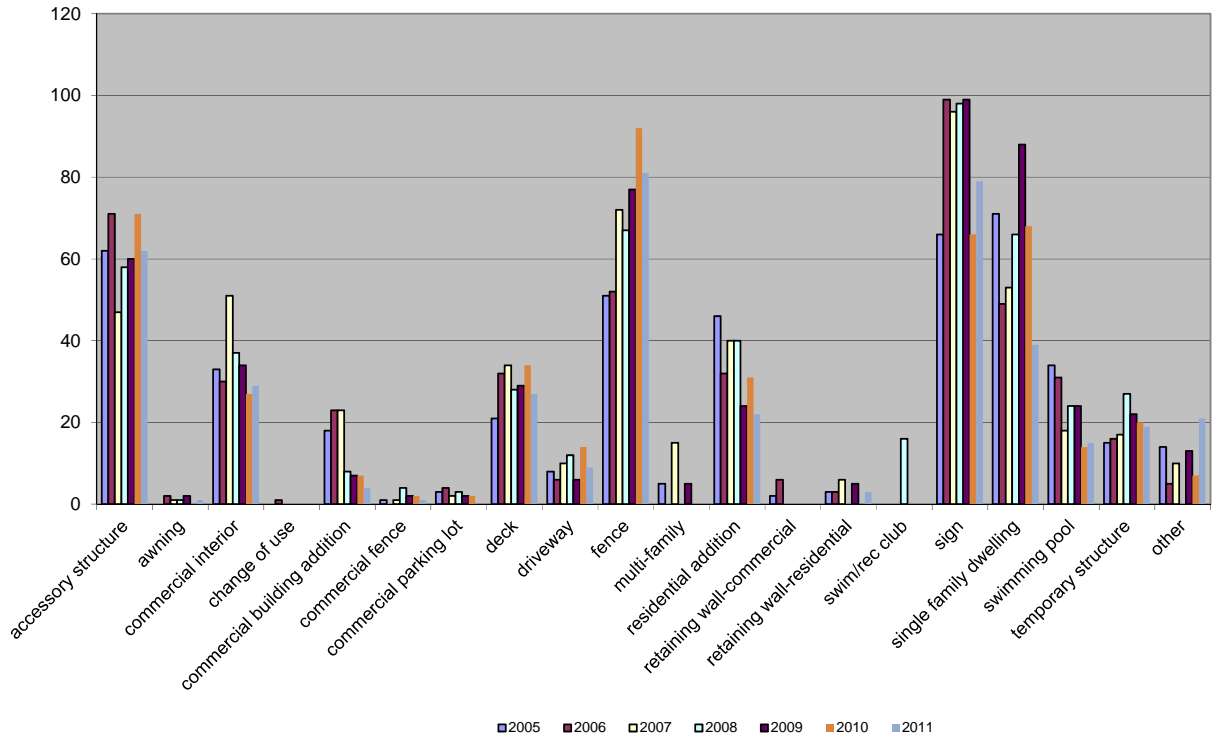


Figure 2

Permits 1999 - 2011

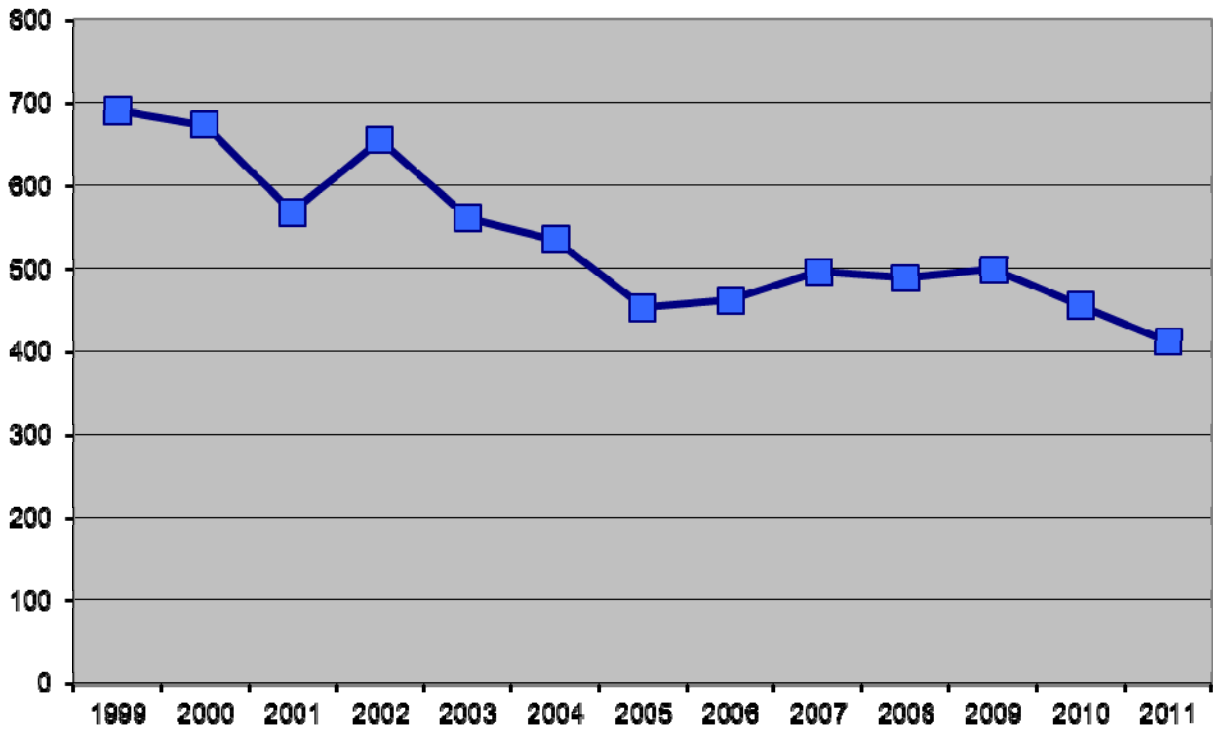


Figure 3

Violations

Overall, violations have hit the lowest number since 2006 with 1712. From 2010-2011 there were 446 fewer violations. 2010 was a peak year not only in individual violations with 2158 but with most of the specific violations as well. None of the specific violations numbers increased besides waste receptacle violations that went from 5 violations in 2010 to 18 in 2011. Lawn parking, property maintenance and recreational vehicles violations had the lowest numbers since 2006. Tall grass and trash violations were down from 2010 peak numbers. Tall grass still reigned as the most complaints once again with 596 violations including many vacant properties. See Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 6 shows the overall trend in violations since 1999. The ongoing foreclosure and vacant property issue as well as the overall economic downturn have contributed to these figures. Many people who are cited do not have the necessary funds to make the required repairs. In many cases, even with compliance fund support, the costs are too much for them. In addition, the work involved in addressing violations impacts the entire Department, as well as support staff in Administration who field many of our calls. Because violation notices are sent by Certified Mail, they represent a significant administrative cost in addition to personnel costs.

2011 Total Violations Colerain Township Planning & Zoning

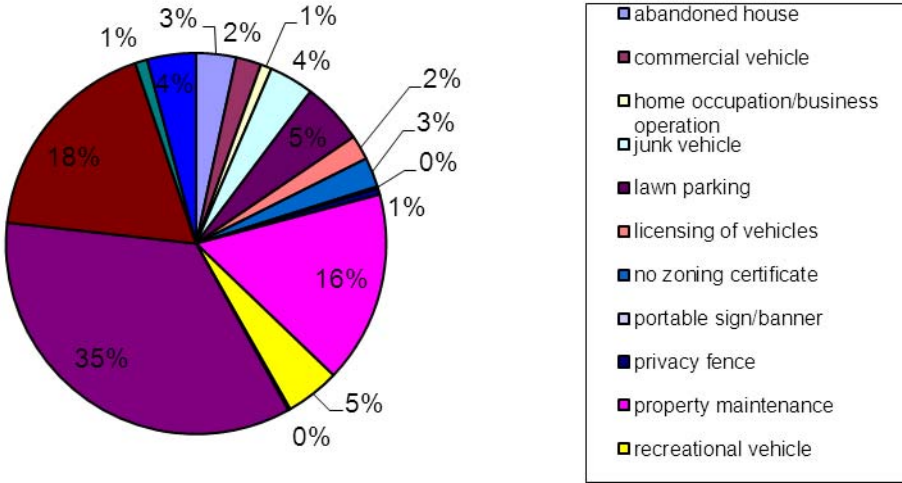


Figure 4

Violations 2005 - 2011

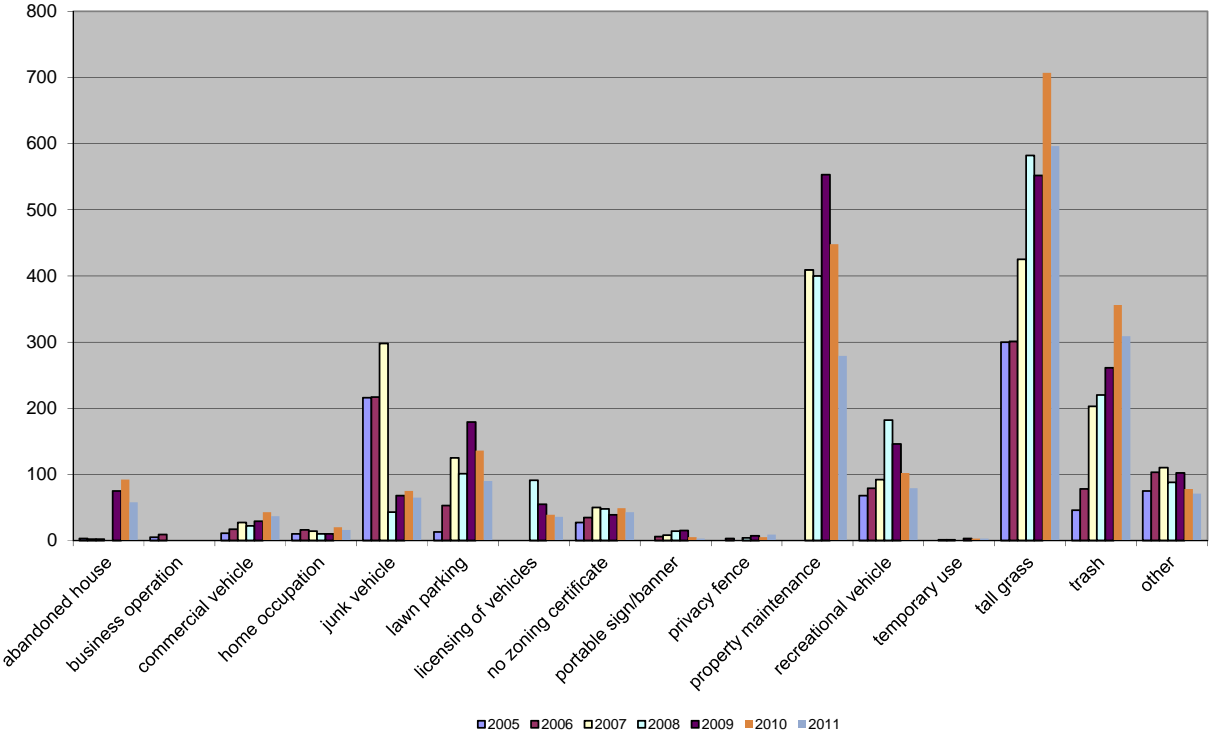


Figure 5

Total Violations 1999 - 2011

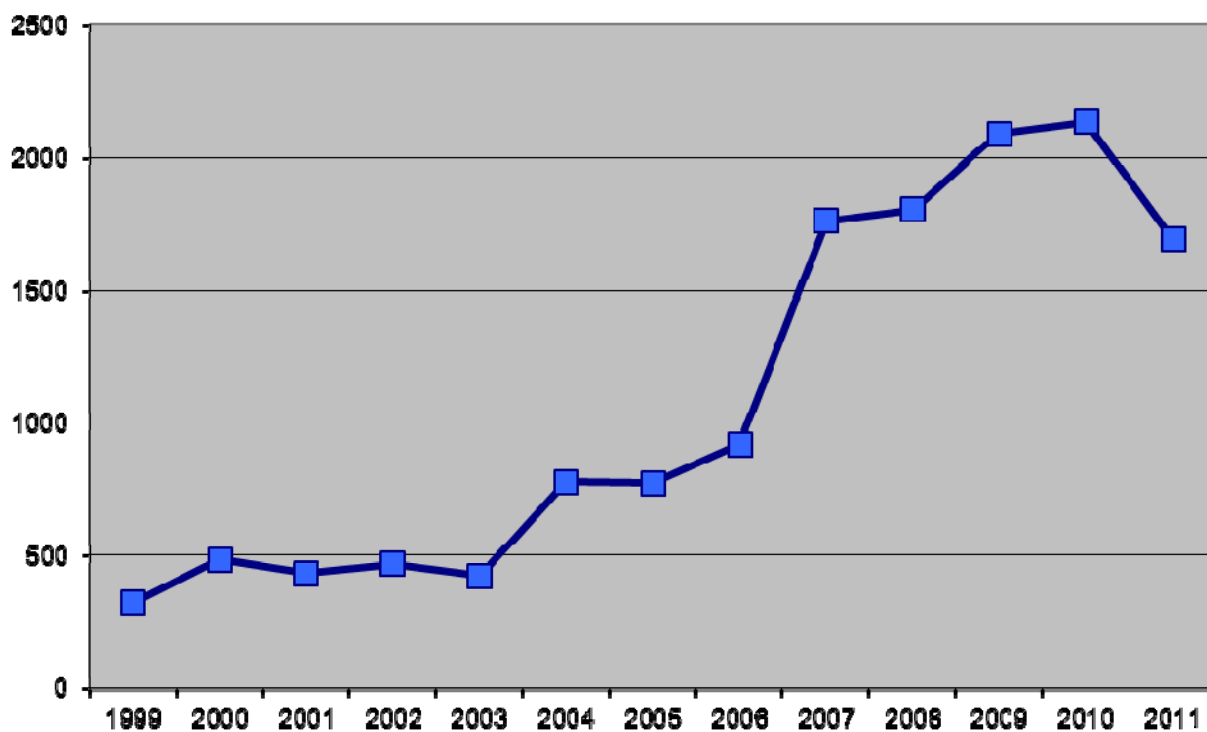


Figure 6

Abatement Assessments

The Township has the authority under ORC 505.87 to abate nuisances by cutting neglected grass or removing trash or debris. This work is done following a series of attempts to contact the owner and a public declaration of the nuisance by the Board of Trustees. The costs are charged back as a lien on the property and are paid either with the next tax bill or when the property sells. In 2011, we sent \$72,750.05 in assessments to the Hamilton County Auditor covering the abatement of 150 properties. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, this represents a decrease in both the number of abatements and the amount spent from the all-time high spent in 2010. As in recent years, most of the abated properties are vacant, and many of those vacant properties are foreclosures. The time between when the property is vacated and when the mortgage holder takes possession and responsibility can often be several months. Individual abatement costs have a wide range, depending on the extent of the problem and size of the lot to be abated. Also, we have limited options for contractors who can provide this service—often tall grass or weeds require special equipment beyond that of a typical lawn service. But, the decrease in abatements in 2011 suggests that more of the foreclosed properties are being returned to occupied status and more are being maintained by the foreclosing entities prior to sale.

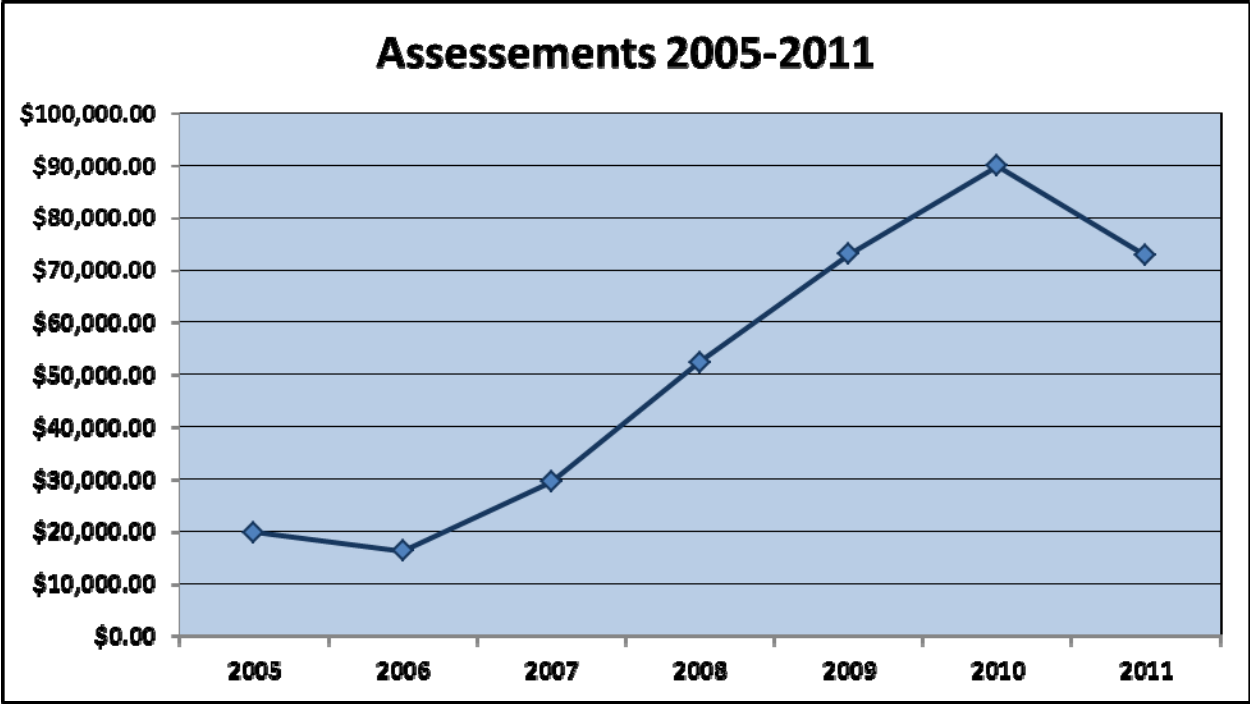


Figure 7

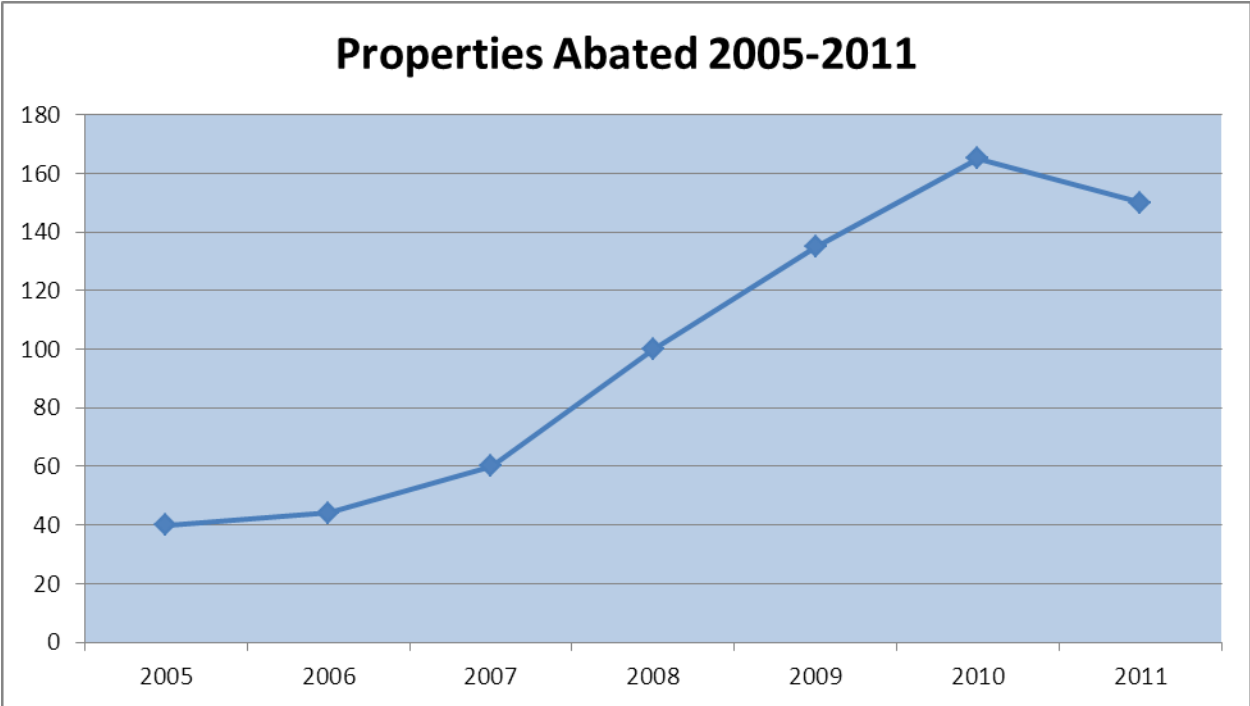


Figure 8

Calls and Site Visits

A primary activity of the Planning & Zoning staff is responding to inquiries from residents, developers, and businesses. Inspections are performed to verify or identify violations. Repeat inspections are performed to verify that violations have been corrected. Inspections also verify that development projects are completed according to approved plans. In addition, staff often greets visitors seeking Fire Inspection services.

Over the course of 2011, the Department responded to nearly 8,288 calls, emails, and in-person inquiries and went on 6,058 site visits.

Calls broke down as follows (2008-2010 figures are shown as well for comparison):

	2008	2009	2010	2011
• Tall grass complaints	625	479	570	662
• Junk vehicle complaints	163	107	109	109
• Property maintenance complaints	818	1205	731	486
• Lawn parking complaints	86	138	106	125
• Trash complaints	282	264	295	379
• Other complaints	1380	1188	1207	942
• Zoning classification inquiries	585	646	385	379
• Permit and application questions	3030	2982	2622	3408
• Other questions	1600	1506	1453	1798

Site visits broke down as follows:

• Grass or trash	1004	1439	2442	2499
• Junk vehicles	161	174	148	163
• Zoning violations	391	533	630	577
• Zoning Commission cases	16	16	24	13
• Board of Zoning Appeals cases	20	23	20	19
• Property maintenance	1633	1701	2445	1748
• Other inspections	703	742	946	1039

For more information...

Further information and up to date charts are available on the Planning & Zoning webpages. See www.coleraintwp.org/zoning.cfm. Also see information there on our Facebook page and Listserv.