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**Bryan County Derelict Property Ordinance**

**ORDINANCE NO. 04 -2020**

AN ORDINANCE BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR BRYAN COUNTY RELATING TO DERELICT PROPERTY; TO PROVIDE FOR DEFINITIONS; TO PROVIDE FOR PROCEDURES FOR A DECLARATION OF A PUBLIC NUISANCE; TO PROVIDE FOR A COMPLAINT AND APPEAL PROCESS; TO PROVIDE POWERS OF COUNTY OFFICERS; TO PROVIDE FOR SERVICE OF PROCESS; TO PROVIDE A LIMITATION OF LIABILITY; TO PROVIDE FOR ENFORCEMENT; TO PROVIDE PENALTIES; TO PROVIDE FOR SEVERABILITY; TO PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE DATE; TO REPEAL ALL ORDINANCES AND PARTS OF ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HEREWITH; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

SECTION ONE

WHEREAS the Bryan County Board of Commissioners (“BOC”) has determined that derelict property has an injurious effect to surrounding property owners and the general health, safety and welfare of the residents of Bryan County; and

WHEREAS the BOC has determined the existing County ordinances do not sufficiently address the procedures for declaring a derelict property a public nuisance and establishing procedures for abating the nuisance; and

WHEREAS O.C.G.A. Section 36-1-20 grants authority to the County to adopt ordinances for the purpose of protecting and preserving the public health, safety, and welfare.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the BOC hereby amends the Bryan County Code of Ordinances as follows.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 104 is hereby added to the Code of Ordinances of Bryan County which shall include the following language:

“CHAPTER 104 – DERELICT PROPERTY

Article I

**Sec. 104-1. Short Title.**

This Article shall be known as the “Bryan County Derelict Property Ordinance.”

**Sec. 104-2. Definitions.**

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As used in this article, the term:

- (a) *Applicable codes* means any optional housing or abatement standard provided in O.C.G.A. title 8, chapter 2 as adopted by ordinance or operation of law, or other property-maintenance standards as adopted by ordinance or operation of law, or general nuisance law, relative to the safe use of real property; any fire or life safety code as provided for in O.C.G.A. title 25, chapter 2; and any building codes adopted by local ordinance prior to October 1, 1991, or the minimum standard codes provided in O.C.G.A. title 8, chapter 2 after October 1, 1991, provided that such building or minimum standard codes for real-property improvements shall be deemed to mean those building or minimum standard codes in existence at the time such real property improvements were constructed unless otherwise provided by law.
- (b) *Closing* means causing a dwelling, building, or structure to be vacated and secured against unauthorized entry.
- (c) *Drug crime* means an act which is a violation of O.C.G.A. title 16, chapter 13, article 2, known as the "Georgia Controlled Substances Act".
- (d) *Dwellings, buildings, or structures* means any building or structure or part thereof used and occupied for human habitation or commercial, industrial, or business uses, or intended to be so used, and includes any outhouses, improvements, and appurtenances belonging thereto or usually enjoyed therewith and also includes any building or structure of any design. As used in this article, the term "dwellings, buildings, or structures" shall not mean or include any farm, any building or structure located on a farm, or any agricultural facility or other building or structure used for the production, growing, raising, harvesting, storage, or processing of crops, livestock, poultry, or other farm products.
- (e) *Graffiti* means any inscriptions, words, figures, paintings, or other defacements that are written, marked, etched, scratched, sprayed, drawn, painted, or engraved on or otherwise affixed to any surface of public or private property by means of any aerosol paint container, broad-tipped marker, gum label, paint stick, graffiti stick, etching equipment, brush, or other device capable of scarring or leaving a visible mark on any surface without prior authorization from the owner or occupant of the property.
- (f) *Governing authority* means the Board of Commissioners of Bryan County, Georgia.
- (g) *Interested party* means:
  - (1) The "owner";
  - (2) Persons in possession of said property and premises;

- (3) Those parties having an interest in the property as revealed by a certification of title to the property conducted in accordance with the title standards of the State Bar of Georgia;
  - (4) Those parties having filed a notice in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 48-3-9; and
  - (5) Any other party having an interest in the property whose identity and address are reasonably ascertainable from the records of the County or records maintained in the county courthouse or by the clerk of court; provided, however, interested party shall not include the holder of the benefit or burden of any easement or right-of-way whose interest is properly recorded which interest shall remain unaffected.
- (h) *County* means Bryan County, Georgia.
  - (i) *Owner* means the holder of the title in fee simple and every mortgagee of record.
  - (j) *Public authority* means any member of the governing authority, any director of a public housing authority, or any officer who is in charge of any department or branch of government (municipal, county or state) relating to health, fire, life safety, building regulations, or to other activities concerning dwellings, buildings, or structures, or use of private property within Bryan County.
  - (k) *Public officer* means the Bryan County Administrator, who is authorized to exercise the powers prescribed by article, and any officer or employee of Bryan County to whom they delegate such authority.
  - (l) *Repair* means altering or improving a dwelling, building, or structure so as to bring the structure into compliance with the applicable codes in the jurisdiction where the property is located and the cleaning or removal of debris, trash, and other materials present and accumulated which create a health or safety hazard in or about any dwelling, building, or structure.
  - (m) *Resident* means any person residing in the jurisdiction where the property is located on or after the date on which the alleged nuisance arose.

**Sec. 104-3. Duty of owners of real property and structures thereon.**

It is the duty of the owner of every dwelling, building, structure, or private property within unincorporated Bryan County to construct and maintain such dwelling, building, structure, or property in conformance with applicable codes in force within Bryan County or such laws and ordinances which regulate and prohibit activities on private property and which

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declare it to be a public nuisance to construct or maintain any dwelling, building, structure, or use private property in violation of such codes, laws or ordinances.

**Sec. 104-4. Declaration of public nuisance.**

Every dwelling, building, or structure within Bryan County which (i) is constructed or maintained in violation of applicable codes in force within Bryan County; (ii) is unfit for human habitation or commercial, industrial, or business use or occupancy due to inadequate provisions for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, or open spaces; (iii) poses an imminent harm to life or other property due to fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, storm or other natural catastrophe; (iv) is vacant and used in the commission of drug crimes; (v) is occupied and used repeatedly for the commission of illegal activities, including facilitating organized crime or criminal enterprises, after written notice to the owner of such activities conducted therein; (vi) is abandoned; or (vii) otherwise constitutes an endangerment to the public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions, is hereby declared a public nuisance. Every private property within Bryan County on which is being regularly conducted any activity or land use in violation of applicable laws and ordinances, including the zoning ordinance of this County, is hereby declared to be a public nuisance. Property which may be deemed esthetically substandard or deteriorating shall not meet the definition of a public nuisance unless the overall condition or use of the property results in impaired health, safety, transmission of disease, infant mortality, or crime.

**Sec.104-5. Powers of the Bryan County Administrator or their designee.**

- (a) In carrying out their duties pursuant to this article, the Bryan County Administrator or their designee to whom their authority is assigned shall, in addition to those powers otherwise conferred upon or delegated to them by the Charter and other ordinances of Bryan County, be empowered to:
- (1) Investigate and inspect the condition of dwellings, buildings, structures, and private property within Bryan County to determine those structures and property uses in violation of this article. Entries onto private property shall be made in a manner so as to cause the least possible inconvenience; provided, however, the public officer shall not enter into any occupied dwelling or structure without first having obtained the consent of the owner or a person in possession. In those cases where consent to entry is denied after reasonable request, the public officer may apply to the Magistrate Court for an administrative search warrant upon showing probable cause that a violation exists.
  - (2) To retain experts including certified real estate appraisers, qualified building contractors, and qualified building inspectors, engineers, surveyors, accountants, and attorneys.

- (3) To appoint and fix the duties of such officers and employees of Bryan County as they deem necessary to carry out the purposes of this article; and
  - (4) To delegate any of their functions and powers under this article to such officers, employees and agents as they may designate.
- (b) In addition to the procedures set forth in this article, the Bryan County Administrator or their designee(s) may issue citations for violations of state minimum standard codes, optional building, fire, life safety and other codes adopted by ordinance, and conditions declared to constitute a public health or safety hazard or general nuisance, and to seek enforcement of such citations before the Magistrate Court prior to issuing a complaint in rem as provided in this article. Nothing in this article shall be construed to impair or limit in any way the power of Bryan County to define and declare nuisances and to cause their removal or abatement by other summary proceedings.

**Sec. 104-6 Complaint in rem in County Magistrate Court; procedure; lien; appeal.**

- (a) Whenever a request is filed with the public officer by a public authority or by at least five residents of the County charging that any dwelling, building, structure, or property is unfit for human habitation or for commercial, industrial, or business use and not in compliance with applicable codes; is vacant and being used in the commission of drug crimes; or constitutes an endangerment to the public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions, the public officer may make an investigation or inspection of the specific dwelling, building, structure, or property and make a written report of their findings. Such officer shall be guided in their investigation by documenting conditions, which include but are not limited to:
- (1) Defects therein increasing the hazards of fire, accidents, or other calamities;
  - (2) Lack of adequate ventilation, light, or sanitary facilities;
  - (3) Dilapidation;
  - (4) Disrepair by failure to conform to applicable codes and ordinances;
  - (5) Structural defects which render the structure unsafe for human habitation or occupancy;
  - (6) Uncleanliness; or
  - (7) The presence of graffiti which is visible from adjoining public or private property.

- (b) If the public officer's investigation or inspection identifies that any dwelling, building, structure, or property is unfit for human habitation or for commercial, industrial, or business use and not in compliance with applicable codes; is vacant and being used in connection with the commission of drug crimes; or constitutes an endangerment to the public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions, the public officer shall file a complaint in rem in the Magistrate Court of Bryan County against the lot, tract, or parcel of real property on which such dwelling, building, or structure is situated or where such public health hazard or general nuisance exists and shall cause summons and a copy of the complaint to be served on the interested parties in such dwelling, building, or structure. The complaint shall identify the subject real property by appropriate street address and official tax map reference; identify the interested parties; state with particularity the factual basis for the action; and contain a statement of the action sought by the public officer to abate the alleged nuisance. The summons shall notify the interested parties that a hearing will be held before the Magistrate Court at a date and time certain and at a place within the County where the property is located. Such hearing shall be held not less than 15 days nor more than 45 days after the filing of said complaint in the proper court. The interested parties shall have the right to file an answer to the complaint and to appear in person or by attorney and offer testimony at the time and place fixed for hearing.
- (c) If, after such notice and hearing, the court determines that the dwelling, building, or structure in question is unfit for human habitation or is unfit for its current commercial, industrial, or business use and not in compliance with applicable codes; is vacant and being used in connection with the commission of drug crimes; or constitutes an endangerment to the public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions, the court shall state, in writing, findings of fact in support of such determination and shall issue and cause to be served upon the interested parties that have answered the complaint or appeared at the hearing an order:
- (1) If the repair, alteration, or improvement of the said dwelling, building, or structure can be made at a reasonable cost in relation to the present value of the dwelling, building, or structure, requiring the owner, within the time specified in the order, to repair, alter, or improve such dwelling, building, or structure so as to bring it into full compliance with the applicable codes relevant to the cited violation; and, if applicable, to secure by closing the structure so that it cannot be used in connection with the commission of drug crimes; or
  - (2) If the repair, alteration, or improvement of the said dwelling, building, or structure in order to bring it into full compliance with applicable codes relevant to the cited violations cannot be made at a reasonable cost in relation to the present value of the dwelling, building, or structure, requiring the owner, within the time specified in the order, to demolish and remove such dwelling, building, or structure and all debris from the property.

For purposes of this section, the court shall make its determination of reasonable cost in relation to the present value of the dwelling, building, or structure without consideration of the value of the land on which the structure is situated; provided, however, that costs of the preparation necessary to repair, alter, or improve a structure may be considered; and, provided further, that if the unsatisfactory condition is limited solely to the presence of graffiti, the dwelling, building or structure shall not be ordered demolished or closed, but its owner may be ordered to repair the same by cleaning or removal of the graffiti. Income and financial status of the owner shall not be a factor in the court's determination. The present value of the structure and the costs of repair, alteration, or improvement may be established by affidavits of real estate appraisers with a Georgia appraiser classification as provided in O.C.G.A. title 43, chapter 39A, qualified building contractors, or qualified building inspectors without actual testimony presented. Costs of repair, alteration, or improvement of the structure shall be the cost necessary to bring the structure into compliance with the applicable codes relevant to the cited violations in force in the jurisdiction.

- (d) If the owner fails to comply with an order to repair or demolish the dwelling, building, or structure, the public officer shall cause such dwelling, building, or structure to be repaired, altered, or improved, or to be vacated and closed, or demolished within 270 days of the expiration of time specified in the order for abatement by the owner. Any time during which such action is prohibited by a court order issued pursuant to subsection (c) of this section or any equitable relief granted by a court of competent jurisdiction shall not be counted toward the 270 days in which such abatement action shall commence. The public officer shall cause to be posted on the main entrance of the building, dwelling, or structure a placard with the following words:

"This building is unfit for human habitation or commercial, industrial, or business use and does not comply with the applicable codes or has been ordered secured to prevent its use in connection with drug crimes or constitutes an endangerment to public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions. The use or occupation of this building is prohibited and unlawful."

- (e) If the public officer has the structure demolished, reasonable effort shall be made to salvage reusable materials for credit against the cost of demolition. The proceeds of any moneys received from the sale of salvaged materials shall be used or applied against the cost of the demolition and removal of the structure, and proper records shall be kept showing application of sales proceeds. Any such sale of salvaged materials may be made without the necessity of public advertisement and bid. The public officer and governing authority are relieved of any and all liability resulting from or occasioned by the sale of any such salvaged materials, including, without limitation, defects in such salvaged materials.

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- (f) The amount of the cost of demolition, including all court costs, appraisal fees, administrative costs incurred by the tax commissioner, and all other costs necessarily associated with the abatement action, including restoration to grade of the real property after demolition, shall be a lien against the real property upon which such cost was incurred.
- (g) The lien provided for in subsection (f) shall attach to the real property upon the filing of a certified copy of the order requiring repair, closure, or demolition in the office of the clerk of superior court in Bryan County and shall relate back to the date of the filing of the lis pendens notice required under subsection 104-7(a)(4). The clerk of superior court shall record and index such certified copy of the order in the deed records of the County and enter the lien on the general execution docket. The lien shall be superior to all other liens on the property, except liens for taxes to which the lien shall be inferior, and shall continue in force until paid. After filing a certified copy of the order with the clerk of superior court, the public officer shall, within 90 days of the completion of repairs, demolition or closure, forward a copy of the order and a final statement of costs to the county tax commissioner.
- (h) It shall be the duty of the county tax commissioner to collect the amount of the lien in conjunction with the collection of ad valorem taxes on the property and to collect the amount of the lien as if it were a real property ad valorem tax, using all methods available for collecting real property ad valorem taxes, including specifically O.C.G.A. § 48-4-5; provided, however, that the limitation of O.C.G.A § 48-4-78 which requires 12 months of delinquency before commencing a tax foreclosure shall not apply; provided, further, that redemption of property from the lien may be made in accordance with the provisions of O.C.G.A. §§ 48-4-80 and 48-4-81. The tax commissioner may initiate enforcement of liens imposed under this section at any time following receipt of the final determination of costs from the public officer. The unpaid lien amount shall bear interest and penalties from and after the date of final determination of costs in the same amount as applicable to interest and penalties on unpaid real property ad valorem taxes.
- (i) The tax commissioner shall remit the amount collected to the governing authority of the County whose ordinance is being enforced. The tax commissioner may retain an amount equal to the cost of administering collection of the lien. Any such amount collected and retained for administration shall be deposited in the general fund of the County to pay the cost of administering the lien.
- (j) The governing authority may waive and release any such lien imposed on property upon the owner of such property entering into a contract with the County agreeing to a timetable for rehabilitation of the real property or the dwelling, building, or structure on the property and demonstrating the financial means to accomplish such rehabilitation.

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- (k) Review of a court order requiring the repair, alteration, improvement, or demolition of a dwelling, building, or structure shall be by direct appeal to the superior court under O.C.G.A. § 5-3-29.

**Sec. 104-7. Service of complaints or orders upon owners and parties in interest.**

- (a) Summons and copies of the complaint shall be served in the following manner:
- (1) In all cases, a copy of the complaint and summons shall be conspicuously posted on the subject dwelling, building, structure, or property within three business days of filing of the complaint and at least 14 days prior to the date of the hearing.
  - (2) At least 14 days prior to the date of the hearing, the public officer shall mail copies of the complaint and summons by certified mail or statutory overnight delivery, return receipt requested, to all interested parties whose identities and addresses are readily ascertainable. Copies of the complaint and summons shall also be mailed by first-class mail to the property address to the attention of the occupants, if any;
  - (3) For interested parties whose mailing address is unknown, a notice stating the date, time, and place of the hearing shall be published in the newspaper in which the sheriff's advertisements appear in such County once a week for two consecutive weeks prior to the hearing; and
  - (4) A notice of lis pendens shall be filed in the office of the clerk of superior court in which the dwelling, building, structure, or property is located at the time of filing the complaint in Magistrate Court.
- (b) The public officer shall cause an affidavit of service to be filed of record in the Magistrate Court prior to the hearing showing compliance with the service requirements of this section. Such affidavit shall constitute a prima facie showing of minimum procedural due process and shall constitute sufficient proof that service was perfected.
- (c) Orders and other filings made subsequent to service of the initial complaint shall be served in the manner provided in this section on every interested party who answers the complaint or appears at the hearing. Any interested party who fails to answer or appear at the hearing shall be deemed to have waived all further notice in the proceedings.

**Sec. 104-8. Limitation of liability for code enforcement; no special duty created.**

It is the intent of this article to protect the public health, life safety and general welfare of properties and occupiers of buildings and structures within Bryan County in general, but

not to create any special duty or relationship with any individual person or to any specified property within or without the boundaries of Bryan County. Approval of a permit and inspection of a property shall in no manner guarantee or warrant to the owner or occupants thereof that said property has been constructed, maintained, or operated in conformance with applicable codes, laws and regulations. Bryan County reserves the right to assert all available immunities and defenses in any action seeking to impose monetary damages upon Bryan County, its officers, employees and agents arising out of any alleged failure or breach of duty or relationship as may now exist or hereafter be created. To the extent any federal or state law, regulation, or ordinance requires compliance as a condition precedent to the issuance of a permit, plan or design approval, inspection or other activity by Bryan County, its officers, employees and agents, issuance of such permit, approval, or inspection shall not be deemed to constitute a waiver or estoppel of the condition precedent, and it shall remain the obligation and responsibility of the owner, their design professional(s), and contractor(s) to satisfy such legal requirements.

*Sections 104-9 through 104-30 are hereby reserved.”*

SECTION THREE

All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed.

SECTION FOUR

If any section, clause, sentence or phrase of this ordinance is held to be invalid or unconstitutional by any court of competent jurisdiction, then said holding shall in no way effect the validity of the remaining portions of this ordinance.

SECTION FIVE

This ordinance shall become effective immediately upon its adoption by Bryan County Board of Commissioners.

SO ORDAINED, this 12 day of May, 2020

  
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Chairman  
Bryan County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Donna Watson

County Clerk

