



MAYOR JOSHUA A. GARCIA

CITY OF HOLYOKE

November 18, 2022

Honorable Holyoke City Council
536 Dwight Street
Holyoke MA 01040

Re: City Council Order Regarding Flex Squad

Dear Honorable City Councilors:

Please accept this communication as response to your order *“that the mayor and the flex squad be invited in to discuss what it is, as well as its effectiveness and what steps they are taking to make sure that the neighborhoods are cleaned, not just on private property but public property as well.”*

The Flex Squad is a public health initiative aimed to address community conditions like blight, graffiti, overgrowth, code violations, trash and illegal dumping, and poor exterior building conditions that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. By conducting strategic outreach in small geographic areas, I hope that the City will see increased compliance, improved housing and living conditions, and improved community health outcomes.

Attached please find the Flex Squad Scope of Services which outlines the activities of the Flex Squad. I have also attached an example of the Flex Squad Tracking Sheet and photo of a citation.

A group of inspectors walks a small geographic area and affixes a Citation Notice to any property found in violation. Approximately three weeks later, the Flex Squad revisits the same location and checks for compliance. The Flex Squad provides friendly outreach to neighbors, makes referrals to services like housing rehab grants and homeless services, and connects constituents to City Hall and its partners. To date, the public reception of the Flex Squad members has been overwhelmingly positive.

In conjunction with the Flex Squad inspectors, the Department of Public Works participates and removes debris and overgrowth from City owned properties, cleans litter from the streets, removes bulk items from the tree belts, and collects shopping carts. When other DPW functions are needed, like tree trimming along sidewalks, work orders are submitted.

I trust that this communication addresses your request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Mayor Joshua A. Garcia

Cc: BOH, DPW, OCD, HFD, HPD

**City of Holyoke Flex Squad
Scope of Services as September 1, 2022**

1. Purpose

The City of Holyoke "Quality of Life Flex Squad" similar to Springfield's efforts will provide coordinated, neighborhood based, quality of life "sweeps". The Mayor envisions a strategy that includes one weeknight (generally Thursdays) and weekend responses by a team of public safety, health, and building officials that addresses concerns within a defined geographic area. This is not intended to be an extension of the M-F workday, but rather an effort to address quality of life complaints like noise, trash, building conditions, outdoor events, etc. that arise during off hours and have increased during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Since the early stages of the pandemic, it has become clear that the necessary reduction in enforcement activities and street-level presence has contributed to a backlog of public health issues in Holyoke. Minor issues at individual properties have multiplied beyond pre-pandemic norms and the status quo in many neighborhoods has been reduced. Basic quality of life issues, such as trash, overgrown vegetation and graffiti have become an eyesore. A backlog of existing code enforcement, coupled with a rising demand for services as pandemic restrictions and concerns diminish have created a need for additional enforcement operations.

Ideally, direct enforcement with a limited scope would have the greatest immediate impact. Complex issues, requiring long term involvement would be referred back to Departments for handling by non-flex squad enforcement, to avoid hampering progress. The usage of form letters for enforcement, with fixed correction periods for each category of violation, would reduce administrative downtime. Failure to comply within the stated correction period would result in a ticket citation, also in fixed amounts, with an increasing scale. Escalation would end with unresolved issues referred to an outside contractor (where applicable) for correction.

The Board of Health, via the City ordinances, Board of Health regulations and State Laws that we are empowered and authorized to enforce would be best suited to focus on trash, overgrown vegetation, unregistered vehicles, graffiti, and unpermitted after-hours food businesses (in certain circumstances). Many of these issues can resolved quickly (+/- 7 days) by sending an enforcement letter or issuing a ticket. There is very little need to negotiate or spend additional time on the property that would diminish ongoing capacity.

Avoidance of long-term, in-depth processes such as housing, vacant buildings and existing disputes should be emphasized. Previous "man on the street" style enforcement efforts became entangled in lengthy projects that require multiple

return visits, back and forth between landlords/tenants, and permitting delays. These types of administrative delays can compound quickly, and erode the benefit of a mobile, fast moving, enforcement team.

Asking BOH inspectors to spend extended periods of time in alleys and in already troubled neighborhoods (hence the need for flex squad), without the safety net of the availability of other departments and assistance (as is normally available M-F 8:30-4:30) is likely to become a safety issue. Therefore, It would be optimal, at bare minimum, to pair BOH inspectors with a uniformed police officer. Aside from the complementary enforcement authority (HPD is the enforcement arm of the License Board, covering food, alcohol and automotive permits, etc) a uniformed officer brings a substantial level of security to what will be largely off-hours enforcement for the Flex Squad. A police officer will have access to a patrol car, radio access to dispatch, and the ability to defend themselves (through a variety of means). Police Officers can also issue criminal citations, while the BOH issues only non-criminal citations.

All Flex Squad activities shall be directed by the Mayor's Office.

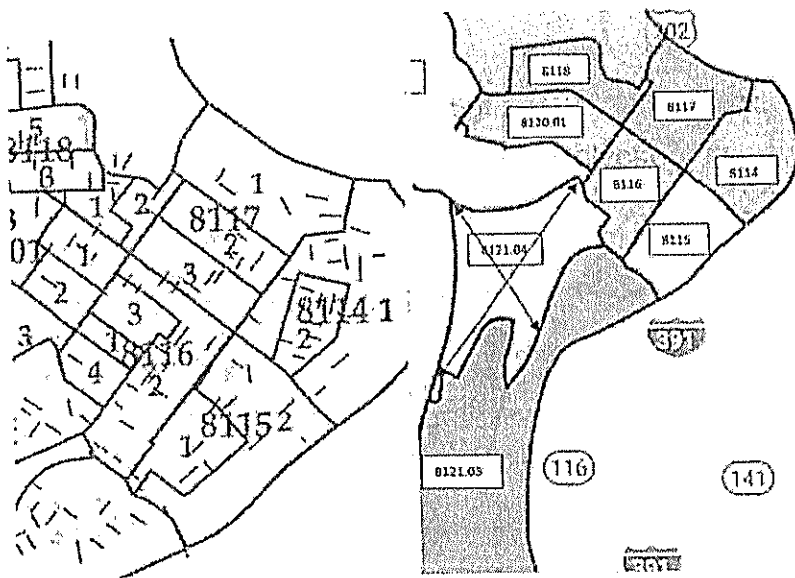
2. ARPA Eligible Expenses/Costs

ARPA funds will be utilized to pay the salaries (overtime) and expenses of Holyoke Police, Holyoke Fire Department, Board of Health, Building Department, Department of Public Works, Mayor's Office, and any other participating employees requested by the Mayor's Office. ARPA funds allocated to this activity will not be eligible or available for the costs of correcting violations. The departments will share the \$35,000. ARPA award to achieve the outcomes of this Scope of Services.

3. Qualified Census Tracts

The ARPA-funded inspectors will be assigned to work only in the Project Area within the boundaries of Qualified Census Tracts and low-moderate income Census Tracts on the attached maps. The Project Area overall consists primarily of Census Tracts 8114, 8115, 8116, 8117, 8118, 8120.01, 8121.03 in the City of Holyoke, Hampden County, MA. Census Tracts 8114, 8115, 8116, 8117, 8118, 8120.01 and 8121.03 are entirely low/moderate income as defined by HUD as having greater than 51% of the persons with low/moderate income. The Census Tracts/Block Groups data is based upon the 2015 Low/Moderate Income Summary Data issued by HUD based upon the 2015 American Survey and in compliance with CPD Notice 1902. (Updated for July 1, 2019)

Tract	Blk Group	Persons	Total Persons	L/M
811400	1	910	1035	87.92%
811400	2	1265	1605	78.82%
811500	1	1135	1220	93.03%
811500	2	1060	1060	100.00%
811600	1	780	830	93.98%
811600	2	820	845	97.04%
811600	3	345	555	62.16%
811600	4	1015	1095	92.69%
811700	1	445	650	68.46%
811700	2	1040	1155	90.04%
811700	3	525	525	100.00%
811800	1	630	915	68.85%
811800	2	585	800	73.13%
811800	3	960	1370	70.07%
811800	4	410	525	78.10%
811800	5	625	855	73.10%
812001	1	755	935	80.75%
812001	2	495	600	82.50%
812001	3	515	670	76.87%
812001	4	340	640	53.13%
812103	1	320	535	59.81%
812103	2	2185	2740	79.74%
		17160	21160	81%



Source: Urban Renewal Plan, Chapter 2, Page 2-9

4. In Conjunction with Improvements, Rehab or Other Services

Within the Project Area, there are a number of other private and public activities that coupled with this Code Enforcement Activity are expected to slow deterioration. These include funded activities such as Neighborhood Clean Up and the rehab of affordable housing at Carlos Vega Housing Complex , HOME funded rehab of Lyman Terrace Phase II, Holyoke Farms and Library Commons. Wayfinders is undertaking a major rehab of three blighted buildings around the Library for an additional new thirty eight units of rental housing (Library Commons I & II).

Other activities like the Urban Quality of Life Activity focusing on alley clean ups, graffiti removal and crime prevention within the Project Area; Community Policing with patrols within the Project Area; the restoration of Library Park; the restoration of Pulaski Park; the addition of litter containers to municipal parks; new sidewalks and pedestrian improvements; public art installations; a demolition and clearance activity; and the HOME-funded rehab of the former Holyoke Catholic High School to affordable rental units (Chestnut Park). Recently completed projects in the Project Area include the expansion of the Public Library, opening of the new Senior Center, transportation improvements, park improvements at Veterans Park, Vega Park, Avery Field, and McNally Park.

The City funds two housing rehabilitation programs- the Neighborhood Improvement Program and the Rental Neighborhood Improvement which will be

used in concert with this activity. The Neighborhood Improvement Program provides sliding scale grants to low/mod homeowners (owner occupied) to correct code violations and the Rental Neighborhood Improvement Program which provides low interest loans to property owners to correct code violations in rental properties. The City also is working closely with the MA Attorney General's Office to increase the number of receivership cases to reduce blight and return properties to safe, sanitary conditions. Through Wayfinders' Get the Lead Out Program, property owners can receive loan assistance with removal of lead-based paint. Finally the City maintains a Resource Guide which provides additional information on resources available to property owners including non-municipal programs offering funding to make units accessible.

5. Progress Tracking

Activity progress will be reported on a monthly basis in Googlesheets by Office for Community Development (OCD) staff based upon reports from the ARPA-funded inspectors. Reportable data will include:

- the number of properties receiving violations;
- the addresses of properties receiving violation notices;
- the number of unsheltered individuals encountered and provided services;
- the amount (approximate) of waste and debris collected by DPW; and
- the locations of any other services provided.

OCD staff will track and report on other specific and public and private improvements or services provided in the code enforcement area.

6. Fines

The Sanitarian/Local Inspector may issue tickets or other fine-able offenses as punitive measures to compel compliance by property owners and not explicitly to recover the costs incurred by the code enforcement activities.

7. Record Keeping

A Googlesheet shared document shall be used for each day of activity by the Flex Squad and track:

- Date of Daily Log;
- Total Hours Worked with Actual Time;
- Address location of inspection with Census Tract and Block Group;
- Map with address identified confirming its location within Project Area;

ARPA-funded inspections shall be managed by an address-centered tracking system whereby each address file contains a tracking form and copies of all correspondence, and other code enforcement documentation related to that address. This system will enable supervisors, OCD staff and HUD to readily confirm the information reported on the Daily Activity Log and confirm the metrics and efficacy of the activity.

8. Emphasis of Code Enforcement Activity

The primary goal of this activity is to reduce code violations and improve the quality of the life in the Project Area to arrest the decline of the neighborhoods. The Sanitarian will be responsible for inspections pursuant to the Massachusetts Sanitary Code and the Local Inspector will conduct building related inspections (see job descriptions). However, the ARPA-funded inspectors may conduct ancillary exterior code inspections of vacant lots, zoning violations, businesses, or other non-residential units, when the non-residential uses are contributing to a decline in adjacent housing conditions or impacting the welfare of nearby residents. Examples include citing overflowing restaurant dumpsters where rats and other vermin are present adjacent to residential units or citing the owner of a vacant parcel for overgrowth where the adjacent residents may be exposed to insect born illness or discarded biohazards (needles, condoms, etc.) or inspecting a restaurant where apartment units are located on upper floors of the same building. Referrals for additional enforcement actions may be made to the City Building Inspector, Holyoke Board of Health, Law Department (City Solicitor), Holyoke Police Department, Department of Public Works and Holyoke Fire Department, as needed.

9. Procurement/Hiring Procedures

All procurement of goods and hiring practices associated with this activity will be conducted in accordance with established City of Holyoke procedures and overseen by the Office for Community Development to ensure compliance with US Treasury requirements.

10. Payment of Inspectors

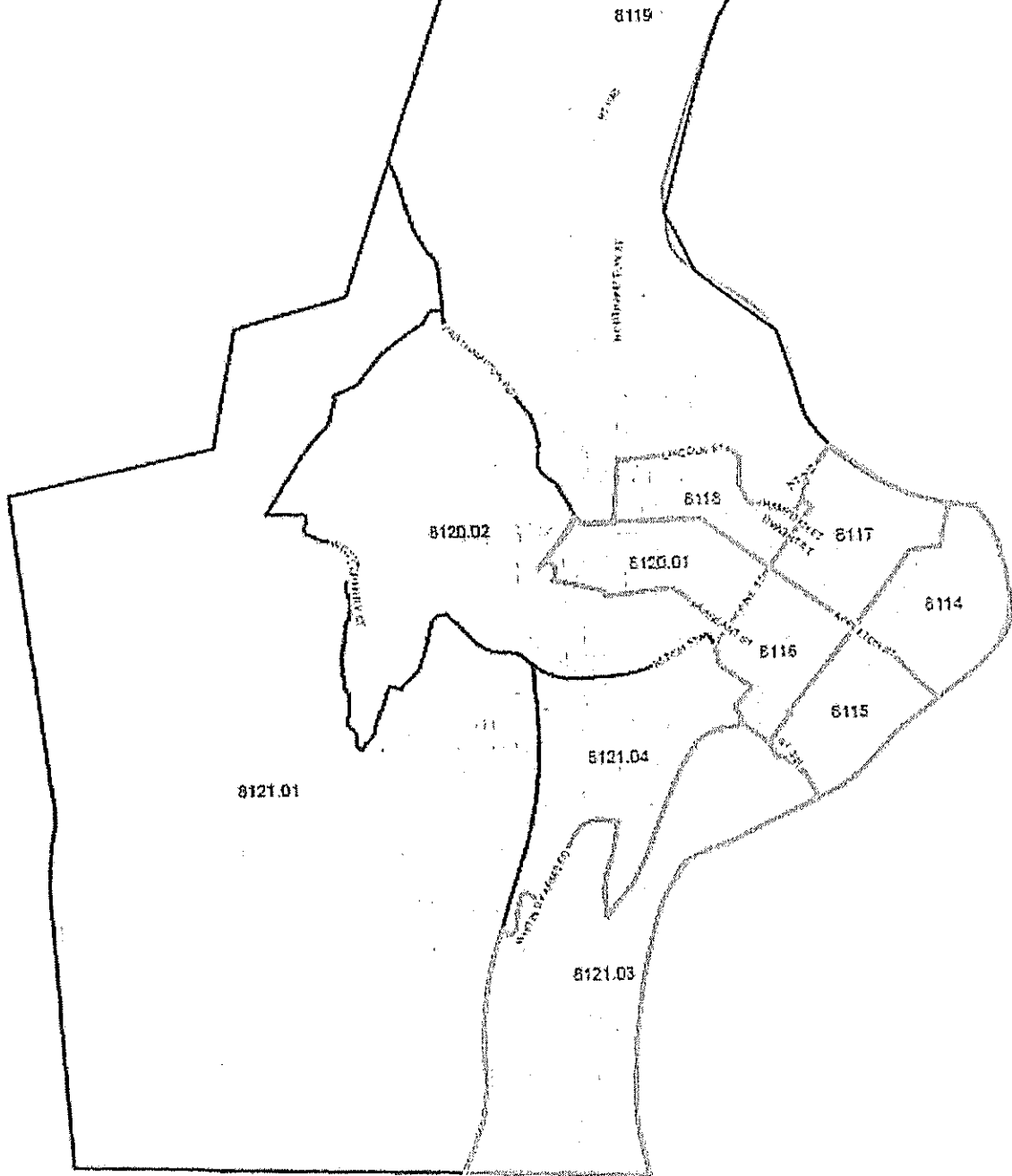
Flex Squad participants shall track and document their time as "ARPA Flex Squad" on provided time sheets and approved in writing by the respective department head. Payment shall be approved by a staff member in the Office for Community Development.

Project Boundary and Map Update

ARPA Flex Squad activity may take place in any low/moderate income Census Tract as indicated in green boundaries on map below and/or any Qualified Census Tract.

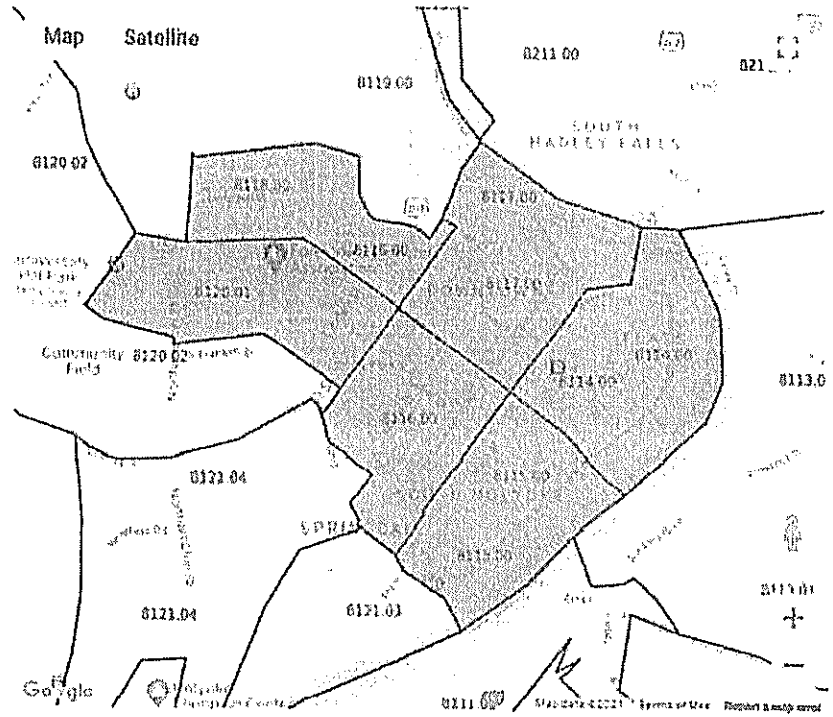
Holyoke, MA Census Tracts

HUD Assistance-eligible Census Tracts
are highlighted in green.



The 2021 Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) and District Development Areas (DDAs) are effective January 1, 2021. The 2021 designations use data from the 2013 Decennial census. The designation methodology is explained in the Federal Register notice published September 21, 2020.

- Map Options**
- Current Zoom Level
 - Show District Development Areas (Zoom 7+)
 - Show QCT Qualified Tracts (Zoom 7+)
 - Show Tract Outlines (Zoom 11+)
 - Show FMR Outlines (Zoom 8+)
 - Show LHTC Projects (Zoom 11+)
- [Click here for full screen map](#)
- Select Year**
- 2021
 - 2020



see: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sadda/sadda_0ct1.html; accessed May 27, 2021

The 2021 Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) and District Development Areas (DDAs) are effective January 1, 2021. The 2021 designations use data from the 2010 Decennial Census. The designation information is explained in the Federal Register notice published September 21, 2020.

Map Options

12 Current Zoom Level

Show District Development Areas (Zoom 7+)

Color QCT Qualified Tracts (Zoom 7+)

Show Tracts Outline (Zoom 11+)

Show FMR Outlines (Zoom 4-7)

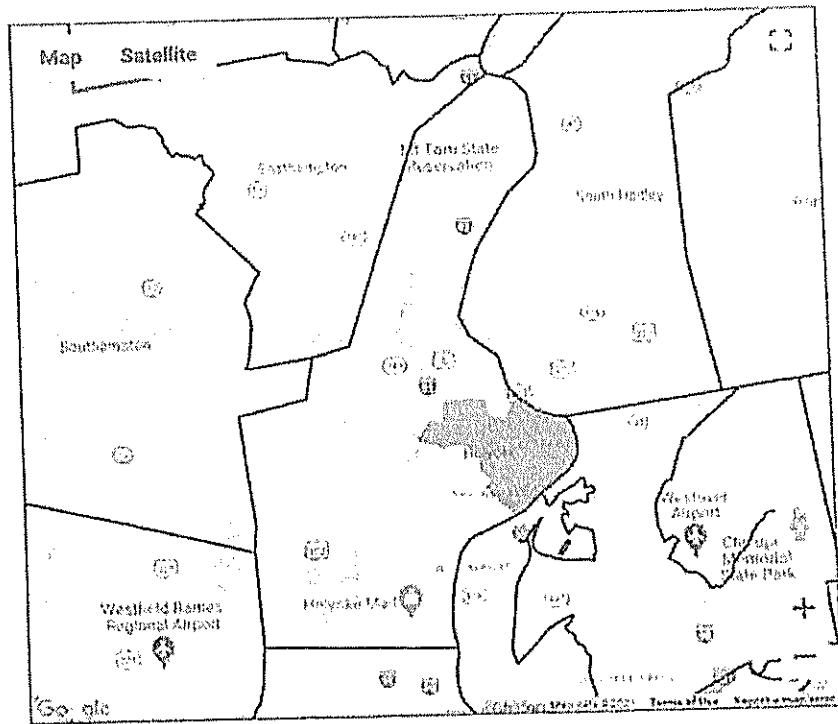
Show LDTIC Projects (Zoom 11+)

[Click here for full screen map](#)

Select Year

2021

2020



Flex Squad Date 11/5/2022 Start 7:00:00 AM End 10:00:00 AM Duration 3:00:00

Location Description: Reinspection of Lyman & Chestnut area

Tires Collected: 29
 Properties Cited: 12
 Shopping Carts Collected: 0
 Unsheltered Individuals Encountered: 0
 Tickets Issued for non-compliance: 5
 Ticket Total \$\$: \$500

Attendees: Michael Gallagher, Frank Joaquin, Louis Lafountain, Jorge Canales, Miguel Acosta - DPW Ryan Paxton & Tim Rivers

Addresses Tagged

Owner Name:	Dept.	Health	Number	Street	Property Record Card
Caadstone II, LLC	Health		354	Hampden St	062-02-018
Pszczyna Realty Trust	Health		339	Hampden St	062-01-017
Joel Rojas	Health		186	Suffolk St	061-01-006
Stanley A Geddes	Health		146	Beech St	062-03-010
Andrew Rohan	Health		126	Beech St	062-03-015
Wajdi Hachicha	Health		95	Elm St	006-05-004
Maria M McDaniel	Health		84	Pine St	006-08-016
Four Harps, LLC	Health		76	Pine St	006-07-010
Eseban Castillo	Health		74	Beech St	062-01-018
NKJ Investment Group, LLC	Health		63	Pine St	062-01-007

Ticketed Properties

Name	Dept.	Health	Citation #	Number	Street	Property Record Card
Acias, LLC	Health		#1477	324	Hampden St	062-02-001
Valley Housing Devel Corp	Health		#1478	151	Walnut St	005-07-002
Rsquareb Properties, LLC	Health		#1480	104	Beech St	062-02-014
Kurt Zimmerman	Health		#1479	120	Suffolk St	005-04-002
Kurt Zimmerman	Health		#1481	155	Elm St	005-04-001

Notes*

Residents at 63 Pine St appear to be dumping at 61 Pine St, a condemned property. Owner was contacted and NOV mailed.
 NOV mailed to 166 Pine St (empty lot, cannot be posted) ****



Mayor Joshua A. Garcia

Enforcement of City Ordinances

City of Holyoke

City of Holyoke Flex Squad

NOTICE TO REMOVE

The property located at 186 Suffolk St is in violation of one or more of the following laws: The Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 111, Sections 122, 123, 124 and 125, Abatement of Nuisances and/or The Holyoke Code of Ordinances, Chapter 18 and Chapter 74, Solid Waste or Chapter II of the State Sanitary Code. These types of violations have a blighting influence on neighborhoods, lead to decreased property values and impact public safety. If you are the occupant of the property and not the property owner, please inform the property owner of this violation notice.

The following violations need to be corrected:

- Cut grass and weeds more than 6 inches in height (includes alleyway, fence line and curb line)
- Cut bushes, shrubs, or trees blocking the public way (includes alleyway, fence, sidewalk, street)
- Remove branches, brush, limbs, wood
- Remove garbage, litter, animal feces, vehicle parts (includes batteries and tires), appliances or furniture
- Provide garbage cans with tight-fitting lids or enough garbage cans to hold all garbage
- Empty overflowing dumpster and/or remove trash around the dumpster
- Remove or register unregistered or inoperable vehicle
- Remove graffiti from the building exterior
- empty pool

Ticket issued (Yes / No) in the amount of \$ _____ .00

Reason for Citation _____

Please correct the above-listed violation(s) by 11-12-22. A re-inspection for compliance with this order will be conducted at that time.

For further information, call the inspector listed below at the number provided.

Ryan Paxton
Inspector

413-322-5595
Phone

11-5-22
Date

IF THE VIOLATIONS ARE NOT CORRECTED BY THIS DEADLINE DATE, YOU WILL BE SUBJECT TO RECEIVING A VIOLATION TICKET WITH A FINE. Each day's failure not to comply with this ordinance or any other order shall constitute a separate violation. It is your legal obligation, as the owner of the subject property, to correct the cited violations within the time frame(s) specified. If you fail to do so, the Holyoke Board of Health has the authority under Mass. Gen. Laws, Ch. 111, Sec. 127B and the State Sanitary Code, 105 CMR 410.960 to enter upon your property, and cause your property to be cleaned, repaired, and/or demolished. All expenses incurred in performing such work may be recovered against you personally in either an action for contract or a lien against your property.

HOLYOKE CITY HALL • 536 DWIGHT STREET • ROOM 1 • HOLYOKE, MASSACHUSETTS
PHONE: (413) 551-1600
Birthplace of Volleyball