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Court-Appointed Receiver to Clean Up Dangerous Hoarding Property *City Attorney's Office seeks relief for neighbors, assistance for resident*

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced today that a court-appointed receiver will clean up a dangerous property at 1909 Mesa Hills Court that is piled high with trash both inside and out. The receiver will ensure the immediate restoration of the single-family residence in the Bay Terraces neighborhood, and assist the resident with obtaining counseling and other necessary treatment to address the hoarding behavior.

In court filings, the City Attorney's Office detailed numerous violations of state and local laws, ranging from inoperable toilets and showers to bottles of urine stacked in the backyard. Neighbors have complained that, on hot days, the smell of urine and feces from the property is unbearable. Doors and windows are blocked by a ceiling-high accumulation of debris, creating a fire hazard. The resident has reportedly lived without running water for the past two years.

The complaint alleges violations of the San Diego Municipal Code, the state Health & Safety Code, and the California Civil Code, including:

- public nuisance and substandard housing due to excessive junk and trash;
- inadequate sanitation due to an unusable shower and toilets and storage of human waste on the premises;
- non-permitted partially enclosed patio structure and electrical connections; and
- lack of emergency egress, as exits are blocked by debris.

“My office intervened in this hazardous situation to provide relief to the neighborhood and to help the resident obtain the resources necessary to address the hoarding,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“The condition of the property not only endangers the resident who lives there, but the neighbors around him.”**

Superior Court Judge Keri G. Katz granted the City Attorney's petition for a receiver, which ensures that the resident can obtain help to address the underlying behavior that led him to live for years in squalid conditions.

A declaration filed in this case by San Diego Fire Marshal Douglas Perry indicated that the house on Mesa Hills Court is so cluttered that some rooms could only be entered by crawling over a wall of junk, trash, and debris. “This clutter can easily become fuel for a fire that can rapidly spread and endanger the dwelling and surrounding community,” he stated. “In my professional opinion, that extreme hoarding is a fire hazard.”

The property first came to the City's attention in July 2018, via a complaint to the Code Enforcement Division of the Development Services Department. The first City investigator to respond found bags of plastic bottles, wrecked strollers, buckets, appliances, auto parts, bicycles, construction materials, canopy frames, non-operational vehicles, clothing, paint cans, wood pallets, other junk, and trash littering the exterior of the property, visible from the street and sidewalk.

At first the occupant wouldn't allow inspectors inside, but when an interior inspection was undertaken five months later, the rooms were so filled with trash that windows and doors were blocked.

City inspectors conducted repeated follow-up inspections, but saw no indication the property owner or resident were taking steps to clean up or make repairs. In March 2019, the owner and resident were given an Order to Vacate and Repair Substandard Building and Abate Public Nuisance, but still there was no apparent change.

This case was prosecuted by Deputy City Attorney Michael J. McGowan of the City Attorney's Community Justice Division/Nuisance Abatement Unit.

The City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit addresses nuisance properties and blight throughout San Diego. This unit works in partnership with the Code Enforcement Division of the City Development Services Department, the San Diego Police Department, other local agencies and the community to identify and aggressively address problem properties.

Nuisance Abatement Unit cases often involve substandard housing violations, public nuisances, and extreme hoarding conditions. In the past, the City would pay to abate the violations, costing taxpayers thousands of dollars, then seek a lien against the property. With receivership actions, the City does not spend any money abating the nuisance. Instead, the property is rehabilitated using funds borrowed from the equity in the property. The City may also collect all costs of prosecution, including attorney's fees and investigative costs.

Community members may report code, health and safety and environmental violations to the City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit at 619-533-5655.

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