

## **How to Report Housing Code Violations**

*By Jonathan Fink*

In previous KMCA meetings, many residents have complained about housing code violations such as grass that is too high and unauthorized home construction. The KMCA's newly-formed housing committee has been researching these problems. The good news is that there is a way for residents to report these violations to the County.

Residents have expressed concern about the following problems:

- Cars or bushes that obstruct sidewalks
- Parking a car on the grass between the street and the sidewalk (on the County right of way)
- Unauthorized home improvements
- Failure to cut grass
- Failure to abate pests
- Junk cars in driveways
- Vacant/abandoned homes

If you are aware of a potential code violation, please call the County's Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) at **240-777-3785**. You may also file a complaint online at: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/DHCA> (click on code enforcement, then click on online complaint submission). Upon receiving a complaint, the DHCA should quickly inspect the property to verify a violation, notify the homeowner, and set a deadline for the problem to be corrected. A number of residents have found the DHCA to be very responsive when notified of a problem through this system.

Residents can also track the progress and resolution of a complaint online at [http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/DHCA/pdm\\_online/pdmfull.asp](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/DHCA/pdm_online/pdmfull.asp). The website allows users to search for cases related to a specific address or a street. For example, the website shows that the County resolved several complaints related to vacant houses in Kemp Mill 2008.

The County has answers to frequently asked questions about code enforcement at: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/apps/DHCA> (click on code enforcement, then click on housing code enforcement handbook).

The County also offers tips on its website for people facing foreclosure and seminars on how to prevent foreclosure. Go to <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dhctmpl.asp?url=/content/DHCA/housing/Foreclosure/index.asp>.

Residents are encouraged to email the KMCA's housing committee chair at [finkfive@gmail.com](mailto:finkfive@gmail.com) when they submit a complaint to the County so that the committee can keep track of the number and type of issues that are arising in the community. We are planning to invite a speaker from the DHCA to a future KMCA meeting to answer questions.

Rules for renting single-family homes

Several questions have been raised at KMCA meetings about the rental of single-family homes. According to information from the County, property owners must obtain a rental license in order to rent their homes (unless the owner also occupies the house). A house may be rented to up to five unrelated people living as a group. In addition:

- Owners may establish an “accessory apartment,” which is a second dwelling unit that is part of a single-family home occupied by the owner. Owners must obtain a special exception to the zoning ordinance to do this.
- Owners may establish a “registered living unit,” which is the same as an accessory apartment, except that the unit is occupied rent-free by family members or household employees of the owner. This type of unit does not need a special exception but must be registered with the County.

**Rental homes that are overcrowded or are not properly maintained may be reported to DHCA at 240-777-3785.**