



CITY OF ATLANTA
City Auditor's Office
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September 2019

Performance Audit:

Atlanta Police Department Code Enforcement Section

What We Found

The section processed nearly 90% of all cases within performance goals. Over the three-year period from March 2015 through February 2018, the section processed nearly 90% of property maintenance and highly hazardous cases within targets established in service level agreements. The section would have processed over 90% of all cases within performance targets if more than 30% of the highly hazardous cases had been correctly recategorized as property maintenance cases.

While resolution of code enforcement cases has improved significantly since the function shifted to the Atlanta Police Department, the section's internal controls over case review and Accela access could be strengthened to reduce risk of improper case closure. The Accela system is not programmed to require supervisory review of cases prior to closure. We found no evidence in Accela to indicate that supervisors reviewed 95% of the cases closed with no violation found and 86% of the cases closed as being in compliance. Officers who perform inspections should not be allowed to close code violation cases without supervisory review; the review serves an oversight role to help identify errors and mitigate the risk of fraud.

Lastly, we identified 42 former section employees who still maintained access to the Accela system. In addition, we found that the section did not ensure that complete records were maintained to validate permitting credentials for 15 officers.

Why We Did This Audit

We undertook this audit because City Council members expressed concern about the timeliness of resolution of code enforcement complaints. In addition, the code enforcement section staff expressed concern about employee turnover.

What We Recommended

To ensure that the section's performance is accurately measured and that it is able to direct resources appropriately to expedite the processing of cases, the section commander should:

- improve procedures to ensure that code violations are accurately categorized
- work with the Human Resources Department to make any needed salary adjustments based on the results of the classification and pay study authorized by Resolution 19-R-3759

To improve controls over tasks performed in Accela and mitigate the risk of error or improper case closure, the section commander should:

- request that the Accela software be programmed to require supervisory approval before code violation cases are closed
- work with AIM to ensure that access to Accela is promptly deleted after employee separation or transfer and that only current section employees have access to the system

To ensure that code enforcement officer qualifications are up-to-date, the section commander should:

- ensure that the police central database and physical certification files are reviewed periodically to ensure that required documents, including permits, are maintained.

For more information regarding this report, please use the "contact" link on our website at www.atlaudit.org

Management Responses to Audit Recommendations

Summary of Management Responses		
Recommendation #1:	We recommend that the code enforcement section improve procedures to ensure that code violations are accurately categorized.	
Response & Proposed Action:	To ensure we are prioritizing the complaints (Highly Hazardous vs Property Maintenance), staff receives and will continue to receive ongoing Accela training. In 2016 a reference guide was created for staff to reinforce the Accela process.	Agree
Timeframe:	Ongoing	
Recommendation #2:	We recommend that the code enforcement section work with the Human Resources Department to make any needed salary adjustments based on the results of the classification and pay study authorized by Resolution 19-R-3759.	
Response & Proposed Action:	We concur with the necessity of a pay study and anxiously await the results. We also feel that if a salary range is approved, a mechanism must be put in place to allow employees to advance through the range.	Agree
Timeframe:	January 2020	
Recommendation #3:	We recommend that the code enforcement section request that the Accela software be programmed to require supervisory approval before code violation cases are closed.	
Response & Proposed Action:	APD Code Enforcement has a meeting scheduled with representatives from AIM on September 4, 2019 to discuss the required Workflow change in Accela. The goal is to have all cases status Complied, No Violation Found , and Transfer to Another Agency routed to Supervisor Review in Accela. This will allow the case to remain active until a Supervisor can establish that all requirements are met such as photos of all four sides of the property are added to the Accela case when possible and that the complaint is transferred or reassigned to the proper department/agency. While this may add to the Supervisors' already demanding workload, it will ensure properties are thoroughly inspected and violations are addressed. This may also reduce the number of complaints received from constituents regarding No Violation Found status.	Agree
Timeframe:	December 2019	

Recommendation #4:	We recommend that the code enforcement section work with AIM to ensure that access to Accela is promptly deleted after employee separation or transfer and that only current section employees have access to the system.	
Response & Proposed Action:	The accounts for all non-city employees have been disabled except for one. The position was vacated on August 23, 2019. Current employees with access to the Accela module are authorized. In addition to APD Code Enforcement staff, ATL311 representatives and Quality of Life Officers have access to the module.	Partially Agree
	Timeframe: June 2019 and ongoing	
Recommendation #5:	We recommend that the code enforcement section ensure that the police central database and physical certification files are reviewed periodically to ensure that the required documents, including permits, are maintained.	
Response & Proposed Action:	<p>With exception of one, all Code Enforcement Officers credentials are current. The credentials for the Officer will be current by mid-September. The Officer will not issue citations until the credentials are current.</p> <p>To safeguard that no APD Code Enforcement Officer credentials expire in the future these steps will be put into place immediately:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All CE Officers will be made aware of their expiration date. 2. The Direct Supervisor will be given a list of their CE Officers and Dates. 3. The Administrative Sergeant will keep a current listing for CE Officers' credentials. <p>The Code Enforcement Officer should apply 30 days prior to expiration to obtain all necessary classes, complete paperwork, and have background investigations completed.</p>	Agree
	Timeframe: June 2019 and ongoing	