Zoning Enforcement

JAMES A. COON LOCAL GOVERNMENT TECHNICAL SERIES

A Division of the New York Department of State

Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor
Rossana Rosado, Secretary of State
This publication is a result of a cooperative effort by the following:

JEFFERSON COUNTY
PLANNING DEPARTMENT
175 ARSENAL STREET
WATERTOWN, NY 13601

MARK GEBO, ESQ.
HRABCHAK AND GEBO, P.C.
ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELORS AT LAW
WATERTOWN, NEW YORK

TUG HILL COMMISSION
DULLES STATE OFFICE BUILDING
317 WASHINGTON STREET
WATERTOWN, NY 13601-3782
www.tughill.org

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF STATE
99 WASHINGTON AVENUE
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12231-0001
http://www.dos.ny.gov

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PREFACE

This publication was originally produced in 1991. It was updated in 1994 by the Jefferson County Planning Department in cooperation with the New York State Tug Hill Commission and the former St. Lawrence-Eastern Ontario Commission. It was updated in 1996 by Mark Gebo, Esq., partner in Hrabchak & Gebo, P.C., Attorneys and Counselors at Law in Watertown, New York, and in 1998 by the New York State Department of State.

INTRODUCTION

This publication discusses the zoning enforcement process, including options for enforcement, along with the laws that authorize enforcement in the towns and villages of New York State. It does not contain specific information regarding zoning enforcement in cities, as those procedures are more appropriately referenced within individual city charters.

Section I describes the roles of various key entities including the zoning enforcement officer. It is critically important that the enforcement official understand the responsibilities of these boards. This is only a summary; for more extensive treatment of the responsibilities of these entities, the reader should consult other publications in this Technical Series. Section II outlines the steps involved in the zoning enforcement process, referencing state enabling statutes. The actual process varies among municipalities; one should always, therefore, consult local laws and officials for more specific local procedural guidance. The Appendix provides useful sample forms for local adoption.

Land use legislation may be enacted by ordinance in towns, as well as by local law in both towns and villages. For simplicity, we will refer to all such legislation as the local “zoning law”.

LOCAL BOARDS AND OFFICERS

The Legislative Body – The legislative body (town board or village board of trustees) plays a major role in zoning administration and enforcement. It appoints members of the planning board,¹ the zoning commission (applicable in towns and villages),² the zoning board of appeals (ZBA),³ and the zoning enforcement officer (ZEO).⁴ The legislative body must approve any by-laws, rules and regulations that govern these boards and officials, as well as any procedures to be used in administering the law. Though other boards may write initial drafts of, or advise on, various land use laws and procedures, only the legislative body may enact them into law.

The legislative body has the option to enact site plan review and special permit approval.⁵ It may choose either to perform site plan review and/or special use permit approval directly, or instead delegate one or both of these procedures to an appointed board such as the planning board or zoning board of appeals. The power to approve subdivisions can, however, only be delegated to the planning board.⁶ The legislative body typically delegates zoning enforcement authority to its ZEO.
By delegating some of the above mentioned powers to other boards and officials, the legislative body frees up time for its other numerous responsibilities. This is a good idea, but it is important to remember that once these powers have been delegated, the legislative body cannot overrule a decision made by the ZBA, ZEO, or planning board. It may appeal such a decision, as may any other concerned citizen, but it cannot simply overrule it.

**The Zoning Enforcement Officer (ZEO)** – The ZEO is the municipality's representative in land use regulation and enforcement, and should be the primary contact for all applicants. His/her major duties usually are: to prepare or acquire forms necessary to properly administer the zoning law; issue zoning permits; conduct inspections and investigations; issue a zoning certificate of compliance or occupancy; maintain records of all administrative actions and papers; and enforce the zoning law through the various methods discussed in this document.

The actual powers and duties of the position will vary among municipalities. They must be clearly spelled out in either the local zoning law or a separate ordinance or law providing for the enforcement of all zoning and land use laws.

The ZEO's power is limited to enforcement of the law as it is written. The ZEO has no power to modify or waive the zoning regulations even if s/he disagrees with a requirement of the regulation. When the ZEO finds that certain requirements of the zoning are inappropriate and consistently create problems for applicants, then s/he can and should propose an amendment to the legislative body. The legislative body is the only board that has the authority to make a zoning amendment, and this power cannot be delegated. The ZEO must deny a permit whenever s/he is in doubt about a project's legality, or about how the zoning law applies to the particular case. An applicant who is denied a permit can appeal to the ZBA for an interpretation of the zoning regulation, or for a variance.7

The ZEO must pursue all violations of the law without undue bias for or against a particular person, otherwise s/he will open himself or herself to lawsuits for discriminatory enforcement.8

Enforcement action can be taken whenever a zoning law or ordinance is violated, or a condition attached to an approval granted by a municipal board is not met. While the landowner can always be held responsible for a violation on his/her property, enforcement action may also be taken against other responsible parties, such as tenants and building contractors.

**The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)** – The enabling statutes provide that the legislative body must appoint a ZBA whenever it initially adopts a zoning law.9 The basic powers of the ZBA fall into two areas: original jurisdiction and appellate jurisdiction.10

Appellate (or appeals) jurisdiction allows an “aggrieved party” to bring an appeal of a decision of the ZEO to the ZBA for review. “Aggrieved parties” may include: the recipient of an enforcement action; an unsuccessful permit applicant; or a third party.

There are two types of appeals: an appeal seeking an interpretation of the zoning law; and an appeal seeking a zoning variance. An appeal for an interpretation simply claims that the ZEO’s decision was incorrect under the zoning law, and requests the ZBA to overturn the decision. An
appeal for a variance, which can only be made by an owner following a ZEO’s enforcement action or permit denial, claims that special circumstances warrant the ZBA to vary the strict terms of the zoning law.

**The Planning Board** – The planning board has an advisory role and must be aware of community needs and goals. It is concerned both with development and with the formulation of growth policies. The planning board usually advises other local boards on matters that affect the community’s development.11

A planning board’s powers exist solely at the legislative body’s discretion. It can be given review and approval authority for special permits, subdivisions, site plans, and other land use-related laws, such as a historic district law. When given such jurisdiction, the legislative body should adopt appropriate regulations to govern the planning board’s procedures. To carry out its duties, the planning board, on referral, may assist in the preparation of a comprehensive plan for development,12 and make investigations, maps, reports, and recommendations dealing with local planning and development.

**The Zoning Commission** – State law provides that the legislative body must appoint a zoning commission to draft the community’s initial zoning law.13 If it so desires, the legislative body may appoint the existing planning board as its zoning commission. If, however, a separate zoning commission is created, it will cease to exist after the legislative body, by resolution, accepts the commission’s final report and draft zoning law.

### ZONING ENFORCEMENT PROCESS

**Step 1: Report of Violation** – The zoning enforcement process begins when the ZEO becomes aware of a violation. The ZEO may discover the violation himself or herself, or it may be reported to the ZEO by a municipal official or local resident. To improve the effectiveness of citizen involvement, every local government should have an established system for taking citizen complaints. Ideally, such a system should provide that anyone may file a citizen complaint form (see Appendix 1) setting forth information about the supposed violation. If possible, the municipality should allow the citizen to file this form electronically, and to receive a response in the same manner. The form should be filed at a central location (probably the town or village clerk's office) that is well publicized.

Should an oral, perhaps anonymous, complaint, trigger an enforcement investigation? Ordinarily, such complaints should be taken seriously and investigated, whether or not the complainant has identified him/herself.

Every system of receiving citizen complaints should include follow-up. The best approach is an immediate follow-up letter (or electronic response) (see Appendix 5) that tells the citizen the complaint has been received and will be investigated as soon as possible. Barring other priorities, a good rule of thumb is that the ZEO should proceed to investigate every citizen complaint within 24 to 48 hours.
In addition to the immediate follow-up letter, the ZEO should forward a subsequent letter to the complainant (see Appendix 6) explaining the final results of the enforcement action. If no action was taken, the ZEO should explain why.

**Step 2: Investigation** – Once a possible violation has been observed or reported, the ZEO is empowered to investigate the matter, make a preliminary determination of whether or not it constitutes a violation, and take the appropriate action in the enforcement process. While some older state statutes directly grant officials the power to enter into buildings to make inspections, those statutes do not supersede constitutional protections against unreasonable search. Without the owner’s consent in a non-emergency situation, a search warrant (see Appendix 7A) is required before the ZEO may lawfully enter onto any premises that the general public is not already invited to enter. All municipalities should, therefore, adopt provisions generally authorizing their ZEO to enter onto all premises, public or private, “consistent with constitutional safeguards and any requisite warrant”, in order to effectuate enforcement. When the ZEO is in doubt about the legality of entering private property against an owner’s will, the best advice is that s/he consult with the municipal attorney before entering the property.

Any investigation should be logged by the ZEO using an Enforcement Inspection Report (see Appendix 2) regardless of the results. This creates a record of initial inspection, and the report can be referred to for further questions or issues involving the project or matter.

**Step 3: Notification To Remedy Violations; Administrative Actions** – If a zoning violation does exist, then enforcement steps must be taken. The first step is to inform the property owner of the violation so that it can be corrected. Often, zoning violations are an oversight on the owner’s part, and simply advising him/her of the violation will resolve the matter. There are a variety of ways that a violator can be notified, and generally the situation will dictate the most appropriate method.

Usually the first attempt at notification is informal contact with the property owner to explain the violation and the potential of enforcement. The ZEO should keep a record of the contact and the results. If the owner is hard to contact, then it is advisable that a letter requesting voluntary compliance be forwarded to the property owner (see Appendix 8). The letter should clearly identify the violation and state that “...This is the only letter you will receive. If you do not correct the violation by [DATE] or contact this office and make arrangements for an extension of time, we will begin enforcement action....” It is very important that this letter be sent by certified or registered mail with a return receipt requested. This will insure that the owner receives it and will provide proof that it was received.

Many local governments require that even informal contact with landowners be documented. While a “Notice of Apparent Violation” looks formal, it does not have any great legal significance. It is simply a way to inform the landowner that s/he may be in violation of the zoning law and that s/he needs to abate or correct the violation. The landowner can be given the opportunity to discuss the case with the enforcement officer. A second, more formal letter, a “Notice of Violation - Order to Remedy” (see Appendix 9) amounts to a determination by the ZEO that a violation exists, and directs the landowner to take specific corrective action.
There are four possible administrative actions that can and should be used in conjunction with notification to prevent the landowner from continuing the violation. The first is revocation or suspension of permits directly related to the questionable activity. Second, any new permits or certificates related to the same work should be denied from the date on which the violation is first determined to exist until the matter resolved. Third, a Stop Work Order (see Appendix 10) should be issued in conjunction with such revocations/suspensions, to prevent any expansion of possibly illegal construction activities (as well as to prevent possibly fruitless additional investment by the owner) until the matter is resolved. A Stop Work Order on construction projects must be authorized in the zoning law itself. Finally, a Cease and Desist Order may be issued to halt a continuing violation other than that related to construction.

It is extremely important that the ZEO keep a record of any written administrative actions, as well as other enforcement actions that go beyond informal contact. Please consult Appendix 3 for a suggested Enforcement Action Checklist that can be used to keep track of such record-keeping. The legislative body may also want to develop a system of regular communication, whereby it is kept informed by the ZEO of all zoning violations and the administrative steps taken to remedy them.

**Step 4: The Respondent’s Alternatives** – Ideally, upon being notified of the violation the respondent will revise her/his plans and actions to conform with the zoning law. But, if s/he is dissatisfied with that approach, s/he has alternatives for seeking relief: s/he can appeal the ZEO’s decision and apply to the ZBA for a zoning interpretation or variance; or s/he could ask the legislative body for a zoning amendment. These alternatives provide a method for respondents to obtain relief from unreasonable restrictions of the zoning law.

The ZBA’s primary function under law is to hear appeals and grant relief (if appropriate) from the strict application of the zoning law. The respondent initiates an appeal by filing a Notice of Appeal to the ZBA. Any appeal asks the ZBA to overturn the ZEO’s action, but, depending on the stance the respondent takes, the ZBA will have either of two tasks: interpretation or variance. First, the respondent may believe the ZEO’s action incorrectly applies the zoning law. Even a well written zoning law has provisions that are open to interpretation. In that instance, the respondent appeals presenting a case for an interpretation in his/her favor. If the ZBA agrees with the respondent, it overturns the ZEO’s decision, finds in favor of the respondent, and issues an appropriate order. It should be noted that only the ZBA can definitively interpret the zoning law. Neither the legislative body nor any other officer or body has that jurisdiction.

Whenever the ZBA makes a determination that interprets a provision of the zoning law, the determination should serve as precedent for any future actions involving that particular provision, until and unless the legislative body amends the provision. Importantly, the ZEO should consider him/herself to be governed by the determination in any future enforcement actions that involve that same provision.

The second broad area of appeal involves the appeal for a variance. Here, the respondent--almost always, in this case, the owner--may agree that the law was correctly applied, but believes that the property is beset by special circumstances that warrant the grant of a variance to the strict application of the law. There are two types of variance, use and area. A use variance
involves a request for a use of land that is prohibited by the zoning law and requires proof of “unnecessary hardship.” An area variance is a request to vary the dimensional standards, such as lot size, setbacks, sign area, or number of parking spaces. The test for an area variance does not require the owner to show hardship. Instead, the ZBA is required to engage in a “balancing of interests.”

Whenever any appeal is taken of the ZEO’s enforcement action, the appeal places into effect a stay against further enforcement. This means that, from the date the Notice of Appeal is filed until the date the ZBA renders its determination, the municipality is prohibited from taking any further enforcement action. During such time the local justice court cannot hear or adjudicate the alleged violation, and the ZEO may not issue any further orders or appearance tickets. The stay may, however, be lifted in cases of imminent peril to life or property. To lift the stay, the ZEO must file a certificate of imminent peril with the ZBA.

Finally, the landowner may wish to apply for a zoning amendment. An amendment constitutes legislative relief, and can therefore only be approved by the legislative body (town or village board). Although the legislative body is not required to apply the tests that the ZBA must apply for a variance, any amendment that it adopts must be consistent with the comprehensive plan. A public hearing must be held before formal adoption of a zoning amendment.

These alternatives are available to provide local relief from zoning restrictions as they may be applied by the enforcement officer. If the requested relief is denied, then the landowner must abide by the determination (which may include abating the violation) or appeal to the Supreme Court for judicial relief. If the owner instead continues to engage in an activity determined to be a violation, then the ZEO is free to take further enforcement action.

Step 5: Judicial Enforcement – While the ZEO is always empowered to seek criminal enforcement in the first instance, it may be his/her practice to undertake either informal or formal administrative action first. Nonetheless, where administrative action does not succeed in causing the owner to abate a zoning violation, then stronger enforcement methods can, and should, be used. The statutes provide for the imposition of both criminal and civil penalties, or sanctions that require abatement or removal of the violation.

Criminal Proceedings – Enforcement actions can be taken to the local criminal court, which can, under specific guidelines set by state law (or by a superseding local law), impose fines or imprisonment. In New York State, zoning offenses are deemed misdemeanors for the purpose of conferring jurisdiction on the courts. Although zoning offenses are deemed misdemeanors for jurisdictional purposes, they do not necessarily confer all the protections of misdemeanors if the imprisonment provisions are low enough to qualify for treatment as a violation. The principal distinctions between treatment as a violation as opposed to treatment as a misdemeanor, are that for a violation the accused is not entitled to a jury trial or the appointment of an assigned attorney if unable to afford one of his/her own. Where imprisonment could exceed more than fifteen days, then the offense is instead considered a misdemeanor, and the aforementioned protections apply.
To institute criminal proceedings against an accused, the ZEO must file an Information and Complaint (almost always accompanied by a Supporting Deposition) with the local justice court. The Information and Complaint contains several parts. The first is an accusatory part that states the date, time, and place of the violation and the section of the zoning law that is at issue. Another part is factual; it outlines in detail the facts the ZEO relies on for establishing the violation. Lastly there is the attestation part, in which the ZEO affirms the information under penalties of perjury or swears to it before a notary.

The Supporting Deposition is meant to add more detail to what is in the Information and Complaint. Where a ZEO has not observed certain aspects of the situation, a Supporting Deposition should be taken from all persons with direct knowledge. The Supporting Deposition should be attached to the Information. Frequently, photographs or other documentary evidence may also be important and may be attached. The Information and Complaint must, however, on its face, contain each and every element of what must be proven to establish the violation. To assist the ZEO in determining what these elements are, we recommend the use of a Proof Chart (see Appendix 4). Once the ZEO compiles the Information and Complaint and Supporting Deposition and files them with the justice court, the local justice will then issue a Summons. A Summons is served by a police officer and requires the defendant to appear in court on a specified date.

To streamline and perhaps shorten this procedure, we recommend the alternative use of the Appearance Ticket (see Appendix 11). The Appearance Ticket must be authorized in law by the legislative body for the ZEO to use it. It is similar to a traffic citation in that it is issued by the enforcement officer directly to the defendant, without any documents having to be filed first with the court. It informs the accused of the section of law s/he is believed to have violated, and sets forth the court appearance date; it thereby takes the place of a Summons. The ZEO can issue an Appearance Ticket to an alleged violator immediately, and then file the Information and Complaint and Supporting Deposition with the local court. Criminal proceedings require, of course, that the municipality prove the violation “beyond a reasonable doubt”. The ZEO and the municipality should be prepared to provide such proof in the justice court.

The Town Law provides that each week that a violation continues constitutes a new and separate offense. This raises the possibility of imposing successive (and escalating) fines imposed for each week that a violation continues. Even so, the municipality must follow due process: it must serve the defendant with a new Information and Supporting Deposition, and Criminal Summons (or Appearance Ticket) for each week that it seeks a conviction. This will require repeated inspections of the property to assure that the violation still exists. It is possible to list more than one violation in the same Information. For example, if a ZEO has been to the property on four or five occasions over a period of two months, trying to obtain voluntary compliance, and is now seeking court action because such voluntary compliance was not forthcoming, then all four incidents may be separately listed as separate counts within one Information. The ability to get successive fines is often a valuable deterrent in obtaining voluntary compliance after the start of a court action. Further, because of the high cost of going to court on such violations, local justices can help to offset some of this expense to a municipality by imposing a high fine.
Because zoning law violations are treated as misdemeanors for jurisdictional purposes, it is the district attorney who has the primary responsibility for prosecution. But district attorneys do not commonly become involved in local zoning code prosecutions. Accordingly, district attorneys will delegate that responsibility to village and town attorneys. This delegation should be confirmed in writing. Usually, the district attorney annually forwards a letter to the municipal attorney, containing a blanket authorization to prosecute municipal code violations. Once authorized by the district attorney to prosecute the zoning violation(s), the village or town attorney becomes an assistant district attorney for that specific purpose, and should immediately file an oath of office as such with the county clerk.

**Civil Proceedings** – State law provides ample authority by which a local government may bring proceedings to prevent, restrain, correct, or abate violations of zoning regulations. Temporary restraining orders and injunctions are the vehicles used to accomplish this, and are often the final enforcement step taken by a local government.

A temporary restraining order is issued by a State court justice upon a showing that there is an activity going on, or a situation present, that may well cause imminent danger to life or property. Examples might be: allegedly illegal contamination of a public water supply, or storage of highly flammable material. Issuance of a restraining order requires application by the municipal attorney directly to the court, and is issued without a hearing. It remains in effect only so long as is necessary for the court to conduct a hearing on a preliminary injunction. At that hearing, the alleged violator is accorded an opportunity to show why a preliminary injunction should not be issued.

A preliminary injunction is a court order that either prevents someone from taking an action that will violate the zoning law, or orders someone to abate or correct an ongoing violation. The preliminary injunction provides temporary relief before a full trial can be held. No showing of imminent danger need be made. The court must, however, find that there is a reasonable chance that the municipality will succeed at the full trial, and that the alleged violator will not be unduly harmed by the injunction. A preliminary injunction can be issued to restrain enforcement of the zoning law or to suspend use or construction of a building.

Following a full trial on the merits of the case, the court may issue a permanent injunction against the violator. Unless appealed to a higher court, a permanent injunction abates the violation as a final matter. It either orders the violator permanently to cease the illegal activity, or orders that certain illegal construction be removed.

As courts can impose jail sentences and heavy fines for the violation of court orders, the injunctive power often provides a significant weapon in cases of willful and determined violators. The local government has no power on its own to issue injunctions - they can only be issued by a State court. Thus the municipal attorney should always be called in to institute the proper action.
CONCLUSION

Effective zoning enforcement prevents or corrects violations of the zoning law, and therefore effectuates zoning’s basic purposes: to protect the general health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the municipality. The zoning law is only as good as its enforcement; without proper enforcement, zoning consists merely of words on paper. Great care should therefore be taken when drafting the enforcement section of the zoning law. The authority to enforce, and the procedures for doing so, should be clearly spelled out. The ZEO should be given very specific guidelines regarding her/his powers and duties, to avoid confusion and to promote greater consistency in enforcement.

When a violation comes to the attention of the ZEO, it is critical that the enforcement process begin. In many cases, the violation results from an oversight on the landowner's part, and all that is needed is informal contact or a notice of violation. If not, the enforcement procedure provides for other administrative and judicial remedies to enforce compliance.

Written documentation and good record-keeping are also critical elements of the enforcement process. The ZEO best accomplishes this by using standardized forms that the legislative body adopts. Many sample forms are included for guidance, in the Appendix of this publication.
Appendix 1--Complaint Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Parcel Number:</th>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Block:</th>
<th>Lot:</th>
<th>Log No.:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

COMPLAINT OF VIOLATION

Form of Complaint:  □ Phone  □ Letter (attach)

Complainant: ________________________________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________________________________

Phone: ______________________________________________________________________

Site Location: __________________________________________________________________

Property Owner: __________________________________________________________________

Nature of Complaint: __________________________________________________________

ACTION BY ENFORCEMENT OFFICER:

Possible violation of Article _____________ , Section _______________, Subsection ___________ of the ___________________________________________(name of the law)

Site Inspection completed on ________(date)____ at ________(time)_______ [AM/PM]

Report of Findings: __________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

Action taken: _________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________
Zoning Enforcement Officer
Appendix 2—Enforcement Inspection Report Form

Tax Parcel Number: Section: Block: Lot: ________________
Log No.: ____________

ENFORCEMENT INSPECTION REPORT

Parcel
Location: _____________________________________________________________
Property Owner: _______________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________
Initiated by:
□ Referral from Official □ Unrelated Inspection □ Citizen Complaint
□ Drive-by Inspection □ Routine Enforcement Inspection
Date of Inspection: __________________________________________
Violation Type:
□ Use □ Building Condition □ Setback
□ Sign □ Junk or trash □ Abandoned Auto
□ Weeds □ Housing
□ None Observed □ Other (Specify): ______________________________________
Describe Violation: ____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Photos Taken: __________ Date: __________________
Violation of Article ______ Section __________________
Informal Contact Results: _______________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Deadline(s) set (if applicable):
Date: ________________________________
Action to occur by deadline: ________________________________

Follow-up of Informal Contact: ________________________________

☐ Case closed         ☐ Enforcement action checklist begun: __________ (date)____________________

________________________________________
Zoning Enforcement Officer
Appendix 3–Enforcement Checklist

Tax Parcel Number: Section: Block: Lot: 
Log No.: 

ENFORCEMENT ACTION CHECKLIST

Owner: 

Address: 

City/State/Zip: 

Phone: 

Describe Violation: 

in Violation of Article _______, Section _______, Subsection._________.

Action Recommended by Inspector: 

□ Withhold Permits          □ Stop work order/ Cease and desist order
□ Information and Complaint filed with local justice
□ Attorney contacted to file for injunction          □ Appearance ticket issued

Recommended Action Approved: 

_________________________________________  ____________________

Supervisor  Date

Actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>________</td>
<td>No violation found/no action taken</td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________</td>
<td>Matter adjusted informally</td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________</td>
<td>Notice of Apparent Violation sent</td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________</td>
<td>Notice of Violation/Order to Remedy sent</td>
<td>________</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building Department notified to withhold permits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stop Work/Cease and Desist Order issued &amp; served</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information and Complaint filed with Local Justice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appearance Ticket issued</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referred to Town/Village Attorney for Possible Injunction</td>
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**Appendix 4--Proof Chart Form**

<table>
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<th>Block:</th>
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**Log No.: ____________**

**PROOF CHART**

Town/Village of: ____________________________________________
Name of Violator: ____________________________________________
Address of Violator: _________________________________________
T. M. Number: _______________________________________________
Violation Alleged: ___________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Elements to Be Proven</th>
<th>Witnesses</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Problems</th>
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</table>
Appendix 5--Initial Follow-up Letter of Citizen Complaint

(date)

(name)
(address)
(city, state, zip code)

Dear ___________________________,

This letter will confirm the receipt and initial processing of your complaint about a possible zoning violation at ____________________(location)__________________. It is our understanding that the alleged violation consists of the following: ____________________________(description)________________________________________________________________________

(Select the appropriate paragraph to include in your letter.)

□ The information which you provided does not indicate a violation of the applicable zoning regulations or other land use regulations. The activity that you described is permitted on that property. If the description of the alleged violation contained is not accurate, please notify this office and we will reevaluate the situation. Unless we hear further from you this file will be closed.

□ An inspector from this office has completed a preliminary investigation and cannot confirm the facts that you reported to us. Specifically, on ____________________________(date of inspection)______, our inspector found no evidence of the activity that you described. If this situation recurs, or if you have additional information that might be useful to us, please contact this office. Unless we hear further from you, this file will be closed.

□ The matter that you describe may be controlled by deed restrictions. Deed restrictions, or restrictive covenants, are essentially private contractual agreements that are a part of the land title. Deed restrictions often control land use, building type, and location, just as zoning does. In some cases, deed restrictions are more restrictive than the zoning regulations. This municipality plays no part in the enforcement of private deed restrictions. Your attorney can furnish you with information on your rights

□ An inspector from this office has contacted the property owner informally. At this time, it appears that the property owner will voluntarily eliminate the violation in the near future. However, we will continue to monitor the situation until the violation is eliminated.

□ An inspector from this office has inspected the property and has initiated normal administrative proceedings for the correction of any violation. This matter has now become a formal enforcement action, identified as case number ____________________________(case #)______. If you have questions about the status of this case, you may contact this office. We will contact you when we believe the matter has been resolved.

Thank you for contacting us.

Sincerely,

___________________________________
Zoning Enforcement Officer
Appendix 6--Final Follow-up Letter of Citizen Complaint

(name)
(address)
(city, state, zip code)

Dear __________________________,

On _____________(date)_____________ you contacted this office regarding a possible violation of zoning or land-use regulations at _____________________(violation address)_____________________. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the conclusion of the enforcement action begun as a result of your complaint.

(Select the appropriate paragraph to include in your letter)

□ We are pleased to inform you that the violation has been eliminated as a result of:
  □ successful administrative enforcement action.
  □ the imposition of civil penalties.
  □ a court order for the abatement of the violation.

□ We regret to inform you that, after further investigation, our office, in consultation with an attorney, has determined that we do not have a case that can be successfully prosecuted in court. We understand your frustration with this situation, but we hope that you can understand our reluctance to prosecute a case we cannot win. We are reexamining the applicable regulations to determine whether those regulations should be revised to facilitate future prosecutions.

□ We regret to inform you that we took this enforcement action to court and were not successful. If you would like to see a copy of the court order in this matter, please contact this office.

Thank you for contacting us regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

________________________________________

Zoning Enforcement Officer
Appendix 7A--Administrative Search Warrant Application

STATE OF NEW YORK }
   COURT }
COUNTY OF ___________ }

In the Matter of an Administrative Inspection
of _________________________ under the control of __________________ presently
located at _________________________ in the ____________________, County of
__________________________ by the ____________________

APPLICATION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE
INSPECTION WARRANT UNDER THE
________________________________________

To: Honorable ___________________________
    Justice of the _______________________

1. _____________ (Name) ___________, ____________ (Title)_________ of the
    ________________________, duly authorized by the ______________________ to act herein, applies for an
Administrative Inspection Warrant, pursuant to the applicable provisions of statute, for:

   ☐ (a) Entry upon the above captioned premises.
   ☐ (b) Inspecting of such premises.
   ☐ (c) Obtaining of materials described as
       ________________________________________.
   ☐ (d) Access to and the copying of any records relating to such premises and materials.

2. Upon information and belief, said ☐ entry, ☐ access to and copying of records, ☐ inspection,
☐ obtaining of materials: ☐ was last undertaken on ☐ __________________________ has never been
undertaken.

3. Pursuant to ______________ and the law therein cited and authorizing the same, the
   ________________________ may enter and inspect any property, premise,
or place for the purpose of:
   ☐ inspects an actual violation of that [local law/ordinance],
   ☐ inspecting a suspected violation of that [local law/ordinance],
   ☐ ascertaining compliance or non-compliance with that [local law/ordinance].

Further, ______________ provides that an authorized representative of the ____________________ shall have a right to (a) enter any premises where a violation of that [law/ordinance] may have been
committed; (b) inspect such premises; (c) obtain materials from any person which may substantiate allegation
of such violation; and (d) have access to and copy any records relating to such alleged violation. To the
extent required by law, any information relating to the private concerns of persons which is obtained in the course of inspection or obtaining of materials shall be kept confidential.

4. The People of the ______________ through the ______________ Board have established that the public has a valid interest in the proper management of land use and in effective enforcement of the land use laws and regulations of the ______________. The public interest necessarily includes, but is not limited to:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

5. In order to safeguard the public interest as outlined in paragraph 4 above, and to ensure the effective enforcement of the land use laws and regulations of the ______________, the ______________ must:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. Based on the statutory authority allowing □ entry, □ to inspect, □ to obtain materials, □ access to and the copying of required records, and the public interest and necessity for said □ entry, □ inspection, □ obtaining of materials, □ access to and copying, there is sufficient justification for the issuance of an Administrative Inspection Warrant.

7. Upon information and belief, ____________ (Name)______________, in his capacity as ______________ of the ______________, in the course of his duties attempted to:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

the consent of _________________. This ________________ was controlled by____________________________, located at ________________________________, in the ________________, County of ________________, State of New York. Permission to make the inspection was denied by ________________________________ in the following manner:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

8. Upon information and belief further attempts to ________________________________

at this time would be to no avail and would result in a similar refusal by ________________________________ as described in paragraph 7 above.
9. Upon information and belief said __________________________ will in the future continue to refuse the statutory right of __________________________ to ________________________________________________ as set forth in paragraph 3 above, unless the court grants the Administrative Inspection Warrant requested herein.

10. The □ entry, □ inspection, □ obtaining of materials, □ access to and copying of required records requested herein will be undertaken during reasonable hours and the credentials of the employee or employees of ___________________________ undertaking the same will be exhibited to persons in control of __________________________ located at __________________________ in the State of New York. Such □ entry, □ inspection, □ obtaining of materials, □ access to and copying of required records will be undertaken by ___________________________ or other agent of __________________________ as soon as practicable after the issuance of the warrant herein requested but in no event later than ten (10) days after the issuance of the Administrative Inspection Warrant and will be completed with reasonable promptness.

11. When the □ entry, □ inspection, □ obtaining of materials, □ access to and copying of required records has been completed, a return shall be made to this court showing that it has been completed.


STATE OF NEW YORK } } ss.: COUNTY OF ____________________________

being duly sworn, deposes and says: I have read the foregoing application for an Administrative Search Warrant and know the contents thereof to be true except as to the matters stated therein to be alleged on information and belief, and as to those matters I believe it to be true.

________________________________________________________

Sworn to before me this __________ day of _________________, 20__.  
__________________________________________
NOTARY PUBLIC
Appendix 7B--Administrative Search Warrant Affidavit

STATE OF NEW YORK }
___________________COURT }
COUNTY OF _____________ }

In the Matter of an Administrative Inspection of __________________ under the control of __________________ presently located at ____________________________ in the ___________________, County of _____________ by the ____________

AFFIDAVIT

________________________(Name)____________________, an official of the __________________, being duly sworn, deposes and says:

1. I am __________________ of the __________________________. I have been employed by ________________ to enforce its land use regulations and my responsibilities include:_________________________________________________________________________________

2. In order to ensure credible and effective enforcement of the ___________________________ and rules and regulations promulgated pursuant thereto, it is necessary and reasonable to conduct unannounced periodic inspections of the __________________________ including places and points where violations of the __________________________ are alleged to be or have been committed.

3. Upon information and belief and based on a review of evidence before me, __________________ is believed to have committed a violation of Article ____, Section ____ of the __________________________.

4. Upon information and belief, the above cited violation of ___________________________ by ______________________ consists, in part, of ________________________________________________

5. The premises to be inspected, described in paragraph 4 above, is located at __________________________ in the ___________________, County of _____________ and State of New York, and is specifically situated and described as follows:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________
6. Upon information and belief these premises have never been inspected or were last inspected on _________________________________.

7. The ___________________ has developed a routine inspection program for the purpose of ascertaining compliance or non-compliance with _________________________________.

8. On __________(date) ______________, I attempted to conduct an inspection of the premises as described in paragraphs 4 and 5 above.

9. At that time, I stated the purpose of my inspection, the statutory authority under which I was conducting the inspection, and presented my credentials, consisting of ______________________________, to ______________________________. Following this identification process, I was denied the right to make the inspection or collect the materials. The denial consisted of __________________________________________________________.

As a result of this denial, I left without making the inspection or collecting materials.

10. Upon information and belief, further attempts by the ________________________________ to conduct an inspection or collect materials would be to no avail and would result in a similar refusal as set forth in paragraph 9 above.

11. I make this Affidavit in support of an application for an Administrative Inspection Warrant in relation to the alleged violation of ______________________________ set forth in paragraphs 4 and 5 above and under the control of ________________________________.

Sworn to before me this ____________
day of _____________________, 20__.

__________________________________
NOTARY PUBLIC
Appendix 7C--Administrative Search Warrant

STATE OF NEW YORK } 
COUNTY OF ______________ } 

In the Matter of an Administrative Inspection of ___________________________ under the control of _____________________ presently located at _____________________________ in the _________________, County of ________________ by the ________________

ADMINISTRATIVE INSPECTION WARRANT

Index No.

To: Officers and Employees Charged with Land Use Enforcement of the ____________________________

Application having made and administrative probable cause shown by ____________________________ of the ____________________________ for:

☐ (a) Entry upon the above captioned premises.
☐ (b) Inspecting of such premises.
☐ (c) Obtaining of materials described as _____________________________.
☐ (d) Access to and the copying of any records relating to such premises and materials.

NOW, THEREFORE, pursuant to the provisions of ______________________________________ and the decisions of the United States Supreme Court in Camara v. Municipal Court, 387 U.S. 523, See v. Seattle, 387 U.S. 541, and Marshall v. Barlow, 436 U.S. 307, you are hereby authorized to:

☐ (a) Enter upon any premises where a violation of the land use regulations of _________________ is alleged to have been committed.
☐ (b) Inspect such premises.
☐ (c) Obtain materials as described above.
☐ (d) Have access to and copy any records relating to such premises and materials.

Said ☐ entry, ☐ inspection, ☐ obtaining of materials, ☐ access to and copying of records shall be undertaken during normal business hours and as soon as practicable after the issuance of the warrant herein requested but in no event later than ten (10) days after the issuance of the Administrative Inspection Warrant and will be conducted with reasonable promptness.

The persons authorized to ☐ enter, ☐ inspect, ☐ obtain materials, ☐ have access to and copy records shall state their limited purposes of __________________________________________ present to the owner, operator, or agent in control of __________________________________________ appropriate credentials and a copy of this Administrative Inspection Warrant.
Any person who refuses the execution of this Administrative Inspection Warrant or impedes the inspector in the execution of this warrant shall be advised that such refusal or action constitutes a violation of Section 195.05 of the Penal Law, and that if such person persists and the circumstances warrant, s/he shall be arrested and the inspection shall commence or continue.

A return shall be made to this court showing that the inspection has been completed and the date thereof.

_____________________________________, Justice of the_________ Court
Dated this ________day of_______, 20___
Appendix 7D--Administrative Search Warrant Return

STATE OF NEW YORK }  
                        }  
COUNTY OF ___________ }  
In the Matter of an Administrative Inspection of ____________________ under the control of __________________ presently located at ____________________________ in the ___________________, County of ____________________ by the ____________________

ADMINISTRATIVE INSPECTION  
WARRANT RETURN

Index No.
To: Honorable __________________________  
    Justice of the ______________________

Pursuant to the Administrative Inspection Warrant issued to you over date of ____________________, inspection as authorized in said warrant was made and completed on __________(date)______________ by________________(name)______________________________, _______________(title)___________________.

Attached is a copy of the Inspection Report dated ________________________________.

STATE OF NEW YORK }  
                        }  
COUNTY OF ___________ }  
__________________________, being duly sworn, deposes and says that s/he has read the foregoing inspection warrant return subscribed by him/her; that s/he knows the contents thereof; and that the same is true to his/her knowledge.

Sworn to before me this ____________
day of _________________, 20__.

______________________________  
NOTARY PUBLIC
Appendix 7E - Administrative Search Warrant Return - Directions for Filing

STATE OF NEW YORK }
___________________ COURT }
COUNTY OF ___________ }
In the Matter of an Administrative Inspection of __________________ under the control of __________________ presently located at ________________________________ in the ______________________, County of __________ by the __________

DIRECTIONS
FOR FILING

Index No.

The annexed return of the Administrative Inspection Warrant issued by me over date of____________________ has been returned to me.

I HEREBY DIRECT that the original warrant, the application for same, and the return be filed in the ________________ (City, Town, Village) Clerk’s office.

_________________________________________ Justice of the ________________ Court
Appendix 8--Letter of Violation

NOTICE OF APPARENT VIOLATION

(name)
(address)
(city, state, zip code)

Dear ________________________,

According to records of the Town of ____________________ Assessor, you are the owner of property located at __________(violation address)_____________. On ___(inspection date)__, I observed an apparent violation of the Zoning Law/Ordinance on your property, specifically: _________(description of violation)_______________________________________________________________________.

That activity is a violation of Article ____, Section ______ of the Zoning Law, a copy of which is attached for your information. I hereby request that you either eliminate the violation or file plans with this office for corrective construction by ________________(date).

If you believe that you are not in violation of the Zoning Law, please contact this office to review the situation. If you intend to bring your property into compliance with the law, but you cannot meet the stated deadline, please contact this office and we will attempt to work with you on a short extension.

If you do not take the requested action or make other arrangements with this office by ___(date)___, we will begin formal enforcement action against you. You will NOT receive an additional warning before we begin formal enforcement action.

THIS IS THE ONLY LETTER YOU WILL RECEIVE. Your next communication from us will involve formal enforcement action.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your case, you can call me at ___(phone number)__. Because I am often in the field, the best time to reach me is between ____________(time and days available)

Sincerely,

______________________________________
Zoning Enforcement Officer
NOTICE OF VIOLATION - ORDER TO REMEDY

(date)

(name)

(address)

(city, state, zip code)

Dear ______________________________,

You are hereby notified that you have been found to be in violation of the Zoning Law Article _____, Section _____, Subsection ______. The specific violation is:

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

as observed by the zoning enforcement officer on ______ (date)____.

The following corrective measures should be taken no later than ______(date)____ or penalties may be assessed:___________________________________________________________

For the purposes of applying the penalties described in the Administrative Section of the Zoning Law, your first violation shall be deemed to have occurred as of ______(date)____.

Please Note: A violation of this code is punishable by a fine not to exceed ____ (amount). Each (time period)________ of continued violation shall constitute an additional, separate offense, after court determination.

If you have questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

____________________________________

Zoning Enforcement Officer
Appendix 10--Stop Work Order Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Parcel Number:</th>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Block:</th>
<th>Lot:</th>
<th>Log No.:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Town of __________
___________ County, New York
Zoning Law

Stop Work Order

YOU WILL PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that there exists a violation of Article _______. Section _______. Page _________ of the ___________ Zoning Law (or line out “zoning law” and substitute other law or ordinance as applicable) at the following location: ____________________________

________________________________________________
____________________________________

Tax Map Number: _________________ in that: ________________(state character of violation)

________________________________________
______________________________________________

You are hereby

Directed and Ordered to Stop Work,
comply with the law, and to remedy the conditions above mentioned on or before _____(date)___________.

Failure to remedy the condition aforesaid and to comply with the applicable provisions of law may constitute an offense punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.

________________________________________ | _______________________________________

Date | Date

Zoning Enforcement Officer

cc: Town Clerk
Appendix 11--Appearance Ticket Form

VIOLATION APPEARANCE TICKET

Defendant Name ____________________________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________________________________
Telephone __________________________________________ Date _______________

You are hereby notified that you are charged with violating the Law/Ordinance of the [Town/Village] of ________________________________ indicated below. A conviction on this charge could result in a maximum fine not to exceed ________________________________.

Name of Law: _____________________________________________________________
Article: ___________________________ Section: ________________________________
Adopted ______________________________

In that on the ________ day of _____________________, 20___, at _______ o’clock in the [fore/after] noon, at __________________ (location) ____________________, defendant did______________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

I hereby affirm the above to be true to the best of my knowledge
____________________________________________________
Signature, Zoning Enforcement Officer

You are hereby directed to appear in the [Village/Town] Court on the ________ of ____________
20___, at _____ o’clock [AM/PM] at ________________________________

YOUR FAILURE TO APPEAR COULD RESULT IN A WARRANT BEING ISSUED FOR YOUR ARREST.
NOTICE: YOU ARE ENTITLED TO RECEIVE A SUPPORTING DEPOSITION FURTHER EXPLAINING THE CHARGES, PROVIDED YOU REQUEST SUCH SUPPORTING DEPOSITION WITHIN THIRTY DAYS FROM THE DATE YOU ARE DIRECTED TO APPEAR IN COURT AS SET FORTH ON THIS APPEARANCE TICKET. DO YOU REQUEST A SUPPORTING DEPOSITION? □ Yes □ No
Receipt Acknowledged:____________________________________________________
Defendant
Appendix 12—Criminal Summons

STATE OF NEW YORK } 
} SS.: 
COUNTY OF ________________ 
CITY/TOWN/VILLAGE OF ________ COURT} 

THE TOWN/VILLAGE OF ________________, 

Plaintiff, 

Against _____________________________, 

Defendant 

SUMMONS 

In the name of the (City/Town/Village) of ____________________: 

To: ____________________________:

AN ACCUSATORY instrument, namely a Violation Code Appearance Ticket having been filed with the above court on the _____ day of __________ 20___ by ______________________________. 
Stating that you did commit the following offense: Violation of (code section or title of local law) of the City/Town/Village of _______________________________. 

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED to appear before this court at ____________________________, New York 
On the _____ day of __________ 20__, at ______(A.M./P.M.) in connection with the said accusatory instrument. 

AND UPON YOUR FAILURE to appear at the time and place herein mentioned a WARRANT may be issued for your arrest for the offense charged. 

Dated: _______________20__ 
__________________________, New York 

________________________________ 
Justice of the (City/Town/Village) Court
Appendix 13--Information and Complaint Form

INFORMATION AND COMPLAINT

[Village/Town] Court of the [Village/Town] of ________________________, County of ___________
The People of the State of New York

against

_______________________________
(Defendant)

STATE OF NEW YORK }} SS.:} COUNTY OF ______________________

FIRST COUNT

The complainant, ________________________, Zoning Enforcement Officer of the [Town/Village] of ________________________, County of ____________, being duly sworn, deposes and says:

1. I am the Zoning Enforcement Officer for the [Town/Village] of ________________________, and make this information based upon personal knowledge.

2. On _____(date)______, at _____(time)___, defendant _________________________ did commit a violation of the [Town/Village] Zoning [Law/Ordinance], Article _______, Section ________, in that at that date and time at ______________ (location) ______________________, in the [Town/Village] of ________________________, defendant did ____________________________________

3. Upon information and belief, defendant was and is the [owner/tenant] of the property referenced above in the [Town/Village] of ________________________, and as such, was responsible for the conditions described above.

4. The condition constituting the violation [is/is not] a continuing violation and has been observed or reported on the following other dates and times: __________________________________________

5. Defendant has failed to abate or remedy the alleged violation despite the following requests to do so: __________________________________________ Copies of all written requests are annexed.

WHEREFORE, your deponent requests that the court take action against defendant as allowed by law.

Sworn to before me this
____ day of _______ 20__

____________________
Notary Public

32
Endnotes

1 General City Law §27; Town Law §271; Village Law §7-718.
2 Town L. §266; Vil. L. §7-710.
3 Gen. City L. §81; Town L. §267; Vil. L. §7-712.
4 Town L. §64; Vil. L. §4-412. For procedures in cities, the reader should consult individual city charters.
5 Gen. City L. §§27-a, 27-b; Town L. §§274-a, 274-b; Vil. L. §7-725-a, 7-725-b.
6 Gen. City L. §32; Town L. §276; Vil. L. §7-728.
7 Gen. City L. §81-a(4); Town L. §267-a(4); Vil. L. §7-712-a(4).
9 See endnote 3.
10 See endnote 7.
11 Gen. City L. §27(14); Town L. § 271(14); Vil. L. §7-718(14).
12 Gen. City L. §28-a; Town L. §272-a; Vil. L. §7-722.
13 See endnote 2.
15 Gen. City L. §81-a(5)(b); Town L. §267-a(5)(b); Vil. L. §7-712-a(5)(b).
16 See Knight v. Amelkin, 68 N.Y.2d 975 (1986).
17 Gen. City L. §81-b(1); Town L. §267(1); Vil. L. §7-712(1).
18 Gen. City L. §81-a(6); Town L. §267-a(6); Vil. L. §7-712-a(6).
19 Town L. §264; Vil. L. §7-706. For procedures in cities, the reader should consult individual city charters.
21 A “violation” is “an offense, other than a ‘traffic infraction’, for which a sentence to a term of imprisonment in excess of fifteen days cannot be imposed.” Penal L. §10.00(3).
22 A “misdemeanor” is “an offense, other than a ‘traffic infraction’, for which a sentence to a term of imprisonment in excess of fifteen days may be imposed, but for which a sentence to a term of imprisonment in excess of one year cannot be imposed.” Penal L. §10.00(4).
26 Crim. Proc. L. §110.10 and , generally, Art. 150.
27 Town L. §268.
28 County L. §700(1); Peo. v. Van Sickle, 13 N.Y.2d 61 (1963).
30 Mun. Home Rule L. §10(4)(b); Town Law §268(2); Vil. L. §7-714.
31 For information regarding the powers of courts to issue orders and injunctions, see, generally, Const., Art. 6§7; City Court Act §1508; Youngs v. Carter, 10 Hun. 194; Matter of Schneider v. Aulisi, 307 N.Y. 376 (1954).