

HAMPTON VA

FOR THE RECORD

Rules on junk cars in neighborhoods tightened

Residents who have been keeping broken-down cars on their property need to either get rid of them or get working on them.

In response to complaints from residents, City Council has mandated that cars parked on private property must be in operating condition, have current or recently expired inspection stickers, and have valid license plates.

There's an exemption for DIYers who are fixing up cars: They can have up to 2 cars on their property (one being fixed and one for parts) but they need to be in a garage or screened from view.

For the record, the city has been getting an increasing numbers of citizen complaints about rusty junkers parked in driveways or yards for extended periods of time. Some have become homes to rats, raccoons and possums, inspectors noted.

The city's previous process took up to 100 days to get junkers removed. The new process is more streamlined.

Read more at hampton.gov/ForTheRecord

FAQ

Q: How many citizen complaints were there?

A: The city received more than 400 calls from residents about junkers last year via the 311 Citizen Contact Center. And inspectors observed many more violations on their rounds. In all, there were almost 1,000 violations being investigated in a one-year period between October 2016-2017.

Q: How can the city tell me what I can do on my property?

A: The city and state have many regulations residents have to follow. For example, zoning rules keep businesses that draw traffic out of neighborhoods; placement and sizes of fences are regulated; noise ordinances limit loud parties after 10 p.m.; grass can't be allowed to be more than 10 inches high; homes can't have peeling paint or rotting porches. In a city, what one property owner does can have an effect on the surrounding properties.

Q: What if my car needs repairs, and I just can't afford it yet?

A: The provision determining a car to be inoperable kicks in after the inspection has been expired for 60 days. That offers some cushion. Inspectors note that they are willing to work with residents in a temporary bind - if you call, explain the circumstances, and have a reasonable timeline to come into compliance.

Q: I have an antique car that isn't required to be inspected.

A: Then that part of the ordinance doesn't apply to your car.

Q: What about a race car that doesn't drive on roads? It's on a trailer.

A: As long as the car is on a licensed trailer, you're good. But if/when you take it off to work on it, you do have to have it in a garage or screened from view.

Q: What if I'm restoring or repairing a car myself? What are the screening rules?

A: First, if you keep the car(s) in a garage, you're exempted. This is about open storage of inoperable cars.

The regulation defines "shielded or screened from view" as: "completely precluding visibility of the subject vehicle by someone standing at ground level from outside of the property on which the vehicle is located by placing the vehicle within an area completely enclosed by any combination of the following:

- (1) a solid, rigid, six-foot opaque fence composed of standard fencing materials; and/or
- (2) a landscape arrangement of non-deciduous trees or shrubs, sufficient in height, spacing, density and circumference; and/or
- (3) a permanent structure.

The placing, draping or securing of a tarpaulin or other non-rigid cover over and around an inoperable vehicle shall not be sufficient to comply with the requirements of this section."

Q: What about the ugly car businesses and junk lots?

A: This rule change only affects inoperable cars on property zoned for residential purposes.

Q: Is it only about cars?

A: No, it includes all motor vehicles

Q: So, what happens if I get a notice of violation?

A: The notice will give you 10 days to remove the vehicle or bring it into compliance. If you have a special circumstance, call the number on the notice and explain. Do that quickly; don't wait until your 10 days are up. After 10 days, the city may remove and eventually dispose of the vehicle and charge removal costs to the owner of the property. If a summons is issued for court, a first-time violation is punishable by a fine of up to \$500; a second violation can draw a fine of up to \$1,000, if convicted.

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