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City Attorney Traces Bad Apples to Washington

Pfeiffer appeals to Tacoma media to put absentee landlords on notice

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. is taking his battle against blight more than 2400 miles away, to Tacoma, Washington. Tacoma is where Start Linden LLC, a limited liability company that acquired 10 properties on the eastside of Columbus in 2009, lists its address. Eight out of the 10 properties have been issued code violation orders and all 10 have outstanding property taxes due. According to records from the Franklin County Auditor, Start Linden LLC has not attempted to pay taxes on any of the properties since originally taking possession of them.

Start Linden sold one of the delinquent properties, 2342 Linden Avenue, to an individual investor allegedly located in Kailua Kona, Hawaii on November 21, 2011. Start Linden reportedly transferred the property via quit claim deed for \$30,000 after originally purchasing it from Delaware County Bank & Trust for \$8700. \$2,803.74 in back taxes are still owed on the property. Of the nine properties still in the possession of Start Linden, a total of \$24,823.22 in taxes is owed.

“I believe in free enterprise and the right to make an honest profit,” said City Attorney Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. “However, it appears as though this company is flouting our laws and exploiting our neighborhoods with little regard for how its business model impacts our community 2400 miles away.”

Pfeiffer became aware of Start Linden while doing research for his documentary on neighborhood blight on Myrtle Avenue in the Linden area. Start Linden registered with the Ohio Secretary of State on December 11, 2008 and lists Luke Lumsden of Worthington as the statutory agent. The incorporating members are listed as Christine S. Rowan and Karen L. Cochrane. The billing and mailing address is listed as 2620 N. Junett Street, Tacoma Washington 98407.

After interaction with the statutory agent did not produce a satisfactory resolution to the delinquent taxes, Pfeiffer turned to the Tacoma media to help deliver his message to the principals of Start Linden.

“These individuals may be productive, responsible members of the Tacoma community, but I have a duty to the residents of Columbus to make sure out-of-state companies such as Start Linden start playing by the rules and are held accountable for abating their nuisance properties in Ohio.”

Various code violations for Start Linden's properties include high grass, unsecured buildings, and general disrepair. Also, according to §4703.01(F)(2) of the Columbus City Codes, a public nuisance can be declared on "[a]ny building, premises or real estate, including vacant land, or any appurtenance thereto upon which its real property taxes have remained unpaid in excess of one (1) year from [the] date of assessment."

If a property owner ignores original orders to abate a nuisance, the City Attorney, through the Zone Initiative, can file a complaint for injunctive relief in the Franklin County Municipal Court Environmental Division. If the owner does not answer in court, the City can file for a default judgment and an injunction. If the owner still does not comply, the City can motion for contempt and petition the Court to order daily fines up to \$250 per day. If the owner continues to ignore court orders, the fines can be reduced to a judgment and foreclosure proceedings can be initiated.

However, City Attorney Pfeiffer's first preference is to work with property owners to abate the nuisance. He's hoping the Tacoma community will speak up and help compel the principals of Start Linden LLC to work with him and take responsibility for their property in Columbus before court action is initiated.

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