



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Beaufort adds smartphone app to toolkit for keeping city clean, safe and attractive

People today use smartphones to check the weather and stock market, to connect with friends through email, texting or social media, and occasionally to place a call. Now, they can use their smartphone to help keep the City of Beaufort clean, safe and attractive.

SafeBuilt, the company that handles codes enforcement for Beaufort, is promoting use of a smartphone application called Government Outreach. The app lets people share their concerns or complaints about possible code violations, including photos and GPS coordinates, directly from their phone.

“This is not spying on your neighbors. It is being a concerned citizen,” said Libby Anderson, director of planning for Beaufort. “We are using technology to provide one more way for people to help us keep Beaufort the special place that it is.”

For years, Beaufort’s residents and visitors have reported their concerns about overgrown lots, abandoned homes and vehicles, and suspicious behavior. Some of these concerns are tackled by the Police Department while others go to Codes Enforcement. In the past, these complaints were shared by telephone, letter or in person at City Hall.

In recent years the most commonly-reported problem has been overgrown lots. Prior to major clean-ups in 2010-2012 conducted by neighborhood groups, volunteers and the City that removed more than 300 tons of trash, rubbish was a more prevalent problem. From January through August 2013, Beaufort received 85 complaints about overgrown lots, 20 property-maintenance concerns and 12 contacts regarding garbage.

The Government Outreach application is available for Android and Iphone smartphones. The app lets people remain anonymous or share their contact information with the City.

No action is taken by the City or its Codes Enforcement team based only on the complaint or concern. The information is investigated, just as it would be if a Codes Enforcement officer saw the problem during a routine drive, Anderson said.

The City encourages people to provide their contact information for follow-up as needed; however, similar to people calling in anonymous tips about crime, neighbors may prefer to remain confidential in their tips about possible code violations. Again, no action is taken simply on the basis of a complaint or concern being shared with the City either through the smartphone app or by other means. An investigation and review of the problem is conducted prior to any citations or other actions, City Manager Scott Dadson said.

“We are simply providing one more way for people to tell us if they see a problem we need to know about,” Dadson said. “For years and years people have called us, written letters or talked to the City Manager or Mayor when they thought there was a problem that needed looking into – now we simply add to that the use of smartphone technology.”

Other than using the Government Outreach smartphone application, concerns can be telephoned to 843-470-3514 or 843-525-7011; emailed to Dboren@safebuilt.com; or mailed to City Hall Code Violations, 1911 Boundary Street, Beaufort SC 29902.

To use the smartphone app, users fill out brief information about the nature of the complaint or concern. Photos of the perceived problem may be attached. Users can choose to include their contact information or remain anonymous – this is a reporting application and not an email. The smartphone’s internal GPS will include coordinates for the location under review, assuming the complaint is made while at the address.

Once an issue is brought to the attention of the City of Beaufort and its Codes Enforcement Officer, the problem is investigated. If the concern is a violation of Beaufort’s rules and ordinances, the property owner is contacted and a solution is found.

“This can be as simple as having an overgrown lot cut back, or the wild weeds cut down or a broken-down car moved,” Anderson said. Other times it can be more involved, as in the case of an abandoned structure that creates a public health hazard.

The app sends reports of violations to the Beaufort Codes Enforcement team. It also tracks violations and can produce reports for the City. People can check the status of reports they've made on the app, which will indicate whether the case has been closed.

“Our police department, and most other law enforcement agencies, depends on citizen reporting to help prevent, respond to and solve crimes,” Dadson said. “Codes enforcement is the same way, especially when we are trying to be as efficient as possible with our tax dollars.”

The City’s Codes Enforcement Officer regularly rides through the city limits and will investigate concerns; however, having residents and visitors share their concerns is a more efficient way to do business, Dadson said.

To download the mobile application, search in the Apple App Store for “gorequest” (this is an iPhone application) or “gorequest” in Google Play for the Android version.

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