

Code Enforcement Across Community Types: A Garfield County Perspective

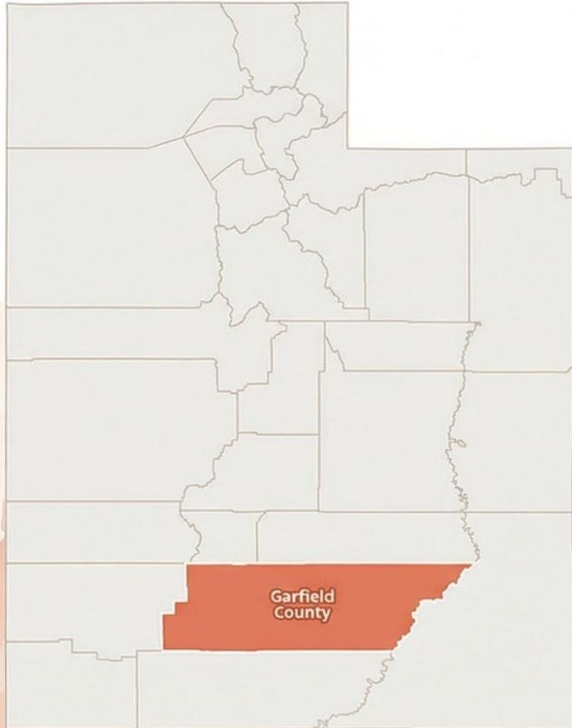
Lessons from a Rural County Perspective

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Garfield County at a Glance



~5,000 Residents

across 5,175 sq. miles

Large County

One of the largest counties in Utah by area

Major Landmarks

Home to Bryce Canyon, Grand Staircase-Escalante, Capitol Reef

Gateway Economy

Tourism-driven, short-term rentals are a major land-use factor

Code Enforcement Isn't a Department — It's Everyone's Side Job



1. Neighbor complaint
(formal written submission
to Planning Dept.)



2. Commissioner call
(routed to planning
staff)



3. Staff discovery
(observed while
traveling the county)

“We enforce when we hear about it.”

Three Paths to Enforcement

Neighbor Complaint

Must be submitted in writing; creates a paper trail; most common trigger.

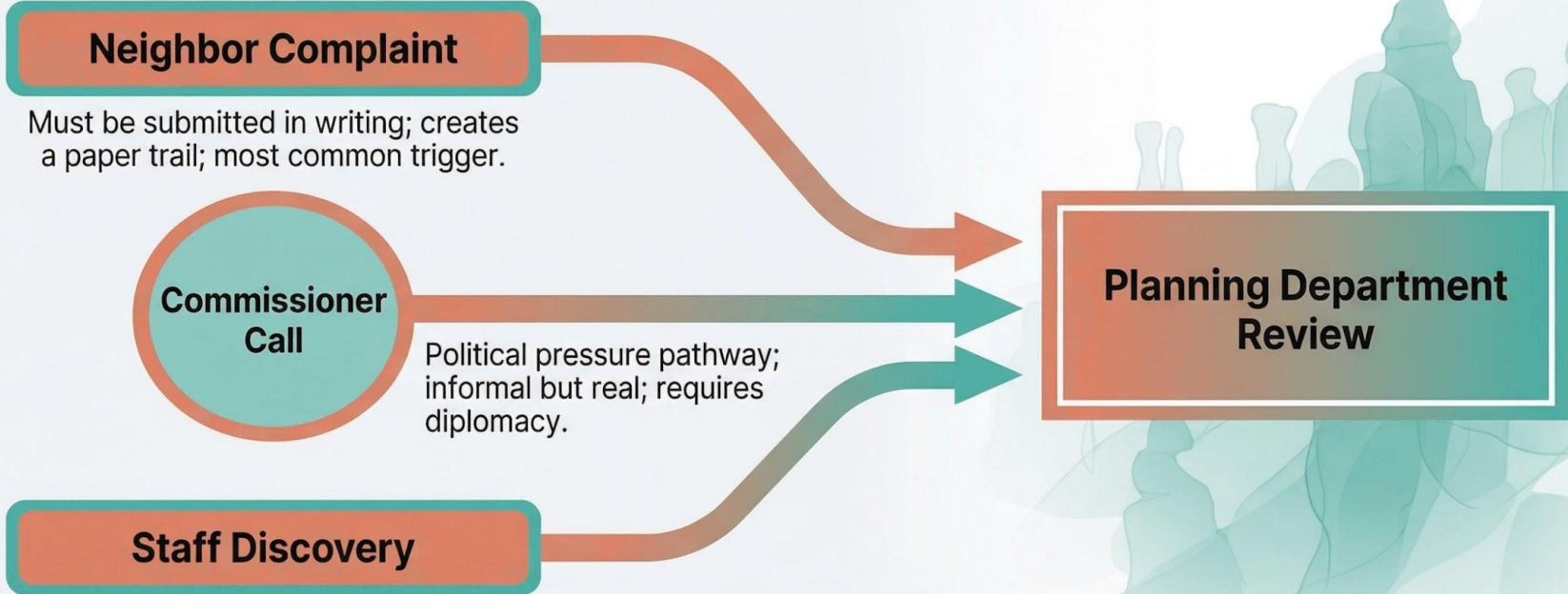
Commissioner Call

Political pressure pathway; informal but real; requires diplomacy.

Staff Discovery

Opportunistic; no systematic patrol; depends on staff travel routes.

Planning Department Review



Not Everything in the Code Gets Enforced

What We Prioritize

- ✓ Short-term rental violations (neighbor-reported)
- ✓ Unpermitted structures with safety concerns
- ✓ Zoning use violations in sensitive areas

What Often Goes Unaddressed

- Minor setback violations
- Agricultural nuisance complaints
- Long-standing non-conforming uses

“Limited staff means triage, **not** total enforcement.”

STRs Are Reshaping Rural Enforcement Demands



- Tourism economy = high STR density relative to population



- Neighbor complaints most often relate to noise, parking, occupancy



- State legislation shapes what counties can and cannot regulate



- Enforcement is reactive — no proactive inspection program

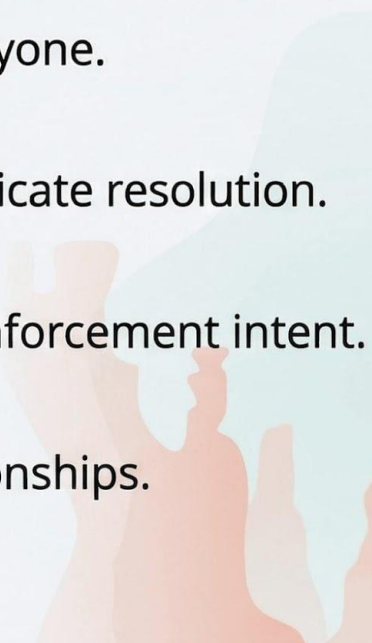
In Small Counties, Relationships Are the Enforcement Mechanism

- Everyone knows everyone — enforcement decisions are visible and personal
- Transparency and consistency build (or erode) trust
- Informal resolution often preferred over formal citation
- The planner as mediator, not just regulator



“The code is the last resort.
The conversation comes first.”

What Works in a Resource-Constrained County

1. Written complaints create accountability — for everyone.
 2. Commissioner involvement can accelerate or complicate resolution.
 3. Staff visibility in the field matters — even without enforcement intent.
 4. Informal resolution saves time and preserves relationships.
 5. Prioritize by impact, not just by complaint volume.
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The Gap Between Code and Capacity

Key Points (Wish List)



- A part-time dedicated code enforcement officer
- A simple online complaint portal
- Clearer prioritization criteria in county ordinance
- Regional cooperation with neighboring counties



Rural Enforcement Is Different — And That's Okay

1. Reactive enforcement can still be fair and effective with the right process

2. Community trust is a resource — protect it in every enforcement decision

3. Honest triage is better than the illusion of full compliance

Thank You

Questions & Discussion

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