

SUMMER 2023

# NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

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### Greetings!

In this *Neighbor to Neighbor* magazine issue, we welcome the summer season and explore ways your neighborhood can get involved with Orange County Government.

This edition connects you, our residents, with County programs and services. On March 1, 2023, Orange County launched the first Office of Tenant Services. The Office is a one-stop shop that addresses landlord and tenant rights issues for residents in unincorporated Orange County.

On October 14, 2023, the Neighborhood Services Division will celebrate 25 years of hosting the Orange County Community Conference. The community conference will be an action-packed day filled with opportunities for residents to learn more about Orange County services, attend workshops and learn how to strengthen their neighborhoods.

We are proud of the many programs we offer through the Orange County Neighborhood Services Division, which are designed to engage you in creating a sense of community. I hope you enjoy the summer issue and all that we have to share about our great neighborhoods. Thank you, and enjoy!

Sincerely,

Jerry L. Demings  
Orange County Mayor



### Hello Neighbors,

A welcome doesn't usually come with a request. However, please save Saturday, October 14, 2023, to your calendars as the return of the highly anticipated, in-person Orange County Community Conference. The 2023 Orange County Community Conference provides opportunities to learn more about Orange County Government's services and initiatives, attend informative workshops with information to strengthen

your organization, and networking with like-minded community leaders and partners. While learning and networking you might get hungry; rest assured, breakfast and lunch will be provided. For more information about the Community Conference, please visit [www.ocfl.net/communityconference](http://www.ocfl.net/communityconference) and don't forget to subscribe to the division's electronic newsletters by sending an email to [ocneighborhoods@ocfl.net](mailto:ocneighborhoods@ocfl.net).

Organizing and implementing the Community Conference is an enormous effort and could not be accomplished without an incredible team. I'm fortunate to lead a dedicated team working to engage with and strengthen our diverse neighborhoods. Please enjoy this issue of *Neighbor to Neighbor* magazine.

I hope to see you all at the conference!

Sincerely,

Jason Reynolds, AICP  
Manager, Neighborhood Services Division

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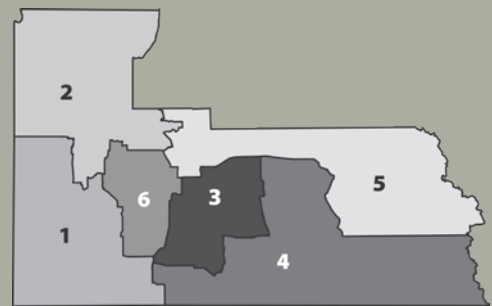
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## EDITORIAL CREDITS

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**On the Cover:** Baldwin Park's urban design and innovative use of open space and ground level that is conducive for retail shops and safe, pedestrian activities.



# HELP FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



## Neighborhood Services Division: Engaging and Strengthening Communities

By **Tiana Davis**, *Public Relations Information Officer* and **Jordan A. Hodge**

**Since 2001, Orange County Neighborhood Services Division has been here to serve YOU and all neighborhoods in the County.** We have provided various resources, tools, and support to improve our communities over the years. In late 2020, the Neighborhood Services Division merged with what used to be known as the Code Enforcement Division and became one, but still continuing the division name of Neighborhood Services. We simply have another component added to our mission of “Engage and strengthen neighborhoods through encouraging compliance with the relevant codes, community development, outreach, and planning.”

This merger serves to provide a foundation of community resources for all who choose to visit or call Orange County home, but the ultimate measurable success of such a merger starts with those directly involved, the great swath of individuals that keep the momentum moving forever forward.

Neighborhood Services is responsible for ensuring that residents are aware of the zoning and housing codes in the form of our Code Compliance team. This includes code compliance inspectors being assigned to all corners

of Orange County to ensure this is being completed. In addition, the Community Development & Outreach team support providing neighborhood grants, outreach through monthly workshops, and helping residents by assisting them if they have experienced fraud through the Consumer Protection Office. The Planning team provides future planning for neighborhoods.

Our office is still responsible for implementing several other programs, which include: Safe Neighborhoods, a crime prevention program; G.O. Neighborhoods (Get Organized), a community-organizing program; Community Connections Workshops, a series of presentations regarding topics of interest to neighborhoods; maintaining the Orange County Neighborhood Organization Directory & Database, a listing of resident and community organizations; an annual Orange County Community Conference; and several programs that assist residents make neighborhood improvements.

**For more information about Neighborhood Services, please contact us at 407-836-4200, visit our webpages at [www.ocfl.net/Neighborhoods](http://www.ocfl.net/Neighborhoods), or e-mail us at [OCNeighborhoods@ocfl.net](mailto:OCNeighborhoods@ocfl.net).**



In the growing lexicon of technology, “Google It” has become the proverbial crutch we’ve adopted, forever propping us up with baked salmon recipes or the biking distance from Albuquerque to Saskatchewan. Albeit on a much smaller scale, Orange County has established its own pillar of information in our community. You may be familiar with the 311 non-emergency help & information service, but speaking from the code compliance perspective, you may be curious about what violations should be reported. Well, at the risk of sounding biased or vague, let’s just agree with the tried and true — if you see something, say something — as our baseline. If what you’re witnessing appears to be unusual behavior, is bothersome to you, or could otherwise be seemingly problematic for the public at large, report it to 311.

That aside, let’s also try to reveal more of what constitutes an actual code violation. Beginning with what is perhaps the most emblematic issue associated with code violations, let’s focus on high grass and weeds. The operative piece of this complaint is twofold: length and definition. High grass and weeds that meets or exceeds 18 inches in height is a verifiable violation, but that only satisfies the first portion of the complaint. How vegetation is defined is the second part. The definition of grass and weeds does not include bushes, shrubs, trees, vines, flowering plants, or any other living plant life typically used and being used for landscaping purposes. Keeping these two points in mind, if your neighbor’s property is filled with exotic flowers, aromatic shrubbery, and the grass is kept at 17 ½ inches, a code violation cannot be issued.

Moving on, perhaps what you’re viewing isn’t located on the exterior of the home and is instead, an interior issue. Do you see what appears to be a construction crew actively replacing a roof, tearing down walls, or converting a garage into an enclosed living space? These could be perfectly legal scenarios, but the appropriate permits are required. For these examples, if there are no permits issued, this would constitute as a code violation. Including, but not limited to these examples of new construction and existing alterations, you can always call 311 and staff will determine whether the applicable permits were issued.

Wait, there’s more. Vehicles located on a property without a license plate/registration tag, trash/junk/debris strewn about the yard, roosters being kept on residential properties, recreational vehicles playing host and remaining occupied for periods of time, etc. are all representative examples of what you should report to 311. Taking this point a step further, a code compliance inspector only has authority within the property’s boundaries. This is to say, if what you’re witnessing is on the sidewalk or in the street, there’s a good chance another division is responsible for addressing the matter, but you should still report it to 311. The matter will be referred to the appropriate agency to ensure it is handled as appropriate.

# Reporting a Code Violation— Call 311

By Jordan Hodge



## Office of Tenant Services Here to Serve You

By **Amy Michaels**, *Administrator*

**The Office of Tenant Services officially opened to the public on March 1, 2023.** The office acts as a one-stop shop and clearinghouse to address issues of landlord and tenant rights for citizens located within unincorporated Orange County. It will focus on outreach and education for both tenants and landlords by providing information related to renting within Orange County. The goal of the office is to “Bridge the Gap between Tenants and Landlords.”

The Office of Tenant Services ensures residents know what their rights are under Florida law. The office can also investigate complaints and enforce the Tenant Bill of Rights Ordinance and the Rental Notices Ordinance. We provide referrals through our partnerships for Orange County Code Enforcement, other Orange County Departments, Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association, Nonprofit organizations, and community stakeholders. The office does not provide direct monetary assistance, emergency rental assistance, represent consumers in legal actions, provide legal advice, force, order a landlord or tenant to provide a specific resolution.

The Office of Tenant Services consists of four staff members that assist tenant and landlords providing information

and referrals. Tenant Services Program Manager — Ruth Jacques develops the educational and outreach materials for the office. She provides seminars and training to both tenants and landlords by assessing the needs based on incoming inquiries. Ruth is also the office’s Creole-speaking staff person. Tenant Services Assistant — Aline Robinson assists with phone inquiries and emails. She also assists the Program Manager developing contents for education and outreach. Aline is the office’s Portuguese-speaking staff person. Tenant Services Assistant, Kacey Ortega-Brown is the office’s Spanish-speaking staff and assists tenants and landlords with information and referrals. The Tenant Services Program Coordinator position is currently vacant, however, the job was posted and has closed.

Orange County staff members who work with the community are encouraged to reach out to our office to host seminars and workshops for their clients. The Office of Tenant Services is always looking for opportunities to partner with others to help the residents of Orange County.

**For more information, contact 407-836-RENT(7368).**



# EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

## Orange County Community Conference: Helping to Encourage Community Volunteers

By **Tiana Davis**, *Public Relations Information Officer*

**This year the Neighborhood Services Division will celebrate its 25th Annual Community Conference, which will be held on Saturday, October 14, 2023.** For the past three years we hosted a virtual conference and we are excited to return to our traditional, in-person conference.

Over 20 years ago, the Planning Division held the first Orange County Community Conference in June 1994 in Downtown Orlando. The community conference strives to educate, encourage community volunteers, assist citizens on how to revitalize their neighborhoods, and provide

them with resources and tools in an effort to make positive improvements in their communities. The conference has seen many transitions over the years, from hosting 100 participants at the University of Central Florida's Student Union to nearly 500 participants at the Orange County Convention Center.

This year's conference will feature a workshop session with Mayor Demings. Mayor Demings will discuss the initiatives he is implementing, including housing for all, economic development, and increased public safety. This interactive





workshop provides the perfect setting to dialogue directly with Mayor Demings about the future and the groundwork being laid to make Orange County the “Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow” by creating a culture of innovation, collaboration, and inclusiveness.

The annual conference will be filled with valuable information about County services and programs that can help neighborhoods thrive and prosper. It will also connect neighborhood leaders and hardworking citizens who want to make an impact by improving their communities. “The Orange County Community Conference is a way to bring neighborhood leaders, civic leaders, and non-profit leaders to a place where they can learn, interact, and then take the information on to their communities,” said Orange County Neighborhood Services Division Manager Jason Reynolds. “It’s a wonderful time when we all get to gather and

celebrate our accomplishments and encourage one another to keep going in the journey of making our neighborhoods the best ever.” We invite you to be our guest at the 2023 Orange County Community Conference by registering at [www.ocfl.net/CommunityConference](http://www.ocfl.net/CommunityConference).



25<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL  
**COMMUNITY  
CONFERENCE**  
Orange County Government





# You Can be The Change

By **Rose-Nancy Joseph**, *Senior Program Manager*





**Everyone wants to live a quality of life, and for some, it begins at home.** Have you driven through a neighborhood and asked: How do they keep it so clean and inviting? Can I get sidewalks that connect my community to nearby parks and shops? The good news is you can be the change, and Orange County Neighborhood Services offers two learning tools to help foster citizen engagement and improve the livability of community.

1. **Community Connections Workshops** offer unconventional topics to educate neighborhood leaders on how to help their community thrive and learn from one another. Workshops are free and held monthly on the 2nd Saturday from 9 to 11 a.m. There is also an opportunity for HOA and Condo Board members to comply with Florida's statutory education requirement (minimal fee may apply).

At Board Member Certification Training for HOAs and Condo Associations, participants listen intently to subject-matter experts as they receive relevant information of their fiduciary responsibilities and how to successfully operate their organizations.

2. **Citizen Planner Academy** empowers citizens to become active decision-makers in the planning process of land development, and healthy and safe neighborhoods. This free workshop occurs on the 4th Saturday from 9 to 11 a.m. It is facilitated by certified planners, who may illustrate the planning concept through interactive walking tours of specific neighborhoods and open spaces. Topics can range from the role of economic development/

redevelopment and effective use of traffic calming devices to improve traffic and pedestrian safety to walkable parks and building modern amenities at recreational facilities. Citizen Planner Academy featured a walking tour of Baldwin Park's urban design and innovative use of open space and ground level that is conducive for retail shops and safe, pedestrian activities.

While the metrics for quality of life is subjective, curating your comfort requires smart planning and ongoing discussions.

**To learn more, visit [ocfl.net/neighborhoods](http://ocfl.net/neighborhoods) or email the program supervisor, [Shurlitha.Jones@ocfl.net](mailto:Shurlitha.Jones@ocfl.net).**





# GET INVOLVED



## Check Professional Licenses Before You Hire

By **Steven Bulinski**, *Program Supervisor*

At the Consumer Protection Office, we receive complaints stemming from all sorts of consumer transactions. Common topics include home improvement, medical billing, timeshares, auto repair and debt collection. While the subjects of the complaints are often quite different, the steps that the consumers should have taken to protect themselves are usually the same.

One of the most important ways to protect yourself is to check professional licensing. There are several state agencies that are responsible for issuing professional licenses in Florida. Before these agencies issue a license, the applicant typically must: 1) prove competency in their field, 2) pass a criminal background check, and 3) show proof of proper insurance.

Not every profession is required to be licensed in Florida. The below list includes some of the most commonly hired professions that have licensing requirements in Florida, and the agency that is responsible for their licensing.

### **Department of Business & Professional Licensing**

<https://www.myfloridalicense.com>  
850-487-1395

Construction Industry Contractors, Real Estate, Timeshares, Veterinarians, Barbers, Cosmetologists, Certified Public Accountants

### **Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services**

<https://www.fdacs.gov/>  
800-435-7352

Private Security Guards, Private Investigators, Vehicle Recovery (Repossession)

### **Department of Health**

<https://www.floridahealth.gov>  
850-245-4444

Acupuncture, Body Piercers, Chiropractors, Dentists, Medical Doctors, Optometrists, Pharmacists, Septic Tank Contractors

### **Office of Financial Regulation, Division of Consumer Finance**

<https://flofr.gov/>  
850-487-9687

Consumer Finance Companies, Debt Collectors

### **Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles**

<https://www.flhsmv.gov/>  
850-617-3003

Auto Dealers

### **The Florida Bar**

<https://www.floridabar.org/>  
850-561-5600

Lawyers

If you are going to hire someone in any of the above fields, plan to contact the agency responsible for their licensing before signing any contracts or paying any money. Confirm that the business has an active license and that they don't have a history of discipline.

**For more information about the Consumer Protection Office or to file a complaint about a business, contact us by phone at 407-836-3111 or by email at [fraudhelp@ocfl.net](mailto:fraudhelp@ocfl.net).**



# SPOTLIGHT LEADERSHIP

## Dr. George A. Wallace: An Ally

By **Orange County Communications**

Due to Hurricane Ian, the 2022 Orange County Community Conference, which was scheduled for early October, was canceled. In lieu of the conference, Orange County Neighborhood Services hosted a Community Awards Recognition breakfast on October 24, during which the 2022 Citizen of the Year and Community Organization Award winners were honored.

The Citizen of the Year awards recognize dedicated individuals who continue to work diligently to improve the quality of life in Orange County, either through their professional work or volunteer activities. Each of the six District Commissioners selected a Citizen of the Year for their respective district to recognize them for their contributions.

The Office of the Mayor Distinguished Citizen of the Year is Dr. George A. Wallace, the CEO of The LGBTQ+ Center in Orlando. Since becoming CEO, Dr. Wallace has overseen the expansion of The Center to include the main community center on Mills Avenue, a dedicated health services office in Orlando and a secondary community center in Kissimmee. Through his leadership, and the creation of the strategic public, private and philanthropic partnerships, The Center has become one of the most trusted LGBTQ+ organizations in Central Florida and has increased its service portfolio to address the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals and the community at-large.



**25<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
COMMUNITY  
CONFERENCE**  
Orange County Government

**The (Re)turn of the face  
to face Orange County  
Community Conference**

Saturday, October 14, 2023 - 7:30am - 2pm  
Location to be determined soon



Orange County Government  
**Neighborhood  
Services  
Division**

"Engaging and Strengthening Neighborhoods"

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