

Scenic Watch



News -
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Anonymous Complaints Ban - More Fallout
"A Tampa mystery: Who's making code complaints in this man's name?"



Photo: Douglas R. Clifford

"The first phone call last November confused real estate agent Jason Papi. Why, the angry stranger wanted to know, did Papi submit a code complaint against his home?"

The second call, weeks later, was jarring. Papi's team leader with Keller Williams Realty asked if he had maliciously squashed a colleague's sale by submitting the same type of complaint to the city of Tampa.

Days later, there was a third call. Another stranger spewed profanity.

'I didn't know what they were talking about,' Papi said. He went looking for answers and describes what he discovered as alarming.

Someone, Papi alleges, has been fraudulently filing complaints under his name through the city of Tampa's website.

City records show that from Oct. 5 through March 27, "Jason Papi" made at least 50 complaints against 48 homes owned by 44 different property owners. Each had enough information for the city to investigate the claims.

'I did not make a single one of those,' said Papi...

Each code complaint was reported to the city through its online portal. They were typically for work done without permits, prompting investigations of the homes by the construction services department that oversees such violations.

The properties span Port Tampa to the Busch Gardens neighborhood — and most of the homes turned out to have legitimate violations.

Twenty-seven of the investigations have been closed and, of those, at least 18 concluded that there was a problem. At least three had violations for work completed years earlier by a previous owner.

At least 44 of the properties were for sale or rent — or recently sold or rented — at the time of the complaint. At least 28 are owned by investment property companies...

How to stop complaints?

On Feb. 7, Papi sent a letter to the city maintaining that he was not behind the slew of complaints. In November, according to the letter, he called the Code Enforcement Department and asked that it stop taking complaints in his name. The letter reiterated the request.

'I fear that a disgruntled individual will show up to my home one day to harm myself, my wife, or our dog,' Papi wrote. "We would like to live our lives in peace and work on starting our own family once we feel safe in our own home again.

City spokesperson Adam Smith said that since the letter was received any code complaints bearing Papi's name would have to be made via notarized letter. But

city records show that one for a dilapidated fence was submitted via the code enforcement website on March 27. It prompted an investigation without a notarized letter.

Smith said that 12 complaints made in Papi's name since Feb. 7 have been dismissed without an investigation because they were submitted online.

Looking through Tampa code enforcement records from the last year, the Tampa Bay Times identified two possible fraudulent names.

From Sept. 12 through Oct. 6, 'Isaac Booth' made at least 25 complaints via email spanning the city and mostly against investment properties. When the Times sent a message to the email address listed on the complaints, it bounced back. And, according to the property manager of his listed residence, no one by that name has ever lived there.

From April 12 through May 15, 'Louis Hernandez' made at least 13 similar complaints through a mix of email and the city's website. But the home address listed was for rent during that period, according to its property manager's website. The property manager did not respond to a Times call. There was no reply to a message sent to the listed email...

According to Magill, it looks like someone is combing through online real estate listings, comparing current photos to those from past listings and looking for changes, then checking to see if permits were pulled for that work — public information available through the city's website.

'How else would they know what work was done inside the house?' Magill said.

Of the complaints made in Papi's name, at least 21 include interior work and some of those reference a Zillow listing. Whoever is behind them, Magill said, she estimates it took the complainant 15 minutes to acquire the information.

'It's pretty easy,' she said. 'All it takes is a computer and some time...'

-- Paul Guzzo, Tampa Bay Times"

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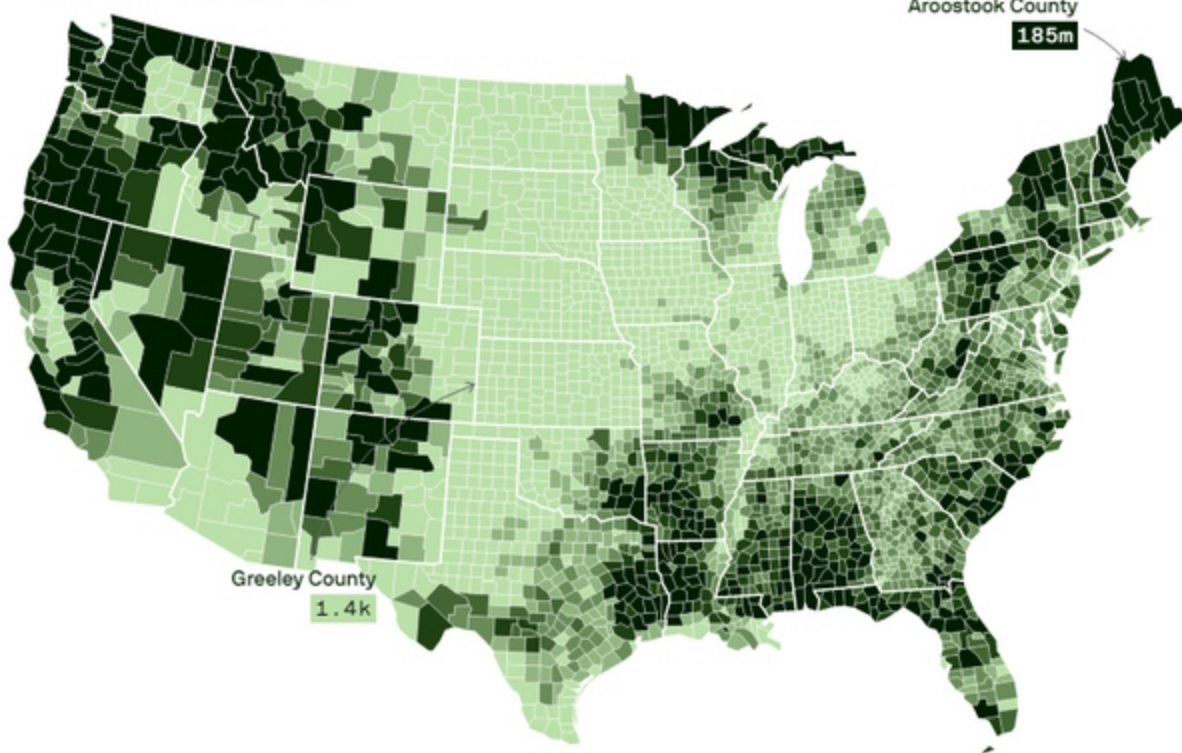
[Related article on Panama City's code department experience with new law](#)

Equitable? "The climate gains of urban trees"

Air pollution absorbed by trees

2010 estimates

Pounds per year



Graphic: Climate Central analysis of U.S. Forest Service data; Map: Simran Parwani/Axios

"From stormwater runoff prevention to reducing the impacts of extreme heat, tree canopies provide a host of health and climate resiliency benefits for those in urban landscapes.

Why it matters: Not all trees are distributed equally. A new Climate Central analysis reveals which localities nationwide benefit most from the boons of urban forests.

How it works: Urban tree coverage helps reduce the impacts of extreme heat, prevents stormwater runoff, mitigates air pollution exposure and can even sequester carbon, per the analysis.

A tree's leaves can absorb pollutants like ozone and nitrogen dioxide, the report noted.

What they found: The U.S. cities with the most air pollution absorbed by trees are Presque Isle, Maine; Eugene, Ore.; Eureka, Calif.; Bangor, Maine; and Duluth,

Minn., according to Climate Central data shared with Axios.

By contrast, the cities with the most intense urban heat islands are Houston, New Orleans, Newark, New York City and San Francisco. Zoom in: Only about 18% of Houston is currently covered by tree canopy, with a roughly 14% 'tree cover discrepancy' between high and low-income neighborhoods, reports the Houston Chronicle.

What they're saying: Jaime González, Community and Equitable Conservation Programs Director for the Nature Conservancy's Texas Chapter, tells Axios the city of Houston is working to meet an 'ambitious' goal of 4.6 million trees planted by the year 2030.

González' team just partnered with the Texas A&M Forest Service to map available planting zones in Gulfton, Texas — a 'nature-deprived' neighborhood in Houston that's home to a largely immigrant and lower-income community. They estimated 804 trees could be placed there to increase tree canopy cover.

'You just walk around the neighborhood, there are long, long stretches where there are no trees and it's just hot pavement,' says González. (In 2020, parts of Gulfton were 17 degrees hotter in the afternoon than the city's coolest neighborhood, per the Washington Post.)

'If there's a very large pot of money coming down, there needs to be equitable and empowering ways to get the money to the communities that are going to be served.'

State of play: The Inflation Reduction Act provided \$1.5 billion in funding over 10 years to the U.S. Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program.

Beattra Wilson, assistant director for cooperative forestry at the U.S. Forest Service, tells Axios in an email that the IRA funding will allow them to 'reach more communities to help plant, replace, and maintain millions of trees.'

Wilson also notes the agency's focus on 'equity considerations' and prioritizing 'underserved communities' with the funding, which will be allotted through grants through 2031. Zoom out: Historic redlining, a discriminatory housing practice, has led to higher proportions of racial minorities living in areas with less tree canopy cover, which can exacerbate health problems, per a 2021 study...

Yes, but: "Tree for tree, [urban] trees are potentially doing a lot. But it's not going to offset the fossil fuels which are also concentrated in cities," says Lucy Hutyra, professor of earth and environment at Boston University.

From planting costs to maintenance, she notes the costliness of urban trees, as well as the different growing environments city to city, which produces varying

ecosystem services and benefits. The bottom line: "Trees are part of the solution," Hutyra tells Axios. "But they are not the whole solution."

-- Ayurella Horn-Muller with contribution by Simran Parwani, Axios

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Turning Beach Trash to Art "The Washed Up Project"



Beach Junki, Fernandina Beach, Florida



Beach Junki, Fernandina Beach, Florida

"The Washed Up Project"

The purpose of the Washed Up Project is to collect marine debris and create ocean art that will bring awareness to the plastic pollution washing up.

Amelia the Sea Turtle

Our first Washed Up Project is the Amelia Sea Turtle created by local talented artist, Sandra Baker-Hinton. Amelia was constructed from washed up sunglasses, bottle caps, plastic pieces. Amelia is currently displayed at Seaside. You can find Sandra at Clay Times Art Center in downtown Fernandina Beach.

Shrimpers Paradise

The second project, Shrimpers Paradise, is also constructed from marine debris. It was created by a young talented artist, Kazuki Roca. The items used to construct the shrimp are shotgun shells, and fishing lures. Shrimpers Paradise is currently displayed at Main Beach in Fernandina, next to the Beach Toy Borrow Box."

-- Beach Junki, Fernandina Beach, Florida

[Visit Beach Junki here](#)

"Common sense has prevailed: Bill threatening Florida's historic buildings is dead"



Photo: Verónica Zaragovia, WLRN WUSF News

"Historic buildings like Art Deco ones in Miami Beach would have been allowed to come down under a bill introduced in the 2023 legislative session..."

St. Augustine Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline said she feels relieved that these bills didn't make it.

'It would have created more problems than solutions,' she told WLRN via email...

This came after opponents, including officials from cities like Palm Beach and St. Augustine, spoke up against the legislation that would have allowed any building to come down so long as it stood in high-risk coastal flood zones mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and didn't meet the agency's requirements for new construction. That would include the majority of historic buildings up and down the state, especially the hundreds of Art Deco structures in Miami Beach. Properties in historic districts would not have been protected except for any individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Senate Bill 1346 and House Bill 1317 received support from Republicans and Democrats, and made it out of the Senate with some amendments, like exclusions for buildings 200 years and older, but didn't get debated on the House floor.

Opponents feared the measure would allow hundreds of Art Deco and Miami Modern buildings in Miami Beach to be torn down, destroying the character of cities and hurting the tourism economy...

The measure even got attention well outside the state. The National Trust for Historic Preservation sent out a statement urging people to contact elected officials to ask them to vote against it.

'Florida's historic districts are irreplaceable architectural, historical, and community treasures,' the National Trust wrote. 'Countless private property owners have invested in the rehabilitation of historic buildings in these districts and helped revitalize local economies. For decades, preservation organizations, commission members, architects, developers, and city staff have helped plan and implement successful development projects in historic districts.'

Critics also feared this legislation would encourage what's known as demolition by neglect — when an owner of a property avoids costly repairs to a building until a building official deems it too unsafe for public use.

When the Deauville Beach Resort — a Miami Modern building built in 1957 — was imploded last November, preservationists accused the owners of abandoning the hotel until it had to get demolished. They had shut it down in 2017 after an electrical fire and later, water damage caused by Hurricane Irma. Despite efforts in court from Miami Beach officials to get the owners to repair it, a judge ruled it had to be demolished due to a public safety risk.

The legislation would have excluded any historic structures listed by name in the

National Register of Historic Places. Miami Beach, however, has fewer than 10.

The bill is expected to return in 2024.

The bill sponsor in the House, State Rep. Spencer Roach, has said he plans to reintroduce the measure next session."

-- Verónica Zaragovia, WLRN WUSF News

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"Alternatives To Using Sod For Right-Of-Way Plantings Presentation to Sanibel City Council"

City initiates pilot program for right-of-way plantings"



Photo: City Of Sanibel, Phillippi Creek project

"The city of Sanibel reported that at its recent meeting, the city council approved by consensus a pilot program that will study alternatives to using sod as a required planting in the city's right-of-way.

Public Works and Natural Resources staff delivered a presentation that explained the history and purpose for using sod in the right-of-way and potential alternatives to sod. The city reported staff will identify locations in the right-of-way to plant native or Florida friendly plants for the pilot program.

Residents interested in participating in the pilot program, by planting approved plants in the right-of-way, can contact Natural Resources at 239-472-4135.

Planting in the right-of-way requires a permit from the Public Works Department..."

-- City Of Sanibel, in Captiva Sanibel Island Reporter

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Equitable Tree Program in Miami: "Caleb Center tree planting"



Photo: Miami-Dade County

"Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and District 3 Commissioner Keon Hardemon were joined by other county officials and a group of children from Easter Seals for a tree planting ceremony last week at the Joseph Caleb Center. The event kicked off the mayor's initiative to increase the tree canopy in low-income neighborhoods, beginning with county buildings."

-- The Miami Times

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