

## CHAPTER 34: CODE HEARING UNIT

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#### **Cross-reference:**

*Building and Property Maintenance Code*, see [Chapter 154](#)

*Subdivision Code*, see [Chapter 155](#)

*Zoning*, see [Chapter 157](#)

## GENERAL PROVISIONS

### **§ 34.01 ESTABLISHMENT.**

There is hereby created a code hearing unit which shall be known as the "County Code Hearing Unit" and authorized to conduct administrative adjudication proceedings for the county, its departments, and its officers.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-1)

### **§ 34.02 JURISDICTION.**

The Code Hearing Unit is authorized to establish a system of administrative adjudications for the enforcement of all provisions of the County Code, except those preempted by state law or county ordinance.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-2)

### **§ 34.03 COMBINED CODE HEARING UNIT AUTHORIZED.**

The Code Hearing Unit may be combined with any adjacent unit of local government to create a combined Code Hearing Unit for the efficient and just adjudication of all ordinance violation cases for the various units of local government.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-3)

#### **§ 34.04 DIRECTOR AND HEARING OFFICERS; APPOINTMENT.**

The Chairperson of the County Board, with the advice and consent of the County Board, shall appoint a Director and one or more Hearing Officers for the purpose in this section. A Hearing Officer may not be a Code Enforcement Officer or other law enforcement officer. The Director of the Code Hearing Unit shall have the power to create and amend regulations for the fair and efficient conduct of administrative hearings pursuant to this chapter.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-4)

#### **§ 34.05 ORDER AND OTHER PLEADING FORMS.**

The Director of the Code Hearing Unit shall have the authority to create and require the use of preprinted order and related pleading forms in the hearing process.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-5)

#### **§ 34.06 HEARING OFFICERS; POWERS AND DUTIES.**

Hearing Officers shall have the following powers:

- (A) All powers authorized by state statute (see e.g., 55 ILCS 5/5-41005 to 5/5-41060) including, but not limited to, the following:
  - (1) Preside at administrative hearings called to determine whether a code violation exists;
  - (2) Hear testimony and accept evidence from the Code Enforcement Officer, the respondent, and all interested parties relevant to the existence of a code violation;
  - (3) Preserve and authenticate the record of the hearing and all the exhibits and evidence introduced at the hearing;
  - (4) Issue and sign written findings and a decision and order stating whether a code violation exists; and
  - (5) Impose penalties consistent with applicable code provisions and to assess costs reasonably related to instituting the proceedings upon finding the respondent liable for the charged violation. In no event, however, shall the Hearing Officer have the authority to impose a penalty of incarceration.
- (B) Hold conferences for the settlement or simplification of issues;
- (C) Administer oaths and affirmations;
- (D) Rule upon motions, objections, and the admissibility of evidence;
- (E) Subject to the provisions of this chapter, subpoena relevant witnesses and the production of relevant documents, records, or other information; and
- (F) Exercise all powers and duties necessary and proper to the administration of fair hearings.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-6)

#### **§ 34.07 HEARING OFFICERS; TRAINING REQUIREMENTS.**

Prior to conducting an administrative adjudication proceeding, a Hearing Officer may be required to complete a training program approved by the Executive Committee, which may include the following:

- (A) Instruction on the county regulations for the conduct of administrative hearings;
- (B) Orientation to each subject area of the code violations which the Hearing Officer will adjudicate;
- (C) Observation of the county or another unit of local government's administrative hearings; and

- (D) Participation in hypothetical cases, including ruling on evidence and issuing final orders.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-7)

#### **§ 34.08 RULES AND REGULATIONS; AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION.**

The rules and regulations promulgated for the conduct of administrative hearings shall be published and kept on file in the office of the County Clerk where they shall be available to the public for inspection and copying during normal business hours.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-8)

### **ADMINISTRATION**

#### **§ 34.20 INITIATING ADMINISTRATIVE ADJUDICATION PROCEEDINGS.**

Code Enforcement Officers of the county may initiate administrative adjudication proceedings with the Code Hearing Unit by forwarding a copy of a notice of violation or a notice of hearing, which has been properly served, to the Code Hearing Unit.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-9)

#### **§ 34.21 SUBPOENAS.**

- (A) A Hearing Officer may issue a subpoena only if the Hearing Officer determines that the testimony of the witnesses or the documents or items sought by the subpoena are necessary to present evidence that is:
  - (1) Relevant to the case; and
  - (2) Relates to a contested issue in the case.
- (B) A subpoena issued under this chapter shall identify:
  - (1) The person to whom it is directed;
  - (2) The documents or other items sought by the subpoena, if any;
  - (3) The date for appearance of the witnesses and the production of the documents or other items described in the subpoena;
  - (4) The time for the appearance of the witnesses and the production of the documents or other items described in the subpoena; and
  - (5) The place for the appearance of the witnesses and the production of the documents or other items described in the subpoena.
- (C) In no event shall the date identified for the appearance of the witnesses or the production of the documents or other items be less than seven days after the service of the subpoena.

(55 ILCS 5/5-41025(a)) (Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-10)

#### **§ 34.22 ELECTION OF REMEDIES.**

In no case may the Code Hearing Unit conduct an administrative adjudication proceeding for an alleged violation of the County Code where the requested remedy is a punishment of imprisonment. Nothing in this chapter, however, shall preclude the county from seeking the remedy of imprisonment in a court of law, including imprisonment for failure to comply with the order of a Hearing Officer.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-11)

### **§ 34.23 ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING NOT EXCLUSIVE.**

Notwithstanding any other provisions of this chapter, neither the authority of the Code Hearing Unit to conduct administrative adjudication procedures nor the initiation of such procedures under this chapter shall preclude the county from seeking remedies for code violations through the use of any other administrative procedures or court proceeding.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-12)

### **§ 34.24 NOTICE.**

Notice shall be as provided by state law. A copy of the violation notice and report form shall be served on the respondent either personally or by first class mail, postage prepaid, sent to the address of the respondent. If the name of the respondents property owner cannot be ascertained or if service on the respondent cannot be made by mail, service may be made on the respondent property owner by posting, not less than 20 days before the hearing is scheduled, a copy of the violation notice and report form in a prominent place on the property where the violation is found.

(55 ILCS 5/5-41020(c)) (Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-13)

### **§ 34.25 ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS.**

- (A) Any administrative proceeding conducted by the Office of Administrative Adjudication shall afford the parties an opportunity for a hearing before an Administrative Law Officer.
- (B) An attorney who appears on behalf of any person shall file with the Hearing Officer a written appearance on a form provided by the Code Hearing Unit for that purpose.
- (C) In no event shall the case for the county be presented by an employee of the Code Hearing Unit; provided, however, that documentary evidence, including the notice of violation, which has been prepared by another department or office of the county, may be presented at the hearing by the Hearing Officer.
- (D) The Hearing Officer may grant continuances only upon a finding of good cause.
- (E) All testimony shall be given under oath or affirmation.
- (F) The Hearing Officer may issue subpoenas to secure the attendance and testimony of relevant witnesses and production of relevant documents. Issuance of subpoenas shall be subject to the restrictions contained in this chapter.
- (G) Subject to this section, the Hearing Officer may permit witnesses to submit their testimony by affidavit or by telephone. A respondent may elect to contest an alleged violation through an adjudication by mail rather than at an administrative hearing. The respondent may use forms provided by the Code Hearing Unit or simply write a letter with any evidence respondent may have to contest the alleged violation. The respondent must sign respondent's correspondence.
- (H) The formal and technical rules of evidence shall not apply to the conduct of the hearing. Evidence, including hearsay, may be admitted only if it is of a type commonly relied upon by reasonably prudent persons in the conduct of their affairs.
- (I) No violation may be established except upon proof by a preponderance of the evidence; provided, however, that a violation notice, or a copy thereof, issued and signed in accordance with 55 ILCS 5/5-41035 (or succeeding state law) shall be prima facie evidence of the correctness of the facts contained therein.
- (J) Upon timely request of any party to a proceeding, any person, who the Hearing Officer determines may reasonably be expected to provide testimony which is material and which does not constitute a needless presentation of cumulative evidence, shall be made available for cross-examination prior to a final determination of liability.
- (K) The record of all hearings before a Hearing Officer shall include:
  - (1) All documents presented at the hearing;

- (2) A copy of the notice of the violation or notice of the hearing; and
  - (3) A copy of the findings and decisions of the Hearing Officer.
- (L) The record of a hearing before a Hearing Officer may include a record of the testimony presented at the hearing, which may be by means of a tape recording, transcription, or other appropriate means.
- (1) The Code Hearing Unit shall not provide recording services or equipment.
  - (2) Any party desiring to record the testimony presented at the hearing shall provide its own court reporter, transcriber, or recorder at that party's own expense regardless of the outcome of the hearing.
  - (3) The Hearing Officer may reasonably limit where the court reporter, transcriber, or recorder may be placed in the hearing room. If the party or the court reporter, transcriber, or recorder is unwilling to follow reasonable limitations, then the Hearing Officer may remove court reporter, transcriber, or recorder.
- (M) Upon conclusion of a hearing, the Hearing Officer shall issue a final determination of liability or no liability. Upon issuing a final determination of liability the Hearing Officer may:
- (1) Impose penalties and/or fines that are consistent with applicable provisions of the County Code;
  - (2) Issue orders that are consistent with applicable provisions of the County Code, including, but not limited to, orders to cure any continuing violations of the County Code; and
  - (3) Assess costs reasonably related to instituting the hearing.
- (N) In the issuance of a final determination of liability, a Hearing Officer shall inform the respondent of respondent's right to seek judicial review of the final determination.
- (O)
- (1) If at the time set for a hearing the recipient of a notice of violation or a notice of hearing, or the recipient's attorney of record, fails to appear, the Hearing Officer may find the recipient in default and proceed with the hearing and accept evidence relevant to the existence of a code violation and conclude with a finding, decision, and order. A copy of the order of default shall be served in any manner permitted under this chapter.
  - (2) Within 21 calendar days from the issuance of an order of default, a recipient of a notice of violation or a notice of hearing who has been found to be in default may petition the Hearing Officer to set aside the determination and set a new hearing date on the basis that the failure to appear at the hearing was for good cause. If the petition is granted, the Hearing Officer shall serve notice of the new hearing date upon the petitioner in any manner permitted by this chapter no less than seven calendar days prior to the hearing date.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-14)

#### **§ 34.26 EX PARTE DISCLOSURES.**

The county hereby adopts and incorporates *Canon 3(A)(6) of the Code of Conduct for Administrative Law Officers*. Therefore, Hearing Officers and other personnel of the Code Hearing Unit are required to refrain from public comment about a pending or impending proceeding before the Code Hearing Unit.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-15)

#### **§ 34.27 POST-HEARING MOTIONS.**

There shall be no post-hearing motion practice before the Code Hearing Unit. Appeals or review of final orders shall be governed by [§ 34.33](#).

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-16)

### **§ 34.28 COMPLIANCE BOND.**

In order to ensure that code violations are remedied or fines are paid in a timely manner, a Hearing Officer, upon issuing a final determination of liability, may require a code violator to post with the county a compliance bond or, as appropriate, to consent to the granting and recording of a lien against titled property. Bonds and liens shall be approved by the County Auditor and State's Attorney's Office as to form and amount. Whenever it is necessary for the county to make repair or otherwise expend funds to a code violation for which a bond was posted, or whenever fines or costs remain unpaid after a code violator has exhausted or failed to exhaust judicial review procedures, the Hearing Officer may, after giving the parties notice and an opportunity to be heard, issue an order permitting the county to draw against the bond in an appropriate amount, or to foreclose the lien. The Hearing Officer shall order the bond or the titled property or proceeds from the titled property, less the costs incurred by the county, returned to the code violator upon proof of compliance with the applicable code provisions and the payment of the applicable fines or costs.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-17)

### **§ 34.29 WAIVER, SUSPENSION, OR REDUCTION OF FINES.**

In instances where the County Code calls for the imposition of a mandatory minimum fine upon a finding of liability by a Hearing Officer, a Hearing Officer may not waive, suspend, or reduce the imposition of said mandatory minimum fine.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-18)

### **§ 34.30 ENFORCEMENT OF HEARING OFFICER'S ORDER.**

Any fine, other sanction, or costs imposed by a Hearing Officer's order and any expenses incurred by the county to enforce the order including, but not limited to, attorney's fees, court costs, and costs related to property demolition or foreclosure, that remain unpaid after the exhaustion of, or the failure to exhaust, judicial review of a Hearing Officer's final determination of liability for a code violation shall be a debt due and owing the county and, as such, may be collected in accordance with applicable law.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-19)

### **§ 34.31 FINES PAYABLE TO THE COUNTY TREASURER.**

All fines and other monies paid to the county in accordance with this chapter shall be remitted to the County Treasurer for deposit to the county's General Fund.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-21)

### **§ 34.32 REVIEW OF FINAL ORDERS.**

- (A) Upon becoming final, an order of a Hearing Officer shall be subject to review in the Circuit Court of the county under the applicable avenue of appeal.
- (B) In general, appeals of final orders for violations of County Code provisions are governed by the state's Administrative Review Act (735 ILCS 5/3-101 et seq.).

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-22)

### **§ 34.33 ADDITIONAL RULES, REGULATIONS, AND PROVISIONS.**

The County Board may adopt any other necessary and proper rules, regulations, or provisions to carry into effect this chapter and the powers granted and purposes stated in the County Code, 55 ILCS 5/5-41.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-23)

### **§ 34.34 REGULATIONS FOR THE CONDUCT OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS.**

- (A) *General regulations.*
  - (1) *Creation and amendment of regulations.* Until amended by the Director of the Code Hearing Unit, the following shall be the regulations applicable to administrative hearings.

- (2) *Scope of regulations.* The regulations shall apply to the conduct of all cases before the Code Hearing Unit.
  - (3) *Supremacy of ordinances.* Nothing in these regulations shall act to override, restrict, or relax the procedural requirements or provisions of the applicable provisions of the County Code. In the event of a conflict between provisions of these regulations and the County Code, the County Code shall take precedence.
  - (4) *Effective date.* These rules shall be in full force and effect commencing May 30, 2002.
- (B) *Decorum.* Administrative hearings shall be conducted with proper decorum at all times. A Hearing Officer is expected to conduct the Officer's room, call, and proceedings in a timely, orderly, and professional manner. A Hearing Officer may order the temporary removal of any individual who is causing or contributing to a disruption of the call or proceedings.
  - (C) *Record of proceedings.* All proceedings may be recorded by audio tape or by other approved means from start to finish. Respondents may, at their own cost, provide a certified or licensed court reporter to record proceedings. Video or audio recording not authorized by the Hearing Officer is prohibited.
  - (D) *Cameras and other non-authorized audio-visual recording or broadcasting devices.* The County hereby adopts and incorporates the order of the State Supreme Court *In re Photographing, Broadcasting, and Televising Proceedings in the Courts of Illinois* (MR No. 2634). Pursuant to said order, the photographing, broadcasting or televising of proceedings, other than those in the appellate and supreme courts, is prohibited. Therefore, the photographing, broadcasting, or televising of proceedings before a Hearing Officer are prohibited.
  - (E) *Introducing and opening remarks.* A Hearing Officer should begin the Officer's call by introducing himself or herself to the litigants and other attendants. Opening remarks should include informing the citizens as to the nature and manner of the proceedings. Opening remarks may include information about the order that cases will be called, the need to maintain proper decorum, continuances, acceptable and unacceptable defenses, the availability of pre-trial conferences and the range of potential fines.
  - (F) *Management of the case call.* Cases should be called in the following order to achieve a timely and efficient management of the call:
    - (1) *Pre-tried dismissals or settlements.* Matters pre-tried prior to the call which result in dismissal or settlement of the case shall be called and placed into the record.
    - (2) *Cases with attorneys.* Cases, not pre-tried or settled, in which an attorney has filed a written appearance shall be called. The Hearing Officer should note in the Officer's opening remarks that attorneys are not given preferential treatment, but as officers of the court their presence may be required before other judges in other courthouses.
    - (3) *Regular call.* Respondents seeking a full hearing shall be called and the hearing commenced.
    - (4) *Additional pre-tried dismissals or settlements.* Matters pre-tried during the call which result in dismissal or settlement of the case shall be called and placed into the record.
    - (5) *Motion to set-aside defaults.* Respondents moving to set aside the default order shall be called and a hearing on the motion commended. The Hearing Officer shall first determine whether the motion is timely and whether the Officer has jurisdiction to entertain the motion. If timely, the Hearing Officer shall determine the merits of the motion. If the motion is granted, the Hearing Officer should proceed with a hearing on the case.
    - (6) *Defaults.* Cases in which no respondent has appeared shall be called. The Hearing Officer shall proceed with a hearing and enter an order on the record.
  - (G) *Discovery.* Discovery in proceedings before the Code Hearing Unit shall be governed by State Supreme Court Rule 201(h). Accordingly, no discovery procedure shall be used in proceedings before the Code Hearing Unit except by leave of a Hearing Officer.

- (H) *Subpoenas of witnesses and documents.* Subpoenas in proceedings before the Code Hearing Unit may only be issued by a Hearing Officer, unless otherwise provided by ordinance particular to the violation in question.
- (I) *Rules of procedure and evidence.* The formal and technical rules of civil and criminal procedure and evidence shall not apply in the conduct of administrative hearings. Evidence, including hearsay, may be admitted if it is of a type commonly relied upon by reasonably prudent persons in the conduct of their affairs.
- (J) *Standard of proof.* No violation may be established except upon proof by a preponderance of the evidence.
- (K) *Representation and appearance.* Parties may represent themselves or may be represented by an attorney or authorized representative. Any and all counsel or other persons appearing on behalf of a respondent in proceedings before a Hearing Officer must file a written and signed appearance on the first occasion before the Hearing Officer. Proceedings, as defined in this section, includes any and all requests for a continuance, hearing, or hearing to vacate a default judgement.
- (L) *Continuances.* In general, continuances are not looked upon with favor and shall only be granted where absolutely necessary for good cause shown. Lack of preparation shall not be grounds for a continuance.
- (M) *Defaults.* If a respondent or respondent's representative fails to appear for a properly noticed hearing, the Hearing Officer may find the respondent in default and proceed with the hearing.
- (N) *Motion to vacate a default.* A respondent must file a written motion to vacate the default order within 21 days after the issuance of the default order. The movant must also be prepared to proceed with an immediate hearing if the motion is granted. The Code Hearing Unit shall not have jurisdiction to vacate a default order after 21 days from the issuance of the default order. However, lack of personal jurisdiction may be raised at any time. **ISSUANCE OF THE DEFAULT ORDER**, as used in this rule, shall be the date that the default order was deposited in the U.S. mail.
- (O) *Dismissal for want of prosecution.* If the Hearing Officer determines that the petitioner has not afforded proper notice, then the case shall be continued on the call to afford the petitioner an opportunity to resend notice. If at the continued date the petitioner has not afforded proper notice, the Hearing Officer shall dismiss the matter for want of prosecution. Said first dismissal shall be without prejudice.
- (P) *Pre-hearing motions.* Pre-hearing motions should be limited to motions for leave to request discovery, subpoenas, continuances, or vacation of prior default under divisions (H), (I), (L), and (N) above. In matters where discovery is allowed by the Hearing Officer, discovery related motions may also be allowed.
- (Q) *Pre-hearing settlements conferences.* A party and the issuing County Department, through its representative or legal counsel, may enter into a settlement or stipulation of the issues or case and present the same to the Hearing Officer when the matter is called.
- (R) *Hearings.*
- (1) *Notice.* A Hearing Officer will first determine whether the petitioner has afforded proper notice to the respondent. If notice is improper, the matter will be returned to the petitioner for re-notice or re-filing.
  - (2) *Presentation of the county's case.* The county bears the responsibility for presenting its case. In general the case may be presented via a county representative (including non-lawyers), live sworn testimony, sworn signed prima facie documentation, or all of these.
  - (3) *Respondent's plea.* In the event that the county has met its initial burdens of notice and evidence of its claim or of a violation, the respondent or the respondent's representative shall be asked to enter a plea of "admit-liable" or "deny-not liable".
  - (4) *Presentation of the respondent's case and defense.* The defenses available to the respondent and the manner in which they may be presented are governed by the ordinance particular to the



subject matter or violation in question. In general, evidence may be presented via live sworn testimony, admissible documents, admissible exhibits, or other admissible evidence.

- (5) *Questions by the Hearing Officer.* The Hearing Officer may ask questions of the parties and witnesses, if necessary, to ensure the clarity and completeness of the testimony and record.
- (6) *Constitutional challenges.* The Code Hearing Unit is not empowered to pass upon the constitutionality of a statute, ordinance, rule, regulation, or other legislative or administrative action. (See *Yellow Cab Co. v. City of Chicago*, 938 F. Supp. 500 (1996).) Parties may, however, make an objection, without argument, to the constitutionality of a statute, ordinance, rule, regulation, or other legislative or administrative action for the record.
- (7) *Closing arguments.* Each party may be afforded an opportunity to make closing arguments.
- (8) *Ruling.* At the conclusion of the hearing, the Hearing Officer shall make a determination on basis of the evidence presented at the hearing as to whether a violation exists or does not exist. The determination shall be recorded in the form of a written order. The manner and content of the order are governed by the ordinance particular to the subject matter or violation in question. The manner of serving a copy of the order on the parties is also governed by the ordinance particular to the subject matter or violation in question.
- (S) *Interpreters.* The respondent is responsible for supplying respondent's own interpreter to provide assistance during the hearing process. Interpreters shall be sworn-in and shall swear that the interpreter shall provide an accurate translation of the proceedings.
- (T) *Reviewing or copying of public records.* The public records and public case files maintained by the Code Hearing Unit may be reviewed during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) in the County Board Office. No records or file items may be removed from the premises absent court order. The Code Hearing Unit reserves the right to require that requests be made in writing and that extensive or multiple requests be made by appointment. Copies of public records and public files may be requested through the Freedom of Information Act, being 5 ILCS 140/1 et seq. The Code Hearing Unit reserves the right to require that requests be made in writing. Fees for processing requests shall be as follows: \$0.20 per side of a page and \$1 per certified order or other certified documents.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-25)

#### **§ 34.99 PENALTY.**

Any person, having received notice and an opportunity for a hearing as provided in this code, who knowingly fails to comply with an order issued by a Hearing Officer under this chapter, including the issuance of a subpoena, shall, if the order is not stayed by a court of competent jurisdiction prior to its effective date, be guilty of contempt. Contempt shall be punishable by a fine not less than \$200 nor more than \$500 for each offense. Each day that the violation continues shall be considered a separate and distinct offense. In a prosecution under this section, it shall not be a defense that a person came into compliance with an order, sought judicial review of it, or made efforts to comply with an order subsequent to its effective date.

(Prior Code, 1 TCC 6-20)