

OVERVIEW: The program prevents individuals from buying or leasing properties with existing code violations.

CHALLENGE: A large number of property and business owners were being cited for zoning violations after they unknowingly bought or leased properties that were in violation of local zoning code. The majority of the cases were residential properties with illegal additions or illegal units and many of them could never be legalized. In other cases involving commercial or industrial properties, business owners might operate their businesses that are not permitted by the property's zoning designation. In either circumstance people were unaware that they were in violation until Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning (DRP) inspected the property in response to a complaint and issued a citation. At best, the citations were merely an inconvenience for the property/business owner to obtain additional permits. At worst, the situation would need a costly resolution that has led to the loss of the property and the relocation of families and businesses or required a substantial financial investment to bring the property to compliance. When DRP explained the violations to the unsuspecting property or business owners, the frequent response was "I did not know" or "my real estate agent never told me the property had a violation."

INNOVATIVE SOLUTION: The Property Buying Education Program, including a "Buying Property" brochure and live presentation, was initiated to proactively address this issue. The brochure outlines important information buyers and business owners need to know, and the questions they need to ask, before buying or leasing property. A presentation mirrored the information in the brochure was given to real estate professionals, who may not always have the knowledge about zoning and land use regulations to adequately counsel their clients, even though home buyers and business owners depend heavily on their advice when buying property. The brochure does not answer every question a buyer might have or need answered. It covers four basic topics that frequently came up to raise awareness so that people will investigate these issues to protect their investments.

Buyer Beware: Property Buying Education Program
Los Angeles County
Page 2 of 2

1. **Know Your Jurisdiction.** Different jurisdictions mean different zoning rules. The brochure explains how to find a property's jurisdiction.
2. **Know Your Zone.** This section explains how property is divided into different land use zones, why it is important to know the zone, and how to find the zoning of a property.
3. **Know The Zoning Code.** The planning and zoning code of a jurisdiction determines permitted land uses and associated development standards. The brochure explains where to find this information and what to look for when purchasing/leasing a property.
4. **Know If It Is Legal.** The brochure discusses how to research legality and the consequences of violations.

COST EFFECTIVENESS: In-house staff hours only and printing costs. Topics in brochure are generic and can be easily adopted by other jurisdictions.

RESULTS: The Property Buying Education Program have been well received by the public. The brochure is available on the DRP website and has been made available at various County service locations. Community and real estate professional groups have expressed great appreciation for this proactive County effort. Many admitted that the information was new to them, but now felt comfortable doing their own research.

PROJECT CONTACT

Edward Rojas, Principal Regional Planning Assistant
320 W. Temple Street, 13th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90012
323-881-7057; erojas@planning.lacounty.gov