

Estelle Fennell releases statement on recent code enforcement controversy

The recent outcry regarding questionable code enforcement practices is clear evidence that rural people have become distrustful of county government. Longtime property owners have stated that their property rights and their rights to privacy, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in their own homes are in jeopardy. They see their rural way of life threatened by decisions made at the county level. Residents feel they cannot count on the very people entrusted with their well-being and the protection of their environment.

The deep disconnect between County Government and rural residents must be bridged if we are to move forward in a way that benefits all. Civil cases must be handled with civility and respect.

I think most would agree that we need proper environmental controls to preserve our natural resources.

Issuing warrants that allow for forcible entry to inspect generic non-threatening code violations on rural properties flies in the face of common sense and lacks respect for rural values. These serious warrants should be a weapon of last resort when egregious environmental problems are clearly in play

I believe the county needs to take an open and friendly, not punitive and adversarial approach to guaranteeing compliance.

This means taking a common sense approach to folding in already existing rural development. And it will take leadership at the Supervisors level to do just that.

I call on the supervisors to direct County Counsel and the Planning Department to make public all policy decisions regarding enforcement of building codes and all parties involved to provide clear and transparent answers to the questions posed by the Civil Liberties Monitoring Project and hundreds of people who attended the recent meetings.

Given the seriousness of this situation and the potential cost to the county and the community, it's time for county leaders to ensure that government works to earn the trust of those it serves. Transparency and accountability are a good place to start.

Estelle Fennell