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## High walls make bad residents?

By Jason Kandel, Staff Writer

BURBANK - Armed with his digital camera one August afternoon, Burbank resident Michael Scandiffio snapped pictures of 40 hedges, fences and walls that surpassed the city's 3-foot height limit - a 6-foot-tall wrought iron fence, a 6-foot-tall ornamental brick wall and a line of cypress trees 12-feet high among the offenders.

He showed the photos at a Burbank City Council meeting as examples of the kinds of walls, hedges and fences that would have to be removed or trimmed to size under the city's ordinance, even though they looked nice.

Two-and-half-months later, he got a letter from the city, saying an 8-foot hedge at his Riverside Drive home was too high, and he was ordered to take it down.

Now, the city has received more than 500 complaints about hedges, fences and walls that are too high - a flood of complaints that has forced the council to consider relaxing the standards.

"We've got a mess," Councilman David Golonski said at Tuesday night's council meeting. "We have to fix it."

Councilwoman Marsha Ramos said she was among the 530 residents who were turned in because her roses were too high. She has since pruned them to stubs.

"Certainly, 525-plus complaints coming all in a period of probably two months says we've got an untenable situation before us," she said.

Michael Forbes, a city planner, said that of the complaints received, violation notices had been issued to 40 residents found to be violating the ordinance, even as changes are being considered to the 1967 rules.

"As long as the laws are on the books, we have to enforce them," Forbes said.

But Councilman Todd Campbell believes the best way to deal with the issue is to raise the limit. The council is

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expected to consider changes to the ordinance again as early as Feb. 21.

"I just think it's sort of silly to ask somebody to tear down their vegetation," he said. "I think, actually increasing the height from 3 to 4 feet would be beneficial because then a lot more residential properties will be in compliance."

Walls, fences and hedges are limited to 3 feet in front yards and 8 feet in back yards, according to a Burbank municipal code section that helps "create a consistent development pattern and improve the aesthetic quality of the street-scape," according to the ordinance.

Similar codes are in place in cities across the state. Burbank officials only initiate a fence, wall or hedge investigation when they receive a complaint - those who complain may remain anonymous. Most of the couple of dozen residents found violating the ordinance annually comply by trimming their hedges, installing shorter fences or applying for a variance to keep things as is, officials said.

But hedges have been a nagging issue lately, Mayor Jef Vander Borght said.

"For one person, no fences at all would be the best," he said. "For the next person, a 3-foot fence is fine. For the next person, 6-foot is fine. And for the other one, they want a 10-foot fence. Everyone has different opinions."

Scandiffio, who has applied for a variance for his hedge, believes the answer is to stop the "draconian enforcement" of the hedge and fence ordinance.

"The purpose of it, it appears, is to selectively enforce the code against people who speak out at City Hall," he said. "I think the planners and the high-ranking staff members want to show the residents that they're in charge."

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