

What's Up, College Station? Transcript

Season 4, Episode 30

Grace Hallowell: What's up, College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today my guest is Tommy Shilling, our Code Enforcement Supervisor. What's up, Tommy?

Tommy Shilling: Hi, how are you doing?

Grace Hallowell: I'm doing well. We had Caroline Ask on the show last week continuing with our move-in season topics. We talked about trash and how to handle that but move-in is a very busy time for you and your team as well.

Tommy Shilling: Yes, ma'am.

Grace Hallowell: For a quick refresher, who are you and what do you do?

Tommy Shilling: My name is Tommy Shilling, and I'm the Code Enforcement Supervisor. I started with the city in 2010 at Northgate, moved to Code Enforcement in 2017, and was promoted to Code Supervisor in 2022. It's almost my fifth year being a supervisor with Code Enforcement.

Grace Hallowell: Awesome. What are some of the changes you've seen during your time here, from that transition at Northgate over to Code Enforcement and into the supervisor role?

Tommy Shilling: The main thing I've seen in College Station is growth. I remember moving here in 2007 when it had a small-town feel, but we've grown, especially with the growth of Texas A&M and the sheer number of students living in town.

Grace Hallowell: Yes, it is a rapidly growing city, and our team does a great job keeping up with that growth. What changes for you during move-in season?

Tommy Shilling: Move-in season shifts our focus more toward education because we have a new crop of freshmen coming into the city. It's a bit different from move-out season. We educate apartment complexes and let people know not to put out certain trash or make recommendations on how to handle it. It's really about encouraging people to be good neighbors and getting that information out as everyone comes back.

Grace Hallowell: Football season starts soon, which is an even busier time for y'all. Not a lot of people know you have a small team—how many officers are out there on a game day?

Tommy Shilling: Usually, we have five code officers and myself—I'm still code-certified, so I'm out there as well. We also have a police officer tagging along to assist us, and we run operations through our contracted recovery service.

Grace Hollowell: Over 100,000 people are here for game day and there are only five of you—that's a big task.

Tommy Shilling: It is, but it's actually fun. Most people going to the game don't park at the campus garages or pay those prices, so they park in the Southside area, which has older, smaller streets that can't handle that capacity. We're there to help with health and safety issues like prohibited parking, facing traffic, or blocking fire hydrants.

Grace Hollowell: Parking on the grass is another big issue.

Tommy Shilling: Yes, please do not do that.

Grace Hollowell: It's unsafe, and you will hear from our code team.

Tommy Shilling: You will hear from us or receive a citation.

Grace Hollowell: What is your favorite part about your job, especially during this time of year?

Tommy Shilling: My favorite part is my team. I have a great group of officers and solid support staff, especially with the Fire Department since we moved under them last year. My favorite time of year is football season. I love being out there to educate people before taking administrative action and getting to know folks visiting College Station.

Grace Hollowell: Making those connections—you're here to educate, not punish. How can people contact you if they have questions?

Tommy Shilling: You can reach us by phone at (979) 764-6363, email codeenforcement@cstx.gov, or use the SeeClickFix app.

Grace Hollowell: What are some of the most common code violations you see when students move into rental homes?

Tommy Shilling: The number one issue is the accumulation of trash. Next is city trash containers because people don't know when to put them out and retrieve them. They leave them at the street all the time, which is a violation in College Station. We also see a lot of parking issues.

Grace Hollowell: When should they have their trash can out by the curb, and when should they bring it back in?

Tommy Shilling: City ordinance states you can put your can out after 8:00 a.m. the day before collection, and it must be retrieved within 24 hours after collection. Any time outside of that window is a violation of local ordinance.

Grace Hallowell: That's because it presents a hazard for drivers and pedestrians and makes neighborhoods look messy. If you have roommates, work out a schedule for who puts it out and pulls it in.

Tommy Shilling: There are many rules with trash cans. A lot of times people overfill them so the lids don't close, and Sanitation won't collect those because uncontained trash spills into the street. Make sure your lid is closed, keep cans four feet apart, and watch for utility lines or mailboxes so they can be collected. If they get missed, contact Sanitation.

Grace Hallowell: Another big topic in the Community Living course is open storage. What is considered open storage?

Tommy Shilling: Open storage in the public right-of-way refers to items not meant for outdoor use. Indoor items like couches need to be kept inside, whereas patio furniture is fine. A leather couch outside attracts vermin and rodents, which creates a nuisance for neighbors.

Grace Hallowell: What should students do before they even start unpacking?

Tommy Shilling: Go introduce yourself and be a good neighbor. Let your neighbors know how many people live there, give them a heads-up if you're having a gathering, or let them know when you're going out of town so they can help pull in your trash cans. That helps you avoid common code violations and keeps us from having to visit.

Grace Hallowell: Make friends with your neighbors. What city regulations tend to surprise first-time renters?

Tommy Shilling: Trash can rules catch a lot of people off guard because other cities allow cans to stay out. In College Station you can't do that. It takes a lot of education and manpower to inform owners, management companies, and tenants that cans need to be moved back toward the house to prevent traffic issues.

Grace Hallowell: For those moving into rental houses or apartments with roommates, how can they make sure they're starting off on the right foot with their property manager?

Tommy Shilling: Review the terms of your lease. That contract includes the city ordinances required to be a good neighbor. Follow your lease and contact your management company if you have questions—there are no dumb questions. It's better to ask upfront than to get a knock on the door or a call from us.

Grace Hallowell: If you don't understand something, ask questions. You can even call the city's Neighborhood Services department.

Tommy Shilling: Exactly. You can view the city website or call Code Enforcement directly. We work for the citizens.

Grace Hallowell: What simple habits can prevent code violations throughout the year?

Tommy Shilling: General cleanliness. Bag your trash—don't throw loose trash in the can—keep lids closed, park correctly, avoid open storage, and follow local regulations.

Grace Hallowell: How can residents use the SeeClickFix app?

Tommy Shilling: SeeClickFix is a free app offered by the city. It includes categories for common code violations like tall grass, open storage, junk vehicles, potholes, or sanitation issues. You select your request, pin your location or address, and it routes directly to the appropriate department where you can communicate one-on-one with a city employee.

Grace Hallowell: It's a tool to report issues, not a place to air personal grievances. Keep it respectful.

Tommy Shilling: Yes, please.

Grace Hallowell: What is the proper way to dispose of bulk items?

Tommy Shilling: Download the free Curbside app. It displays your recycling, trash, and bulk pickup schedule, outlines the regulations, and sends notifications so you stay in compliance.

Grace Hallowell: What are residents responsible for when maintaining rental properties?

Tommy Shilling: That depends on the lease. Some tenants don't realize they may be responsible for lawn care, while in other cases the owner covers it. Review your lease terms carefully, and if you notice property maintenance issues, contact your landlord or management company.

Grace Hallowell: How important is mowing and keeping yards clear of tall grass, weeds, and debris?

Tommy Shilling: It's very important. College Station has received a lot of rain recently, making grass grow rapidly. Grass cannot exceed 12 inches across the majority of the yard. Overgrown grass becomes a health and safety issue because snakes and rodents hide in tall weeds.

Grace Hallowell: What should students do if maintenance issues that are the landlord's responsibility aren't being addressed in a timely manner?

Tommy Shilling: First, follow your lease terms and contact the owner or management company. You can also submit a property maintenance request via SeeClickFix, which routes to Code Enforcement and the Building Official so we can help address the situation.

Grace Hallowell: Are there property-related parking issues students should keep in mind when using driveways?

Tommy Shilling: Pay attention to where you park, read posted signs, and avoid blocking fire hydrants or stop signs. Additionally, do not block the sidewalk with your vehicle in the driveway. Blocking sidewalks forces pedestrians into the street and constitutes an ADA and federal law violation.

Grace Hallowell: How can students be good neighbors in established residential neighborhoods?

Tommy Shilling: Introduce yourself and build relationships with your neighbors. Many long-time residents welcome students and invite them over for dinner. Getting to know your neighbors prevents misunderstandings that result in calls to code enforcement or police.

Grace Hallowell: Our neighborhoods are a mix of families, retirees, and students. Keep that in mind, enjoy yourself, and be respectful. What concerns do permanent residents usually voice during move-in season?

Tommy Shilling: Bulk items are the primary concern due to the high volume put out at once. Sanitation works around the clock during the first part of the month to clear those items. If bulk piles contain hazard items like loose trash, tires, or paint, report it on SeeClickFix and we will address it.

Grace Hallowell: If students have questions about whether something is allowed, what's the best way to check beforehand?

Tommy Shilling: Call Code Enforcement at (979) 764-6363, email codeenforcement@cstx.gov, or review city ordinances on the city website.

Grace Hallowell: If someone receives a violation, what does that process look like?

Tommy Shilling: We usually start by leaving a door tag to educate the occupant about the violation. If it isn't resolved upon re-inspection, we make a phone call or send an email to the tenant, owner, or management company. If necessary, we follow up with a certified

letter providing a timeframe before taking administrative action. Our goal is 100% compliance before administrative action is needed.

Grace Hallowell: If you could give every student moving into College Station three pieces of advice, what would they be?

Tommy Shilling: Be a good neighbor, get to know the people around you, and familiarize yourself with local ordinances and state laws.

Grace Hallowell: Is there anything else students or landlords should know before move-in season?

Tommy Shilling: Remind everyone about game days. We have seven home football games this year, including Texas and Tennessee. We operate in the Southside and Eastgate areas, among others. Do not park in yards, block stop signs, or face traffic. We start patrolling three hours before kickoff to educate drivers, but vehicles causing severe hazards or left unattended in prohibited areas will be cited or towed.

Grace Hallowell: What about selling parking?

Tommy Shilling: Do not sell parking on residential driveways or yards. It is prohibited in College Station, and code enforcement will take action if we encounter it.

Grace Hallowell: Time for a quick lightning round. Best advice for first-time renters in one sentence?

Tommy Shilling: Be a good neighbor.

Grace Hallowell: Most overlooked code violation?

Tommy Shilling: Leaving trash cans out at the curb.

Grace Hallowell: What is one thing students can do to make your job easier?

Tommy Shilling: Follow the rules.

Grace Hallowell: What is one thing you wish every resident knew about Code Enforcement?

Tommy Shilling: I wish people knew how hard our officers work for the city. Beyond our standard weekday hours, we alter schedules for night parking patrols and staff home football games. Our five operating officers do a fantastic job keeping the city running smoothly.

Grace Hallowell: Finish the sentence: The easiest way to avoid a code violation is...

Tommy Shilling: Follow the rules.

Grace Hallowell: Thank you so much for being here today, Tommy.

Tommy Shilling: Thank you for having me.

Grace Hallowell: And that's what's up!