

Senate Bill 162

By: Senators Meyer von Bremen of the 12th, Lee of the 29th and Walker of the 22nd

AS PASSED

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 2 of Title 41 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to
 2 abatement of nuisances generally, so as to clarify the conditions under which property is
 3 considered a public health hazard; to change the provisions relating to the power of counties
 4 and municipalities to repair, close, or demolish unfit buildings or structures; to provide for
 5 the power of counties and municipalities with respect to buildings which are not in
 6 compliance with the applicable codes or general nuisance law; to change the definition of
 7 certain terms; to define additional terms; to change the provisions relating to county or
 8 municipal ordinances relating to unfit buildings or structures; to provide for the adoption and
 9 enforcement of county ordinances relating to nuisances; to provide for filing and adjudication
 10 of a complaint in rem; to provide for service of process; to provide that costs expended by
 11 a local government to make property safe shall be treated and collected in the same manner
 12 as tax liens; to change other provisions relating to service of complaints or orders upon
 13 parties in interest and owners of unfit buildings or structures; to provide protection for the
 14 rights of minors, estates, incompetent persons, unknown persons, and unborn remaindermen;
 15 to provide procedures; to change the provisions relating to prior ordinances relating to the
 16 repair, closing, or demolition of unfit buildings or structures; to amend Chapter 1 of Title 41
 17 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general provisions with respect to
 18 nuisances, so as to prohibit a municipality from restricting the use of language other than
 19 English on signs for privately owned businesses; to provide for application; to provide for
 20 related matters; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other
 21 purposes.

22 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:**

23 **SECTION 1.**

24 Chapter 2 of Title 41 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to abatement of
 25 nuisances generally, is amended by striking in its entirety Code Section 41-2-7, relating to
 26 the power of counties and municipalities to repair, close, or demolish unfit buildings or
 27 structures, and inserting in lieu thereof a new Code Section 41-2-7 to read as follows:

28 "41-2-7.

1 (a) It is found and declared that in the counties and municipalities of this state there is the
 2 existence or occupancy of dwellings or other buildings or structures which are unfit for
 3 human habitation or for commercial, industrial, or business occupancy or use and not in
 4 compliance with the applicable state minimum standard codes as adopted by ordinance or
 5 operation of law or any optional building, fire, life safety, or other codes relative to the safe
 6 use of real property and real property improvements adopted by ordinance in the
 7 jurisdiction where the property is located; or general nuisance law and ~~are inimical to the~~
 8 ~~welfare and are dangerous and injurious~~ which constitute a hazard to the health, safety, and
 9 welfare of the people of this state; and that a public necessity exists for the repair, closing,
 10 or demolition of such dwellings, buildings, or structures. It is found and declared that in
 11 the counties and municipalities of this state where there is in existence a condition or use
 12 of real estate which renders adjacent real estate unsafe or inimical to safe human habitation,
 13 such use is dangerous and injurious to the health, safety, and welfare of the people of this
 14 state and a public necessity exists for the repair of such condition or the cessation of such
 15 use which renders the adjacent real estate unsafe or inimical to safe human habitation.
 16 Whenever the governing authority of any county or municipality of this state finds that
 17 there exist in such county or municipality dwellings, buildings, or structures which are unfit
 18 for human habitation or for commercial, industrial, or business uses due to dilapidation and
 19 not in compliance with applicable codes; which have defects increasing the hazards of fire,
 20 accidents, or other calamities; which lack of adequate ventilation, light, or sanitary
 21 facilities; or where other conditions exist rendering such dwellings, buildings, or structures
 22 unsafe or unsanitary, or dangerous or detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare, or
 23 otherwise inimical to the welfare of the residents of such county or municipality, or vacant,
 24 dilapidated dwellings, buildings, or structures in which drug crimes are being committed,
 25 power is conferred upon such county or municipality to exercise its police power to repair,
 26 close, or demolish the aforesaid dwellings, buildings, or structures in the manner provided
 27 in this Code section and Code Sections 41-2-8 through 41-2-17.

28 (b) All the provisions of this Code section and Code Sections 41-2-8 through 41-2-17
 29 including method and procedure may also be applied to private property where there exists
 30 an endangerment to the public health or safety as a result of an accumulation of weeds,
 31 ~~trash, junk, filth, and other unsanitary or unsafe conditions shall create a public health~~
 32 ~~hazard or a general nuisance~~ to those persons residing or working in the vicinity. A finding
 33 by any governmental health department, health officer, or building inspector that such
 34 property is a health or safety hazard shall constitute prima-facie evidence that said property
 35 is in violation of this Code section and Code Sections 41-2-8 through 41-2-17.

1 (c) The exercise of the powers conferred upon counties in this Code section and in Code
 2 Sections 41-2-8 through 41-2-17 shall be limited to properties located in the unincorporated
 3 areas of such counties."

4 SECTION 2.

5 Said chapter is further amended by striking in its entirety Code Section 41-2-8, relating to
 6 definitions applicable to Code Sections 41-2-7 through 41-2-17, and inserting in lieu thereof
 7 a new Code Section 41-2-8 to read as follows:

8 "41-2-8.

9 As used in Code Section 41-2-7, this Code section, and Code Sections 41-2-9 through
 10 41-2-17, the term:

11 (1) 'Applicable codes' means (A) any optional housing or abatement standard provided
 12 in Chapter 2 of Title 8 as adopted by ordinance or operation of law, or other property
 13 maintenance standards as adopted by ordinance or operation of law, or general nuisance
 14 law, relative to the safe use of real property; (B) any fire or life safety code as provided
 15 for in Chapter 2 of Title 25; and (C) any building codes adopted by local ordinance prior
 16 to October 1, 1991, or the minimum standard codes provided in Chapter 2 of Title 8 after
 17 October 1, provided that such building or minimum standard codes for real property
 18 improvements shall be deemed to mean those building or minimum standard codes in
 19 existence at the time such real property improvements were constructed unless otherwise
 20 provided by law.

21 ~~(1)(2)~~ (2) 'Closing' means ~~securing and~~ causing a dwelling, building, or structure to be
 22 vacated and secured against unauthorized entry.

23 ~~(2)(3)~~ (3) 'Drug crime' means an act which is a violation of Article 2 of Chapter 13 of Title
 24 16, known as the 'Georgia Controlled Substances Act.'

25 ~~(3)(4)~~ (4) 'Dwellings, buildings, or structures' means any building or structure or part thereof
 26 used and occupied for human habitation or commercial, industrial, or business uses, or
 27 intended to be so used, and includes any outhouses, improvements, and appurtenances
 28 belonging thereto or usually enjoyed therewith and also includes any building or structure
 29 of any design. As used in Code Section 41-2-7, this Code section, and Code Sections
 30 41-2-9 through 41-2-17, the term 'dwellings, buildings, or structures' shall not mean or
 31 include any farm, any building or structure located on a farm, or any agricultural facility
 32 or other building or structure used for the production, growing, raising, harvesting,
 33 storage, or processing of crops, livestock, poultry, or other farm products.

34 ~~(4)(5)~~ (5) 'Governing ~~body~~ authority' means the board of commissioners or sole
 35 commissioner of a county or the council, board of commissioners, board of aldermen, or
 36 other legislative body charged with governing a municipality.

1 relating to county or municipal ordinances relating to unfit buildings or structures, and
 2 inserting in lieu thereof a new Code Section 41-2-9 to read as follows:

3 "41-2-9.

4 ~~(a) As used in this Code section, the term 'resident' means any person residing in the~~
 5 ~~affected jurisdiction on or before the date on which the alleged nuisance arose.~~

6 ~~(b)~~(a) In addition to any other remedies or enforcement mechanisms available, upon Upon
 7 the adoption of an ordinance finding that dwelling, building, or structure conditions of the
 8 character described in Code Section 41-2-7 exist within a county or municipality, the
 9 governing body of such county or municipality is authorized to adopt ordinances relating
 10 to the dwellings, buildings, or structures within such county or municipality which are unfit
 11 for human habitation or commercial, industrial, or business uses and not in compliance
 12 with applicable codes, which are vacant and being used in connection with the commission
 13 of drug crimes, or which constitute an endangerment to the public health or safety as a
 14 result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions. Such ordinances shall include at least the
 15 following provisions:

16 (1) That it is the duty of the owner of every dwelling, building, structure, or property
 17 within the jurisdiction to construct and maintain such dwelling, building, structure, or
 18 property in conformance with applicable codes in force within the jurisdiction, or such
 19 ordinances which regulate and prohibit activities on property and which declare it to be
 20 a public nuisance to construct or maintain any dwelling, building, structure, or property
 21 in violation of such codes or ordinances;

22 ~~(1)~~(2) That a public officer be designated or appointed to exercise the powers prescribed
 23 by the ordinances;

24 ~~(2)~~(3) That whenever a request is filed with the public officer by a public authority or by
 25 at least five residents of the municipality or by five residents of the unincorporated area
 26 of the county if the property in question is located in the unincorporated area of the
 27 county charging that any dwelling, building, ~~or structure,~~ or property is unfit for human
 28 habitation or for commercial, industrial, or business use ~~or whenever it appears to the~~
 29 ~~public officer (on his own motion) that any dwelling, building, or structure is unfit for~~
 30 ~~human habitation or is unfit for its current commercial, industrial, or business use or~~ and
 31 not in compliance with applicable codes; is vacant, ~~dilapidated,~~ and being used in
 32 connection with the commission of drug crimes; or constitutes an endangerment to the
 33 public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions, the public officer
 34 shall, if his preliminary investigation discloses a basis for such charges, ~~issue and cause~~
 35 ~~to be served upon the owner of and any parties in interest in such dwelling, building, or~~
 36 ~~structure a complaint stating the charges in that respect and containing a notice that a~~
 37 ~~hearing will be held before the public officer (or his designated agent) at a place within~~

1 the county or municipality in which the property is located, fixed not less than ten days
 2 nor more than 30 days after the serving of said complaint; that the owner and any parties
 3 in interest shall be given the right to file an answer to the complaint and to appear in
 4 person, or otherwise, and give testimony at the place and time fixed in the complaint; and
 5 that the rules of evidence prevailing in courts of law or equity shall not be controlling in
 6 hearings before the public officer make an investigation or inspection of the specific
 7 dwelling, building, structure, or property. If the officer's investigation or inspection
 8 identifies that any dwelling, building, structure, or property is unfit for human habitation
 9 or for commercial, industrial, or business use and not in compliance with applicable
 10 codes; is vacant and being used in connection with the commission of drug crimes; or
 11 constitutes an endangerment to the public health or safety as a result of unsanitary or
 12 unsafe conditions, the public officer may issue a complaint in rem against the lot, tract,
 13 or parcel of real property on which such dwelling, building, or structure is situated or
 14 where such public health hazard or general nuisance exists and shall cause summons and
 15 a copy of the complaint to be served on the owner and parties in interest in such dwelling,
 16 building, or structure. The complaint shall identify the subject real property by
 17 appropriate street address and official tax map reference; identify the owner and parties
 18 in interest; state with particularity the factual basis for the action; and contain a statement
 19 of the action sought by the public officer to abate the alleged nuisance. The summons
 20 shall notify the owner and parties in interest that a hearing will be held before a court of
 21 competent jurisdiction as determined by Code Section 41-2-5, at a date and time certain
 22 and at a place within the county or municipality where the property is located. Such
 23 hearing shall be held not less than 15 days nor more than 45 days after the filing of said
 24 complaint in the proper court. The owner and parties in interest shall have the right to file
 25 an answer to the complaint and to appear in person or by attorney and offer testimony at
 26 the time and place fixed for hearing;

27 ~~(3)~~(4) That if, after such notice and hearing, the ~~public officer~~ court determines that the
 28 dwelling, building, or structure ~~under consideration in question~~ is unfit for human
 29 habitation or is unfit for its current commercial, industrial, or business use ~~or~~ and not in
 30 compliance with applicable codes; is vacant, dilapidated, and being used in connection
 31 with the commission of drug crimes; or constitutes an endangerment to the public health
 32 or safety as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions, he the court shall state in writing
 33 his findings of fact in support of such determination and shall issue and cause to be
 34 served upon the owner and any parties in interest that have answered the complaint or
 35 appeared at the hearing thereof an order:

36 (A) If the repair, alteration, or improvement of the said dwelling, building, or structure
 37 can be made at a reasonable cost in relation to the present value of the dwelling,

1 building, or structure, requiring the owner, ~~or parties in interest,~~ within the time
 2 specified in the order, to repair, alter, or improve such dwelling, building, or structure
 3 so as to ~~render it fit for human habitation or for current commercial, industrial, or~~
 4 ~~business use or to vacate and close the dwelling, building, or structure as a human~~
 5 ~~habitation~~ bring it into full compliance with the applicable codes relevant to the cited
 6 violation and, if applicable, to secure the structure so that it cannot be used in
 7 connection with the commission of drug crimes; or

8 (B) If the repair, alteration, or improvement of the said dwelling, building, or structure
 9 in order to bring it into full compliance with applicable codes relevant to the cited
 10 violations cannot be made at a reasonable cost in relation to the present value of the
 11 dwelling, building, or structure, requiring the owner, ~~or parties in interest,~~ within the
 12 time specified in the order, to ~~remove or demolish~~ and remove such dwelling, building,
 13 or structure and all debris from the property.

14 For purposes of this Code section, the court shall make its determination of 'reasonable
 15 cost in relation to the present value of the dwelling, building, or structure' without
 16 consideration of the value of the land on which the structure is situated; provided,
 17 however, that costs of the preparation necessary to repair, alter, or improve a structure
 18 may be considered. Income and financial status of the owner shall not be factor in the
 19 court's determination. The present value of the structure and the costs of repair,
 20 alteration, or improvement may be established by affidavits of real estate appraisers with
 21 a Georgia appraiser classification as provided in Chapter 39A of Title 43, qualified
 22 building contractors, or qualified building inspectors without actual testimony presented.
 23 Costs of repair, alteration, or improvement of the structure shall be the cost necessary to
 24 bring the structure into compliance with the applicable codes relevant to the cited
 25 violations in force in the jurisdiction; In no event shall the governing authority of any
 26 such county or municipality require removal or demolition of any dwelling, building, or
 27 structure except upon a finding that the cost of repair, alteration, or improvement thereof
 28 exceeds one-half the value such dwelling, building, or structure will have when repaired
 29 to satisfy the minimum requirements of this law;

30 ~~(4)(5)~~ (5) That, if the owner ~~or parties in interest fail~~ fails to comply with an order to ~~vacate~~
 31 ~~and close~~ repair or demolish the dwelling, building, or structure, the public officer may
 32 cause such dwelling, building, or structure to be repaired, altered, or improved or to be
 33 vacated and closed or demolished, ~~and that the~~ The public officer may shall cause to be
 34 posted on the main entrance of any the building, dwelling, or structure ~~so closed~~ a placard
 35 with the following words:

36 'This building is unfit for human habitation or commercial, industrial, or business use and
 37 does not comply with the applicable codes or has been ordered secured to prevent its use

1 in connection with drug crimes or constitutes an endangerment to public health or safety
 2 as a result of unsanitary or unsafe conditions.; ~~the~~ The use or occupation of this building
 3 for human habitation or for commercial, industrial, or business use is prohibited and
 4 unlawful.;

5 (5) ~~That, if the owner fails to comply with any order to remove or demolish the dwelling,~~
 6 ~~building, or structure, the public officer may cause such dwelling, building, or structure~~
 7 ~~to be removed or demolished, provided, however, that the duties of the public officer, set~~
 8 ~~forth in paragraph (4) of this Code section and this paragraph, shall not be exercised until~~
 9 ~~the governing body shall have by ordinance ordered the public officer to proceed to~~
 10 ~~effectuate the purpose of Code Sections 41-2-7, 41-2-8, this Code section, and Code~~
 11 ~~Sections 41-2-10 through 41-2-17 with respect to the particular property or properties~~
 12 ~~which the public officer shall have found to be unfit for human habitation or unfit for its~~
 13 ~~current commercial, industrial, or business use, which property or properties shall be~~
 14 ~~described in the ordinance;~~

15 (6) If the public officer has the structure demolished, reasonable effort shall be made to
 16 salvage reusable materials for credit against the cost of demolition. The proceeds of any
 17 moneys received from the sale of salvaged materials shall be used or applied against the
 18 cost of the demolition and removal of the structure, and proper records shall be kept
 19 showing application of sales proceeds. Any such sale of salvaged materials may be made
 20 without the necessity of public advertisement and bid. The public officer and governing
 21 authority are relieved of any and all liability resulting from or occasioned by the sale of
 22 any such salvaged materials, including, without limitation, defects in such salvaged
 23 materials; ~~That the amount of the cost of such vacating and closing or removal or~~
 24 ~~demolition by the public officer shall be a lien against the real property upon which such~~
 25 ~~cost was incurred. Said lien shall attach to the real property upon the payment of all costs~~
 26 ~~of demolition by the county or municipality and the filing of an itemized statement of the~~
 27 ~~total sum of said costs by the public officer in the office of the clerk of the governing~~
 28 ~~body of the county or municipality on a lien docket maintained by said clerk for such~~
 29 ~~purposes. If the dwelling, building, or structure is removed or demolished by the public~~
 30 ~~officer he shall sell the materials of such dwellings, buildings, or structures and shall~~
 31 ~~credit the proceeds of such sale against the cost of the removal or demolition and any~~
 32 ~~balance remaining shall be deposited in the superior court by the public officer, shall be~~
 33 ~~secured in such manner as may be directed by such court, and shall be disbursed by such~~
 34 ~~court to the persons found to be entitled thereto by final order or decree of such court.~~
 35 ~~Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to impair or limit in any way the power~~
 36 ~~of the county or municipality to define and declare nuisances and to cause their removal~~
 37 ~~or abatement by summary proceedings or otherwise;~~

1 (7) That the amount of the cost of demolition, including all court costs, appraisal fees,
 2 administrative costs incurred by the tax commissioner, and all other costs necessarily
 3 associated with the abatement action, including restoration to grade of the real property
 4 after demolition, shall be a lien against the real property upon which such cost was
 5 incurred. ~~Counties and municipal corporations may enforce the collection of any amount~~
 6 ~~due on such lien for removal or demolition of dwellings, buildings, or structures only in~~
 7 ~~the following manner:~~

8 (A) ~~The owner or parties at interest shall be allowed to satisfy the amount due on such~~
 9 ~~lien by paying to the county or municipal corporation, within 30 days after the~~
 10 ~~perfection of said lien, a sum of money equal to 25 percent of the total amount due and~~
 11 ~~by further paying to said county or municipal corporation the remaining balance due on~~
 12 ~~such lien, together with interest at the rate of 7 percent per annum, in three equal annual~~
 13 ~~payments, each of which shall become due and payable on the anniversary date of the~~
 14 ~~initial payment made as hereinabove prescribed;~~

15 (B) ~~Should the property upon which such lien is perfected be sold, transferred, or~~
 16 ~~conveyed by the owner or parties at interest at any time prior to the termination of the~~
 17 ~~said three-year period, then the entire balance due on such lien shall be due and payable~~
 18 ~~to the county or municipal corporation; and~~

19 (C) ~~Should the amount due on such lien, or any portion thereof, be unpaid after the~~
 20 ~~passage of said three-year period, or upon the occurrence of the contingency provided~~
 21 ~~for in subparagraph (B) of this paragraph, the county or municipal corporation may~~
 22 ~~enforce the collection of any amount due on such lien for alteration, repair, removal, or~~
 23 ~~demolition of dwellings, buildings, or structures in the same manner as provided in~~
 24 ~~Code Section 48-5-358 and other applicable state statutes. This procedure shall be~~
 25 ~~subject to the right of redemption by any person having any right, title, or interest in or~~
 26 ~~lien upon said property, all as provided by Article 3 of Chapter 4 of Title 48.~~

27 **(b)(1) The lien provided for in paragraph (7) of subsection (a) of this Code section shall**
 28 **attach to the real property upon the filing of a certified copy of the order requiring repair,**
 29 **closure, or demolition in the office of the clerk of superior court in the county where the**
 30 **real property is located and shall relate back to the date of the filing of the lis pendens**
 31 **notice required under subsection (g) of Code Section 41-2-12. The clerk of superior court**
 32 **shall record and index such certified copy of the order in the deed records of the county**
 33 **and enter the lien on the general execution docket. The lien shall be superior to all other**
 34 **liens on the property, except liens for taxes to which the lien shall be inferior, and shall**
 35 **continue in force until paid. After filing a certified copy of the order with the clerk of**
 36 **superior court, the public officer shall forward a copy of the order and a final statement**
 37 **of costs to the county tax commissioner. It shall be the duty of the county tax**

1 commissioner to collect the amount of the lien in conjunction with the collection of ad
 2 valorem taxes on the property and to collect the amount of the lien as if it were a real
 3 property ad valorem tax, using all methods available for collecting real property ad
 4 valorem taxes, including specifically Chapter 4 of Title 48; provided, however, that the
 5 limitation of Code Section 48-4-78 which requires 12 months of delinquency before
 6 commencing a tax foreclosure shall not apply. The tax commissioner shall remit the
 7 amount collected to the governing authority of the county or municipality whose
 8 ordinance is being enforced. Thirty days after imposition of the lien, the unpaid lien
 9 amount shall bear interest and penalties in the same amount as applicable to interest and
 10 penalties on unpaid real property ad valorem taxes.

11 (2) Where the remittance is to a municipality, the tax commissioner shall collect and
 12 retain an amount equal to the cost of administering a lien authorized by this chapter
 13 unless such costs are waived by resolution of the county governing authority. Any such
 14 amount collected and retained for administration shall be deposited in the general fund
 15 of the county to pay the cost of administering the lien.

16 (c) The governing authority may waive and release any such lien imposed on property upon
 17 the owner of such property entering into a contract with the county or municipality
 18 agreeing to a timetable for rehabilitation of the real property or the dwelling, building, or
 19 structure on the property and demonstrating the financial means to accomplish such
 20 rehabilitation.

21 (d) Where the abatement action does not commence in the superior court, review of a court
 22 order requiring the repair, alteration, improvement, or demolition of a dwelling, building,
 23 or structure shall be by direct appeal to the superior court under Code Section 5-3-29.

24 (e) In addition to the procedures and remedies in this chapter, a governing authority may
 25 provide by ordinance that designated public officers may issue citations for violations of
 26 state minimum standard codes, optional building, fire, life safety, and other codes adopted
 27 by ordinance, and conditions creating a public health hazard or general nuisance, and seek
 28 to enforce such citations in a court of competent jurisdiction prior to issuing a complaint
 29 in rem as provided in this Code section.

30 (f) Nothing in this Code section shall be construed to impair or limit in any way the power
 31 of the county or municipality to define and declare nuisances and to cause their removal
 32 or abatement by summary proceedings or otherwise."

33 **SECTION 4.**

34 Said chapter is further amended by striking in its entirety Code Section 41-2-12, relating
 35 to service of complaints or orders upon parties in interest and owners of unfit buildings or
 36 structures, and inserting in lieu thereof a new Code Section 41-2-12 to read as follows:

1 "41-2-12.

2 (a) ~~Complaints or orders~~ issued by a public officer pursuant to an ordinance adopted
 3 under Code Sections 41-2-7 through 41-2-11, this Code section, and Code Sections
 4 41-2-13 through 41-2-17 shall, in be served in the following manner. In all cases, ~~be~~
 5 ~~served upon each person in possession of said property, each owner, and each party in~~
 6 ~~interest; and the return of service signed by the public officer or his agent or an affidavit~~
 7 ~~of service executed by any citizen of this state, reciting that a copy of such complaint or~~
 8 ~~orders was served upon each person in possession of said property, each owner, and each~~
 9 ~~party in interest personally or by leaving such copy at the place of his residence, shall be~~
 10 ~~sufficient evidence as to the service of such person in possession, owner, and party in~~
 11 ~~interest~~ a copy of the complaint and summons shall be conspicuously posted on the
 12 subject dwelling, building, or structure within three business days of filing of the
 13 complaint and at least ten days prior to the date of the hearing. A copy of the complaint
 14 and summons shall be served in one of the following ways:

- 15 (1) Personal service upon each owner and party in interest if such parties are residents
 16 of the county. Service shall be perfected at least ten days prior to the date of the hearing.
 17 Service may be made by the public officer designated by ordinance to abate nuisances
 18 or by any law enforcement officer of the county or municipality whose ordinance is
 19 being enforced; and a return of service, filed with the clerk of the appropriate court,
 20 shall be deemed sufficient proof that service was perfected;
 21 (2) Pursuant to the provisions of Article 5 of Chapter 4 of Title 48; or
 22 (3) Statutory overnight delivery.

23 (b) ~~If any of the owners~~ owner ~~and parties~~ or party in interest shall reside out of the
 24 county or municipality, service shall be perfected by causing a copy of such complaint
 25 or orders to be served upon such party or parties by the sheriff or any lawful deputy of
 26 the county of the residence of such party or parties or such service may be made by any
 27 citizen; and the return of such sheriff or lawful deputy or the affidavit of such citizen that
 28 such party or parties were served either personally or by leaving a copy of the complaint
 29 or orders at the residence shall be conclusive as to such service is a resident of this state
 30 but resides outside of the county, service shall be perfected by certified mail or statutory
 31 overnight delivery, return receipt requested, to the most recent address shown in county
 32 tax filings and mailed at least 14 days prior to the date of the hearing.

33 (c) Nonresidents of this state, whose mailing address is known, shall be served by
 34 posting a copy of such complaint or orders in a conspicuous place on premises affected
 35 by the complaint or orders certified mail or statutory overnight delivery, return receipt
 36 requested, mailed at least 14 days prior to the date of the hearing. For nonresidents whose
 37 mailing address is unknown, a notice stating the date, time, and place of the hearing shall

1 be published in the newspaper in which the sheriff's advertisements appear in such
 2 county once a week for two consecutive weeks prior to the hearing. ~~Where the address~~
 3 ~~of such nonresidents is known, a copy of such complaint or orders shall be mailed to~~
 4 ~~them by registered or certified mail or statutory overnight delivery.~~

5 (d) In the event either the owner or any party in interest is a minor, an estate, an
 6 incompetent or an insane person, or person laboring under disabilities, the guardian or
 7 other personal representative of such person shall be served and if such guardian or
 8 personal representative resides outside the county ~~or municipality~~ or is a nonresident of
 9 this state, he or she shall be served as provided for in subsection (c) of this Code section,
 10 ~~or this subsection in such cases.~~ If such ~~minor or insane person or person laboring under~~
 11 ~~disabilities~~ owner or party in interest has no guardian or personal representative, ~~or in the~~
 12 ~~event such minor or insane person lives outside the county or municipality or is a~~
 13 ~~nonresident,~~ service shall be perfected by serving such ~~minor or insane person personally~~
 14 ~~or by leaving a copy at the place of his residence which shall be sufficient evidence as to~~
 15 ~~the service of such person or persons; in the case of other persons who live outside of the~~
 16 ~~county or municipality or are nonresidents, service shall be perfected by serving the judge~~
 17 ~~of the probate court of the county wherein such property is located~~ at least 30 days prior
 18 to the date of the hearing ~~who~~ which judge shall stand in the place of and protect the
 19 rights of such minor, estate, or incompetent ~~or insane~~ person or appoint a guardian ad
 20 litem for such person.

21 (e) In the event of unknown persons or unborn remaindermen who are likely to have any
 22 rights in the property or interest or the proceeds thereof, the judge of the probate court of
 23 the county wherein such property or interest is located shall be personally served at least
 24 30 days prior to the date of the hearing, and it shall be the duty of the judge of the probate
 25 court to stand in the place of and protect the rights of such unknown parties or unborn
 26 remaindermen.

27 ~~(e)(f)~~ (f) In the event the whereabouts of any owner or party in interest is unknown and the
 28 same cannot be ascertained by the public officer in the exercise of reasonable diligence
 29 or if any owner or party in interest cannot, after due diligence, be served as provided in
 30 this Code section, and the public officer shall make an affidavit to that effect, ~~then the~~
 31 ~~service of such complaint or order upon such persons shall be made in the same~~ and serve
 32 by publication in the manner as provided in subsection (c) of this Code section, ~~or service~~
 33 ~~may be perfected upon any person, firm, or corporation holding itself out as an agent for~~
 34 ~~the property involved~~ and such publication shall be sufficient proof that service was
 35 perfected.

36 ~~(f)(g)~~ (g) A notice of lis pendens ~~copy of such complaint or orders shall also be filed in the~~
 37 ~~proper office or offices for the filing of lis pendens notice~~ office of the clerk of superior

1 court in the county in which the dwelling, building, or structure is located at the time of
 2 filing the complaint in the appropriate court. Such notice and such filing of the complaint
 3 or orders shall have the same force and effect as other lis pendens notices provided by
 4 law. Any such complaint or orders or an appropriate lis pendens notice may contain a
 5 statement to the effect that a lien may arise against the described property and that an
 6 itemized statement of such lien is maintained on a lien docket maintained by the clerk of
 7 the governing body of the county or municipality.

8 (h) Orders and other filings made subsequent to service of the initial complaint shall be
 9 served in the manner provided in this Code section on the owner and any party in interest
 10 who answers the complaint or appears at the hearing. Any party who fails to answer or
 11 appear at the hearing shall be deemed to have waived all further notice in the
 12 proceedings."

13 SECTION 5.

14 Said chapter is further amended by striking in its entirety Code Section 41-2-17, relating
 15 to prior ordinances relating to repair, closing, or demolition of unfit buildings or structures,
 16 and inserting in lieu thereof a new Code Section 41-2-17 to read as follows:

17 "41-2-17.

18 Ordinances relating to the subject matter of Code Sections 41-2-7 through 41-2-16 and
 19 this Code section adopted prior to ~~April 1, 1966~~ July 1, 2001, shall have the same force
 20 and effect on and after said date as ordinances adopted subsequent to and by authority of
 21 these Code sections."

22 SECTION 5.1.

23 Chapter 1 of Title 41 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general
 24 provisions with respect to nuisances, is amended by adding at the end thereof the following:

25 "41-1-10.

26 A municipality shall be prohibited from restricting the use of language other than English
 27 on signs for privately owned businesses. This Code section shall not restrict the
 28 municipality's right to enact any other restrictions on signs."

29 SECTION 6.

30 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2001.

31 SECTION 7.

32 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.