

Helena Getting Serious About Unsightly Property

By Josh Troy

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Ten houses in Helena were condemned and will be torn down thanks to the city council unanimously passing a resolution after hearing chairman of the Property Standards Board John King's recommendation. From the time the ordinance is published in the newspaper, the owner will have 15 days to act on it.

The five aldermen present for the vote were Joe St. Columbia, Sue Sellers, Rogerline Johnson, Maxine Miller, and Bobby Martin.

King said the city's code enforcement Officer inspected these buildings. He said that one owner of a building asked and is being given a chance to improve their facility.

"We like that," King said. "We're not here for vindictiveness. We want to help people who can improve their property."

In February, King hopes to submit 10 more buildings to the council for approval.

King said the owners of the property are responsible for making sure everything is in compliance.

Mayor Dr. Robert Miller stressed that there are problems with burned houses throughout Helena.

Michael Boone of the Property Standards Board said broken down cars on property also has been a problem. He said the code enforcement officer has found approximately 15 to 16 broken down cars on property that have been tagged. He stated that there as many as 10 to 15 cars were found on one property. When that happens, Boone said the owner would have 10 days to take action, not the usual 72 hours.

Boone said problems with homes include no electricity, gas, or pipe connections. He added that problems could arise such as homes falling in with children playing in the street.

In the near future, Boone said 30 letters are going to be sent out regarding property that is not in compliance standards. Boone stressed the need to be patient.

"We're abiding by the law," Boone said. "We're not doing anything

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illegal, so I feel good about that."

Boone said the city would get back all the money they put into tearing houses down because there is not an opportunity to make a profit.

City Attorney Brian Miller gave a legal opinion backing Boone.

"We can't make a profit for tearing your house down," said the city attorney.

Brian Miller added that the city could not legally take property. It can only accumulate land. He said that the state could take the property if taxes were not paid. He insisted that the city only mows private property for the public welfare.

Lack of adequate maintenance, deemed a menace, and threat or hazard to the general health and safety of the community were just some of the reasons listed in the ordinance for condemning properties.