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Fight against blight good for Ruston

Rick Hohlt Rick Hohlt, *Publisher*

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A slow drive through some neighborhoods in Ruston reveals several houses that look as though they have been vacant for decades. Paint is missing, windows are broken out and trees have started growing into the structures.

Many of these houses have reportedly been abandoned for years. Their presence has stirred concern among residents, police officers and elected officials, who believe the dilapidated structures cause their neighbors' property values to decline, pose a danger to mischievous children wandering about and offer a safe haven for criminal activities.

Each month, a list of dilapidated structures is presented at the City Council meeting. The aldermen give property owners a set amount of time to repair, move or tear down their aging houses, mobile homes or sheds. If an owner fails to take action within the allotted time frame, the aldermen give the city permission to hire contractors to demolish the structure. The property owners are usually billed between \$1,500 and \$3,000 for the demolition work.

Since residents spoke out during Ruston 21 Community Visioning Day in November 2008, city officials have accelerated efforts to rid Ruston of abandoned structures. A street-by-street inventory has been conducted, and city building inspector Mark Joiner notes more than half of the deteriorating structures identified are heir properties with multiple owners who live out of town. This presents challenges in finding the owners. Additionally, property owners who live out of town may have difficulties taking care of the necessary repairs or demolishing the building themselves in a reasonable amount of time.

Perhaps it's time for more community members to get involved in the clean-up effort.

When deciding who to pass down their property to, they should select relatives or friends who are responsible and will make keeping the house in good shape of utmost priority.

And those who do have deteriorating property should make an effort to do something about it.

Letting a vacant house in poor condition remain can bring unwanted activities into a neighborhood. Residents who observe suspicious activities around an abandoned structure should call the police.

Let's work together to make this an even greater community of which we can be proud.

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