



City bears down on blight
Focus on property a response to residents' worries on topic
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The city of Ruston moved a few steps closer toward its goal of tackling abandoned and blighted property during the Board of Aldermen meeting Monday.

In their first meeting of the new year, aldermen approved the condemnation and demolition of four adjudicated properties. Three other houses were ordered condemned, and the property owners were given a time frame in which to make repairs or remove their belongings from the area.

The city is set to demolish the houses located at 909 Baldwin, 111 South Hazel, 1308 Larson and 1312 Larson. Chief Code Enforcement Officer Mitch Dufour explained that these properties are technically owned by the Lincoln Parish Police Jury, because they were sold for nonpayment of property taxes. The jury is in favor of proceeding with demolition, he said, and that process could start as soon as two weeks. The cost of demolishing a property is approximately \$2,000.

Aldermen heard from real estate agent Qureda Wigfield, speaking on behalf of Mike Mabry, owner of the abandoned property located at 614 Eastland.

Wigfield explained that the property is in the process of being sold, and the sale should be closed by the end of the month. She said the buyer plans to renovate the house and use it as rental property.

"She's bought and rehabbed several properties in town, and she's doing a pretty good job," Dufour said.

The aldermen agreed to give the property owner 90 days to complete the sale and for the new owner to make repairs.

"We don't want to demolish anything we don't have to," alderman Elmore Mayfield said. "That is one of the worst dwellings on the street. I'd like to give her the opportunity to buy it and bring it up to par."

Wigfield explained that even if the sale falls through, Mabry has agreed to have the house torn down within 90 days.

Gregory Davis, owner of the abandoned property located at 1403 Cornell, told aldermen he is not able to bring the house up to code, and he requested time to remove his belongings before the city demolishes it. The board granted him 30 days to do so.

The final property listed on Monday's agenda was 1414 Oakdale, which Dufour said is scheduled to be repaired by the owner, Michael Lyons. The board agreed to allow Lyons 90 days to bring the property up to code.

The city has been working to address abandoned and blighted property since residents voiced concerns at the Ruston 21 Community Visioning Day in November. For the 2008-09 fiscal year, the city's budget to pay for houses that need to be torn down was increased from \$40,000 to \$100,000. There are 50 substandard houses on the city's current list, with about 100 additional substandard properties, according to Public Works Director Lewis Love.

Other business

In other action at Monday's regular Board of Aldermen meeting, the board:

- Adopted an ordinance annexing 331 acres along I-20 and Tarbutton Road for a future interchange in Ruston.
- Adopted an ordinance authorizing the issuance of \$4 million in bonds for the construction of a water storage tank.
- Entered into a professional service agreement with Vector Disease Control Inc. for mosquito control services at a cost of \$140,000.
- Passed a resolution to enter into a contract for construction of an electrical transmission system reconductor.
- Entered into a professional service agreement with the Riley Company to study Shepherd Creek Drainage Basin, located on Homer Street near the Louisiana Tech campus.

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