

Still no arrest in February 'zombie house' fire

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FILE PHOTO/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

The Feb. 12 fire on Adams St. was ruled arson but no arrests have been made. CGPD asks anyone with information to contact the department.

Five months after residents on Adams St. were asked to evacuate their homes as a historic structure burned nearby, and six months after the Cottage Grove City Council took an out-side-the-box action against abandoned homes within the city, there still has not been an arrest in the case the triggered heated discussion and calls for action.

On Feb. 12, a fire broke out on Adams St. in a garage structure of an abandoned house. One of the city's more notable "zombie" houses, the property had been left to financial institutions after owners stopped paying the mortgage and left town. At the time, Cottage Grove law enforcement ruled the fire arson and noted a suspect had been identified.

No arrest was made. Months later, the local police log listed an interview with an individual who claimed to have information about the fire.

According to police chief Scott Shepherd, the department has interviewed several persons of interest but did not garner enough for an arrest.

Zombie houses have become a national nuisance with local governments scrambling to find a solution. In 2016, the

city of Portland foreclosed on its first house in nearly half a century after 24 years of complaints and more than \$66,000 in liens against the property.

A code change that allowed homes to be sold for market value, rather than the total cost of the liens, was cited as the driving factor in the home's

foreclosure (and four others) but it still left the city with more than 400 empty houses.

According to county records, Cottage Grove had 10 foreclosed homes at the time of the fire but that number did not include homes that hadn't begun the official foreclosure process but had already been

abandoned by homeowners, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly how many of these homes fell into the zombie home category.

In 2017, Lane County sent 15 empty homes in Cottage Grove up for auction.

"People could be living in them just like you or I live in them, taking care of them and so it's not a problem. We find out when it's a problem," Meyers told the council in November.

Just a week before the fire on Adams St., the Cottage Grove City Council voted to allow the city to begin addressing the source of the Feb. 12 fire. In a tangled, out-of-the-box approach, city officials managed to take possession of another zombie home on Sixth Street and relayed their success to the council that finally, there seemed to be a path to alleviating the problem that had begun popping up shortly after the 2007 financial crisis.

Meyers told *The Sentinel* in February that he planned to bill the responsible party for the cost of the fire.

Cottage Grove authorities are asking that anyone with information about the Feb. 12 fire to contact Office Steven Biehler at 541-942-9145 ext. 227 or sbiehler@cgsentinel.com.

SHOOTING from A1

sheriff's office, Loop eventually exited the building at approxi-

mately 3:45 a.m. and engaged deputies with a firearm. Two deputies returned fire and struck Loop. He was transported to the hospital for a medical evaluation where he later died.

"The use of deadly force by law a law enforcement officer in Lane County is investigated by the Lane County Interagency Deadly Force Investigation Team," the agency said.

The deputies have reported on injuries and were placed on administrative leave.

The shooting is still under investigation.

TEMPS from A1

down to the high 80s before heading right back into the 90s next Saturday and Sunday. High temperatures are expected through next Tuesday when the mercury will hit 93. Clouds are not expected to break up the sunshine until Wednesday, July 25, and nine of the next 10 days are expected to either hit 90 degrees or hover dangerously close in the high 80s.

Oregon health officials are recommending people pre-

vent heat-related illnesses that can lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke as summer temperatures climb into at least the mid-90s in the coming days.

"We love our Oregon summers and the warm temperatures they bring, but people need to take precautions when temperatures get to the level where they can cause health problems," said Tom Jeanne, MD, deputy state health officer at the OHA Public Health Division. "Extreme heat conditions can even be deadly for some people."

OPH suggests staying in air conditioned spaces if possible and limiting exposure to the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Avoiding hot foods and dressing in loose, light weight, light-colored clothing is also advised. While no official cooling stations have been activated in Cottage Grove, those looking for relief from the heat can visit city hall, the community center or the library (both housed at 700 E. Gibbs) all of which are air conditioned.

Signs of heat exhaustion:

- Heavy sweating
- Weakness
- Fast, weak pulse,
- Nausea/vomiting

Signs of heat stroke:

- High body temperature above 103 degrees
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Hot, red, moist skin

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