

Nuisance: City again goes after problem properties

Continued from Page 1

"In the past, we've been fairly aggressive," she said.

Former Community Development Director Kevin Cronin made it his mission to force property owners to fix nuisance properties, but the city has had three different people in that post since he left 15 months ago.

"Because of the time it takes to bring one nuisance property into compliance, it might be worth looking into putting some money into consulting," Engbretson said. Adding nine or 10 nuisances to the list the city's already working on will take time, she said.

"I like to think outside the box sometimes," Commissioner Tom Dyer said. "Maybe we can get a tax write-off for people to (help them) get assistance. ... I'd rather assist people without getting to that

point."

In the past, Dyer has gathered volunteers or arranged for help to haul old vehicles and debris.

"My preference ... (is to) prioritize properties and put something on the record," Mayor Henry Balensifer said.

"We have multiple businesses that would love to come to Warrenton and they can't. They're unable to because property owners think their property is worth a million dollars and yet looks like it should be foreclosed upon," Balensifer said.

An example is the Vitko property at 368 S. Main Ave. Once part of the Fort Stevens military base, the 2,028-square-foot warehouse sits on a triangular sliver of land between the city's main drag and the Skipanon River. It last was listed for sale for \$85,000. The

property is owned by Yvonne Vitko of Hillsboro and the Lyle Vitko Living Trust.

"It's been in limbo forever," Commissioner Rick Newton said. "I think the last person who used it was Vern Mullins in the 1960s."

Added Commissioner Mark Baldwin: "Is it salvageable? Yeah. The property it sits on? You can't do much with."

The property at South Main Avenue and Ninth Street once belonged to Pete Peterson, a self-described "collector."

Peterson had no heirs and left the 936-square-foot house with an adjoining warehouse full of junk to his neighbors, Grace and Felix Tapales.

"We donated a Dumpster to be used in there," Hoxsey said. "Now the roof is falling in on one piece. This is a danger. It's a disaster. This thing needs to be knocked down. If there's anything of value in there, which I doubt there is, it should be taken out and cleaned up. It's a mess. A total mess."



Cindy Yingst/The Columbia Press

The former Peterson property at South Main Avenue and Ninth Street is full of the former owners "collectables."

The properties that got the most discussion, however, were three buildings sitting on prime commercial property in downtown Hammond.

The house at 930 Pacific Drive, owned by Chester Born of John Day, is a 768-square-foot house built in 1901. Next door is the former Rosalie's Store, built in 1962 and owned by Wallace Rogers of Salem. Rogers also owns the Hammond Post Office building, which was built in 1960.

All three properties have structural problems and there are at least five boxcar-sized metal storage buildings scat-

tered around them.

"These properties have been like this for quite a while," Commissioner Gerald Poe said. "They do stand out."

"If that trifecta could be fixed, it could spur a lot of (commercial) growth in that area," Newton said. "It would be one of the snowballs to make it go."

Commissioners agreed priority should go to structures on main routes.

An ad hoc group made up of planning commissioners, Spruce Up, the city manager, and planning director will monitor and prioritize the problem properties.



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Letter to the editor

Rancor among city commissioners is a disgrace

I was dismayed to read about the open warfare going on at the Warrenton city council meetings in The Columbia Press on Sept. 17.

The unbridled rancor between all the members over personal disagreements has absolutely paralyzed our city leadership.

The childish shows of ill temper from board members make any gestures toward cooperation, such as Rick Newton's basic but valid offer of a handshake -- impossible.

The mayor has failed to enforce federally mandated diversity and anti-harassment training and it shows in the outright belligerence, aggression and social ignorance of his staff. City Com-

missioner Mark Baldwin and Budget Committee member Flint Carlson both have failed to attend these training sessions.

I was a federal employee once who had to sit through all these boring classes about adulting. I get it. Sometimes they're boring, but they keep stupid things from happening, like when a Newberg school worker showed up in blackface, in this, the 21st century (See The Oregonian, 9/21/21). Dollars to donuts that employee missed his federally mandated training.

These classes help teach some of what it means to be an adult, a human, a civic leader and servant to the people who elect and appoint our

representatives to office; how to cooperate with other helpful people to ensure a peaceful life of a city.

Commissioner Baldwin told city council members to "toughen up" during a government meeting. He needs to realize his job is not a football game. There are people's livelihoods riding on council decisions, and lawmakers are not Navy SEALs.

The mayor and commissioner were not elected to office to carry out personal vendettas. Maybe the commissioner should grow up before asking others to toughen up in public policy meetings. Work together or retire.

Julia Stavenhagen
Hammond