

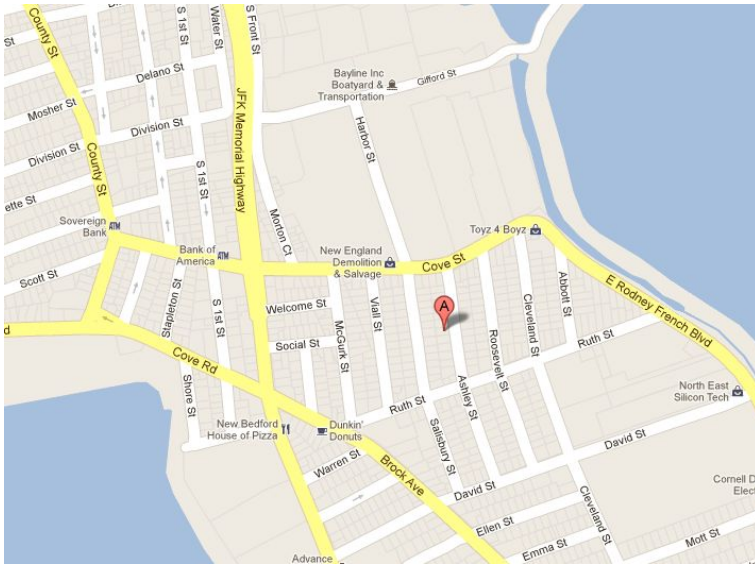
New Bedford “House of Horrors” Ordinance



by
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If you followed the 2011 New Bedford elections, you know that Mayor Jon Mitchell made the “absentee landlord” issue a major part of his campaign. It looks like he’s taken action on the promise by proposing a new ordinance that tackles problem properties in New Bedford.

I define absentee landlords as property owners that neglect their properties at the detriment of the neighborhood and city. These landlords may live in New Bedford, Boston, or even outside Massachusetts, and simply ignore the property they own for various reasons. For example, after the massive rain storm we had in 2012, I remember water leaking into one of the vacant buildings on Acushnet Avenue near Wings Court in downtown, causing an alarm to go off for three days. Obviously, the building owner was nowhere to be found to turn off the alarm, so downtown New Bedford residents had to listen to the alarm go off day and night.



31 Ashley Street – Google Maps

A more extreme case is the vacant building on 31 Ashley Street towards the south end of New Bedford that was recently taken over by a tax title taking. According to the mayor's office, the building, "remained for years an epicenter of criminal activity, including drug distribution, violence and gang activity. The condition of the building was deplorable and was cited repeatedly for health and fire code violations. Since June 2009, New Bedford Police were called to this one property more than 200 times, costing the City thousands of dollars."

A new city ordinance will be proposed by the mayor to the City Council later this month called the "Problem Properties Ordinance." If passed, it will allow the City to designate properties "problem properties" and fine the landlords thus pushing the police cost on to them. The Ordinance will allow the City to designate properties with six or more valid complaints for criminal offenses within an eighteen-month period involving tenants or others associated with the property (or those with more than six sustained city code violations during an eighteen-month period) as "Problem Properties."

In the case of the vacant building on 31 Ashley Street, it will be a neighborhood park for New Bedford residents to

enjoy. According to the City, this new ordinance, “will give the City new tools to crack down on “problem properties” where chronic illegal activity occurs and undermines the health, safety, and quality of life for neighborhood residents.”

This “House of Horrors” ordinance will put absentee landlords in New Bedford on notice. Either maintain your property, or you risk being fined and even losing it. If you are for this ordinance or would like to voice your opposition, I suggest you contact your New Bedford City Council and let them know how you feel. I also recommend everyone take a look at the official City of New Bedford press release on this subject.