

Mayor Proposes Ordinance To Crack Down on Problem Properties

At press conference today New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell, other City officials, and neighborhood leaders announced their support for an innovative new “Problem Properties Ordinance” that will give the City new tools to crack down on buildings where chronic illegal activity occurs and undermines the health, safety, and quality of life for neighborhood residents.



The Ordinance is designed to hold accountable the City’s small number of irresponsible landlords who flagrantly neglect their responsibilities to their tenants and the neighborhood. This measure will force these landlords, if their building is designated a “Problem Property,” to now bear responsibility for the cost of excessive police intervention instead of city taxpayers.

The announcement was made on the steps of a dilapidated tenement, 31 Ashley Street, a “poster child” for the challenges the City has faced in dealing with the problem in recent years. Since June 2009 New Bedford Police were called to this one property more than 200 times, costing the City thousands of dollars.

The new Ordinance makes the owner responsible for the cost of these police calls, once the building is designated a “Problem Property.” It gives the Police Chief the authority to assess the cost of future police responses to the location.

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."

The measure, modeled after a similar ordinance already in place in Boston, is part of a broader effort by the Mitchell Administration to improve the quality of life throughout New Bedford's neighborhoods. The City has stepped up code enforcement, proactively conducted targeted sweeps of problem properties, and has pursued problem property owners through the legal system.

Mayor Jon Mitchell said, "The Problem Property Ordinance will go a long way toward putting an end to the chaos and disorder City departments encounter over years of intervention at properties like 31 Ashley Street."

Mayor Mitchell added, "Neighbors and taxpayers have suffered for too long. Enough is enough. It is important we hold those who own these properties accountable for the burdens they impose on everyone else."

Despite the efforts of the City, 31 Ashley Street remained for years an epicenter of criminal activity in the neighborhood, including drug distribution, violence, and gang activity. Over a roughly two and a half year period (Jan '10 to May '12) police were dispatched there 104 times (or more than 200 times since June '09).

The list of crimes committed at the property is a long one, including—

Drug use and distribution: The police raided the house twice, resulting in crack cocaine and heroin charges for the occupants.

The house was a source for gang activity: "Blood" graffiti was painted throughout.

The house had a history of domestic violence and animal cruelty incidents, including the discovery of a large, chained alligator this past summer.

The house was a location for illegal firearms: A .25 caliber pistol and various ammunition were found.

The house was the location of an assault with a dangerous weapon: A tenant was once chased down the street by a machete-wielding assailant.

The condition of the building was deplorable and was cited repeatedly for health and fire code violations, including a major cockroach infestation that had spread to every floor and every apartment in the building.

In short, the building was a house of horrors, well-known to local residents and public safety and health officials. The building is now under City control and plans are in place to develop it as part of Loretta Bourque Park.