

City to demolish more than 1,000 nuisance structures

Officials hope additional funding will become available for hundreds of others in its neighborhoods.



This home on Lorenz Avenue burned down last year. The structure was knocked down, but the debris was not removed, which has attracted illegal dumping.

JIM NOELKER / STAFF



“What we have said as a planning team is if ... a significant amount of money opens up with (the state), our focus would be those areas like Springfield, Greenwich and Residence Park because they have highest concentration of eligible properties that” are unfunded, said Steve Gondol, Dayton’s deputy director of planning, neighborhoods and development.

CORNELIUS FROLIK / STAFF



Luis Aguilar, a Chicago resident who moved to Dayton a year ago, found an inexpensive house on Huron Avenue near multiple vacant homes on the city’s nuisance list. “I hope more people move in and don’t get scared because it looks weird,” said Aguilar. “I had a co-worker ask me if I was scared to live here, and I said, ‘No, I love it here.’”

JIM NOELKER / STAFF





*These vacant properties are on Huron Avenue in Dayton. The Reservoir Park neighborhood has 77 nuisance structures, the third-most in the city behind Westwood (141) and Southern Dayton View (105).
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Dayton resident Johnnie Webb, 70, lives next to the nuisance property at 125 Huron Avenue. The Westwood neighborhood has more nuisance properties than any other in the city.

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This nuisance property on Huron Avenue is home to critters that have bothered neighbors.

Dayton plans to spend \$22 million to remove nuisance properties like this one on Lorenz Avenue.



BY CORNELIUS F

DAYTON DAILY

Dayton plans to demolish more than 1,000 nuisance properties in the next several years, but that would still leave hundreds of other similar kinds of eyesores that the city currently does not have the funding to tear down.

Many residents and leaders can't wait for the bulldozers to arrive in their neighborhoods because they say demolition will beautify and strengthen the community.

"I would definitely love to see them knocked down," said Marquita Johnson, 33, who lives on a street with multiple nuisance structures in the Westwood neighborhood.

She calls them "abandos."

"There's been so much commotion about people going into abandos and sitting on abandos and I would love for them to be gone," she said.

But Dayton inspectors and other staff have identified more than 400 additional properties across the city that are troubled and appear to have nuisance conditions.

The city would like to level these properties or find other ways to address their health, safety and code issues, but it would cost \$7 million more than the city has budgeted. Officials say they hope that additional demolition funding will become available sometime in the not-too-distant future, and they will be ready to seize the opportunity if that happens.

Demo targets Dayton plans to spend about \$12.4 million of its \$138 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding on residential

demolition and the removal of fire-damaged properties and “fire piles.”

Fire piles are the mounds of debris left over after house fires and emergency demolition.

Dayton estimates it should be able to tear down about 625 structures and remove about 30 fire piles using its federal ARPA COVID recovery funds.

But in total the city proposes spending nearly \$21.9 million demolishing about 990 structures and cleaning up 110 fire piles in the next four years.

The rest of the planned funding would come from the federal Community Development Block Grant program (\$3.5 million), the state of Ohio (\$2.9 million) and the city’s general fund (\$3 million).

The city has decided to focus its federal ARPA spending on “priority” target neighborhoods and areas including Wolf Creek, Edgemont, Carillon, Miami Chapel, Five Oaks, Old North Dayton and Twin Towers.

The city wants to set the stage to help drive new investment to these areas over the next 15 to 20 years, said Dayton City Manager Shelley Dickstein.

“What we’re trying to do is build momentum and really, truly create transformative, sustainable investment into our communities,” she said.

City officials said many parts of the city are expected to benefit from demolition activities but removals are concentrated in certain areas to try to maximize impact.

‘Abandos’

Johnson, 33, has lived on the 100 block of Huron Avenue in the Westwood neighborhood for about six years.

During that time multiple decaying homes around her have been torn down.

One blighted home was used for drug activity, she said, and shady characters regularly hung out on the porch.

Johnson said she does not let her young children play outside too often because of safety concerns.

A couple of nuisance properties still remain on her block, including a home at 110 Huron Ave. Johnson said she has seen people enter the home, presumably for illicit reasons.

Johnson said eliminating the remaining nuisance structures could boost interest in the area.

Once they are gone, developers might consider building new homes or property owners might decide to spruce up their properties, she said.

“And it would be way better on the eyes,” she said.

Johnson’s 70-year-old neighbor, Johnnie Webb, lives one lot over from a nuisance property at 125 Huron Ave.

Webb said the property is infested with critters that sometimes find their way into her yard and home.

About a year ago, a raccoon got inside her house and attacked her dog, which she said resulted in trip to the vet.

“I’m glad it didn’t bite me because I was in the middle of it,” Webb said. “I didn’t know what to do, so I took off my shoe and started beating it.”

Webb, who has lived on Huron Avenue since she was in the fifth grade, said getting rid of the nuisance properties on her block would be very beneficial.

“It would help a great deal,” she said. “It would make things look better, and people won’t be scared to come into the neighborhood.”

Westwood has more nuisance structures than any other Dayton neighborhood (141).

Southern Dayton View has the next most (105), followed by Residence Park (77), city data shows.

Luis Aguilar, 23, who lives across the street from Webb, said nuisance structures on his block don’t really bother him. He said they don’t seem to cause any real problems.

But Aguilar said he'd like to see some of the surrounding homes fixed up and attract new tenants because that would make the neighborhood more lively.

"I hope more people move in and don't get scared because it looks weird," said Aguilar, whose family moved to Dayton from Chicago about a year ago.

"People get spooked: I had a co-worker ask me if I was scared to live here, and I said, 'No, I love it here.' "

Funding gap

Dayton housing inspectors and nuisance abatement staff earlier this year completed a comprehensive property survey that identified about 1,700 nuisance and "pre-nuisance" structures.

Pre-nuisance structures appear to have nuisance conditions but they have not been officially certified by city staff.

More than one in 10 of the nuisance and pre-nuisance properties (roughly 182) are expected to be rehabbed, stabilized or removed by private owners, city officials said.

Of the roughly 1,517 remaining properties, the city says it has funding to remove nearly 75% of them, leaving about 417 without a funding source to demolish.

Demolition on average cost about \$17,715 per structure in recent years, according to city estimates, and at that price the city would need more than \$7.3 million to level the unfunded pre-nuisance structures.

Most of the pre-nuisance structures likely will end up on the nuisance list, and the city wanted a rough estimate of what it might cost to knock them down, said Hilary Browning, Dayton's budget and grants supervisor.

"If we don't communicate our gap, then we may not be able to identify funding sources for those structures when they come into nuisance," she said.

City planning officials said hopefully some nuisance properties will not need to be demolished and instead can be rehabbed and reoccupied.

Good candidates for rehab include troubled structures in historic districts, which have fairly strict rules about demolition, especially when it comes to using federal dollars.

Of the 417 unfunded properties, more than two-thirds are located in three neighborhoods: Greenwich Village (144 properties), Residence Park (79) and Springfield (62), the city said.

'Have to get in line'

Blight is a significant issue in the Greenwich Village neighborhood and many residents are unhappy with the state of some properties near their homes, said Renee Jackson, president of the Greenwich Village Neighborhood Association.

While Jackson said she understands that the city's demolition funds are limited, she also said that residents want to see neighboring dilapidated structures removed as soon as possible.

"Trying to tell the neighbors that we have to get in line and wait for the funding to become available is kind of hard, especially when people want things down now," she said.

Jackson said demolition definitely would help the neighborhood but the area really needs new parks, recreation centers and entertainment options.

More funds possible

Steve Gondol, Dayton's deputy director of planning, neighborhoods and development, said the state is the city's best bet to get additional demolition funding.

The city estimates that Dayton, in partnership with the Montgomery County Land bank, could benefit from about \$3 million or more in demolition funding from a state program that has about \$150 million to distribute. If approved, the state funding should help demolish or partially demolish about 174 residential and commercial structures in Dayton, according to Mike Grauwelman, executive director of the land bank.

If Dayton can acquire more demo money, city staff will be ready and will

certify some pre-nuisance structures to put them on the path to removal, Gondol said.

“What we have said as a planning team is if let’s say that a significant amount of money opens up with (the state) our focus would be those areas like Springfield, Greenwich and Residence Park because they have highest concentration of eligible properties that” are unfunded, he said.

‘Abandominimums’

Chris Clements, 60, grew up in a home on Lorenz Avenue that is on the city’s nuisance list. He said the property has been vacant for years and it is now a magnet for scrappers and other illegal activities.

Clements said he’s like to see his family home knocked down. He thinks knocking it and other nuisance homes down create new opportunities for housing.

And right now, these properties are causing serious headaches for neighbors.

“We call them ‘abandominimus,’ because people come in and occupy them,” he said.

Eyesores not on list

Some residents say they do not understand why some decaying and troubled properties are not on the city’s nuisance list.

They say some properties not on the list are in worse shape than those that are included.

Tonya McClearin, 42, lives on the 100 block of Lorenz Avenue in the Westwood neighborhood between a nuisance property and a fire pile.

McClearin would like to see the home torn down, but the fire pile is a much bigger source of frustration and health and safety issues.

The home at 185 Lorenz Ave. burned down in July.

Fire crews performed emergency demolition.

Firefighters managed to keep the blaze from spreading to McClearin's home by spraying the side of her house with water.

The fire pile has not been cleaned up, and the site now is full of garbage, broken furniture and often debris. People illegally dump trash there.

McClearin said she contacted the city but was told that the property owner is responsible for cleaning up. McClearin fears the site could remain in a deplorable condition for the foreseeable future.

Gondol said property owners generally are responsible for cleaning up their properties when there are fires.

But sometimes, he said, the city can use general fund money to pay for cleanup costs and then assess those costs to the properties.

Gondol said it's important to understand that the city does not have the ability or authority to tear down every eyesore in the city.

Demolition activities are restricted by state and federal laws and program requirements of funding sources, he said.

However, Gondol said the city's demolition plans will make a big difference in many neighborhoods.

"I think this is a significant shot in the arm for the city," he said. "We are addressing more than we are not."