

# Winston-Salem's housing woes

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But that's not to say that much more isn't left to do, Newell says, citing the absentee landlord as the city's biggest housing problem.

"The city needs to relocate tenants from absentee landlords who will do anything for a dollar," she says. "This can be done within two or three years."

"The city hasn't taken the lead in this," she continues. "Sometimes we have to have the fear of God in us before we'll do what's right. And somebody has to put it there."

Newell recently proposed that the city establish a commission to increase the city's housing code enforcement efforts.

While the problems Betty Jean McFadden has experienced don't affect only black people, the numbers show that the city's black community is more severely affected by poor housing conditions than whites. In fact, it is the eastern half of the city, where most of Winston-Salem's blacks live, that brings the highest number of housing complaints, says Darwin Hudler, the city's housing inspections supervisor.

Of the 158 inspections Hudler's office made between April 1983 and January of this year, almost 90 percent were in the eastern half of the city. And, of the five field inspectors Hudler supervises, all but one are assigned to the eastern portion of the city.

"Though at present some 370 houses have been condemned by the city until they are brought into compliance with the city's housing codes -- and though Hudler believes the city has a strong-enough housing code -- he says the problem of enforcing the code is not as simple as some would like to make it.

"The shortage of available housing makes it difficult to enforce the housing code any stricter than we do," he says. "If a family is living in unfit conditions, it's probably all they can afford -- they aren't able to do any better."

Like Newell, Northeast Ward Alderman Vivian Burke says the city has taken steps to erase poor housing conditions, but it can do much more, including strengthening its enforcement of housing code violations. In May, the city's Board of Aldermen voted to bring misdemeanor or criminal charges against landlords and tenants as a last resort to get people out of unfit housing.

"The city can only put people in standard homes," says Burke. "It's other agencies that put people in substandard homes."

While Burke agrees that tenants sometimes don't take pride in their rented homes, she finds it hard to sympathize with landlords in general. "Those who're doing all the talking and complaining must have something good going on," says Burke. "I don't see them selling their property."

And landlords do have their say in the matter.

Even though property owners agree with city officials that the environment in which many of the city's residents live is not ideal, they also contend that the bigger problem is the tenants themselves.

"Whoever lives there should have enough interest to care of the place," says Jerry Gilmore, a funeral director and landlord who owns 23 houses. "Those who rent should have different attitudes. They should take care of the place, no matter what. They need some sort of spirit and encouragement to take care of what they are using. When the expense comes in, it doesn't fall on them."

John Dickson, who owned seven houses in the 1300 block of Cameron Avenue before he sold them, says it's not always true that landlords are getting rich off their property.

He owned his houses for five years, Dickson says, and he made no money during that time.

Meanwhile, Mayor Wayne Corpening believes the city hasn't been given its just due for trying to alleviate the city's poor housing conditions.

"In the last six years," he says, "two thousand units have been built or approved, and that's a lot of units."

Corpening says the city needs better inspections and follow-ups in order to make sure both the tenant and landlord uphold their responsibility. He also says the present conditions are more the fault of economic times than individuals.

"You've got to go back to the basics," he says. "First, you have to have more jobs for people so they can afford decent houses. ... It's our responsibility as elected officials to go out and look for good jobs."

Adds Burke: "We have a

responsibility to the people. Once you tell people, 'I want to represent you,' you must represent them."

But, unlike the mayor, who lauds the city for its efforts and says Winston-Salem has done more to alleviate poor housing conditions than any other city its size, Burke says comparisons shouldn't be made.

"Let's look at Winston-Salem itself," she says. "Let us become that shining example of humane progress. We're not doing enough."

As for enforcing the housing code, Inspections Supervisor Darwin Hudler says the city is doing the best it can under the circumstances.

"They think we're dealing with 2x4's," he says. "We're dealing with people problems. If you're dealing with an empty house, we can deal with it."

"But as long as there are people who can't afford decent housing, there will always be people in the market for unsafe housing. This people problem complicates housing code enforcement."

Hudler adds: "We could bring 200 cases to the board, but where would they go? The city can't morally put that many people in the street."

"The man (the inspector) out there knows what the situation is and has a feeling for it. The police power is always there, but it takes time to go through the stages."

Hudler's office has a set procedure to follow when a tenant brings a complaint to his office which begins with an initial in-

spection and courtesy letter and can end with the demolition of the property if the landlord doesn't comply (see the accompanying box).

From July 1, 1982 to June 30, 1983, 94 housing units were demolished and 1,455 were brought into compliance. From July 1, 1983 to January 1984, 777 housing units were brought into compliance and 34 were demolished.

More often than not, says Hudler, when the city finds a housing unit that needs repair, and the owner brings the property into compliance, he then increases the rent to offset his expenses. Unfortunately, Hudler says, the city has no control over this practice, which is why many substandard houses go unreported because tenants fear a rent increase. Hudler says he has had tenants break into tears and beg him not to cite a housing code violation because they couldn't afford a rent increase.

He takes care, however, not to make the landlord the sole villain. As Alderman Burke pointed out, he says, some tenants are guilty of not taking care of what they rent.

"You can look at 100 different files and see 100 different cases," says Hudler. "It could be a bad landlord, a bad tenant, low income or a combination of things."

Next week: A close-up look at a landlord and a tenant.

# Board agrees to help pay relocation costs

By AUDREY L. WILLIAMS  
Chronicle Staff Writer

The city's Board of Aldermen agreed Monday night to approve a policy that may allow up to \$500 in assistance to residents seeking to relocate out of substandard housing.

The move, which was approved 6-1, with Alderman Robert S. Northington voting against the measure, is the result of the city's housing code enforcement policy, which will cite and fine landlords for receiving rent from tenants after a dwelling has been declared unfit. The code will also cite tenants who refuse to move from a dwelling that has been condemned.

At least \$50,000 of city funds will be used for the relocation program.

Daniel R. Beerman, program supervisor for in-take services of the Forsyth County Department of Social Services, said it was a "very positive move" for the city and told the board that in extreme cases, moving costs for residents who want to move out of substandard housing can go as high as \$400.

"There is a consistent need to help people relocate," he said, "and the need is not always people in substandard housing."

For those not living in

substandard housing assistance can be sought from Social Services, Crisis Control or any other public assistance agency. The new move by the board, however, includes only those who have been advised or wish to move from substandard housing.

Alderman Virginia K. Newell asked for specific figures, but no one from the city staff could give her definite numbers on how many people could be helped by the relocation funds. Gary Brown, director of the city's community development department, estimated that at least 90 people could be in need of the assistance.

"Why can't they have a handle on all the houses that are substandard," asked Newell. "I want definite figures. I want to know how many. Maybe I'm asking too much."

Newell had earlier indicated that the some board members had become "bored" with substandard housing discussion and said, "Some don't have to deal with it."

Northington accused Newell of directing her remarks at him and said, "I defy you to prove otherwise."

Alderman Lynne Harpe was absent from Monday night's meeting.

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