

Blighted Property Program of Waveland, MS
Submitted to City of Waveland Website June 2015 by Bernie Cullen

Historical Overview:

Two administrations ago, Robert Pitre was assigned to work on blight post Katrina. Robert created files which were the foundation for this program. When Robert left, various employees assisted when asked. In 2011-2012, the newly re-organized Keep Waveland Beautiful (KWB) Committee took on the task of analyzing where this project was to date. A KWB task force on blighted property was formed on 7/20/2012. This group compiled all paper work available on blighted property and developed a comprehensive electronic database and paper file system. A standard letter was also developed and sent to homeowners that were identified as having consistent complaints of abandoned property. Members of this task force were: Melinda Tucker KWB Chairperson, Bernie Cullen Ward 1 appointee, Rhoda Swanson and Jim Meggett, KWB Volunteers.

This database was created by all complaints received by citizens, visitors, and city employees. So if you don't see a particular property that you are concerned about then it was not reported.

Soon this project was more complex and time consuming for a volunteer organization. As of October 3, 2012 Bernie Cullen began working part time with the Fire Chief who served as the Code Enforcement Officer for this Blighted Property Program.

2012:

Report of success from July 2012 to December 2012 included:

- Complied a comprehensive list of all properties considered blighted (351).
- Verified the status of all 351 properties.
- Closed 152 sites since now in compliance. (43%)
- Active plans for 41 properties to get in compliance. Requests regular updates and try to communicate via email.
- Current properties with no signs of progress: 158 (45%)

In 2013 and 2014, progress continued. As more owners came into compliance, city employees and neighbors contacted me regarding getting other properties in compliance. During this time frame, the process design was amended and completed with the cooperation of the Code Enforcement Officer, Mike Smith and Building Inspector, Bill Carrigee. The process is outlined in a separate section.. This process was created from the International Building Code 2012 and the City's Ordinance 360. Our process mirrors the work of Mr. Carrigee to be in agreement with our complimentary work.

Activity as of 2013:

- 363 properties listed in database
- 168 were closed as being in compliance.
- Re-visited and assessed all properties that had submitted plans for remediation in 2012.
 - 12 were closed
 - 6 showed improvement
 - 11 with no improvement
 - Added 2 more with recent plans
- Began new action of bringing non-compliant owners to the Board for direction and action. Results included that 5 properties were cleaned and brought into compliance. Four were cleaned by owners; one by the city and costs added to owner's taxes.

Report from 2014 and new stats as of end of January 2015:

2014:

- Board actions and results: 7 properties cited and all seven were addressed by owners and are now in compliance.
- Other properties with pools were secured and treated.
- More properties came into compliance and new owners also were noted.

New stats as of January 29, 2015:

- Total properties listed on database: 410
- 241 are closed. (241/410= **59%**)
- 37 have plans. (add these 37 to the 241 closed is **278**. 278/410= **68%**)
- 5 owned by State of MS. I also know of another lot not in the database.
- 19 are undeliverable
- If you add the four groups above the total is 302. 302/410 is **74%**.
- Current properties not listed in a category above with no signs of progress: 108. **26%**. These will probably be the most difficult and many will need to go before the Board.

Activities for first half of 2015 and plans for future:

- Plan to re-visit properties where homeowners on active list to determine status.
- Since most of the non-compliant owners have already gotten registered letters, plan to bring more properties to the attention of the Board as next step once I re-visit the sites.
- Since 2014 was the year of the "pools"; 2015 is the year of cleaning up Hwy 90.
- Re-visit Geoportal on all active properties to check for any update on owners.
- Coordinate with State of MS to agree on a plan to clean up STATE owned land.
- Continue to work with citizens as they present new complaints.

- Having heard that beautification, especially blight, was a frequent topic of concern during the election, my plan is to start this column on the city website so that I can share this kind of information and update the site at least quarterly. I know that no amount of success is relevant if you are the person living next to a blighted property so I also hope this will be a means to inform citizens of how they can report such issues.

I hope this report gives you a better insight into the process over the last few years. I welcome any comments or suggestions. My part time days/hours are most Tuesdays and Thursdays. I may be out assessing and documenting sites so to be sure to catch me, I will be in my office in City Hall on those days from 11am-2pm. If my schedule changes, please leave a message (name, issue, phone number or email address) and I will get back to you on my next work day. You can always email me at blightedproperty@waveland-ms.gov. Feel free to share the blighted email address with anyone. If they do not have email, they can call me at City Hall or leave a message there as well. That number is 228-467-4134.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been so willing to assist in this program: my fellow KWB volunteers (especially Jim Meggett), Mike Smith, our Firefighters, Mr. Carrigee, Judge Mauffray, Prosecutor Melinda Tucker and our previous Mayor and Aldermen. I look forward continued success in 2015 working with our new city leaders.

Bernie Cullen
Blighted Property Program