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MEMO

To: City of Watertown Public Safety & Welfare Committee

From: Brian Zirbes, Zoning Administrator

Date: May 29th, 2024

RE: 1015 Meadow Street

I have been asked to inform this committee about the situation at 1015 Meadow Street. Building, Safety, and Zoning has received several complaints about this property. The first complaint dates back to 2003 for siding and other items blowing into adjacent yards. In 2008 we received a complaint for junk in the yard and raccoons entering and exiting the property. Again, in June of 2020 we received two complaints for an abandoned structure with the front entry door being open, holes in the siding and soffit, and a detached garage in disrepair. In response to these complaints, four letters have been sent to the property owner, 3 citations have been issued, 10 on-site inspections have been documented, and several discussions regarding tax liens have been conducted with Jefferson County.

The property remains vacant and no attempt has been made to correct any of the violations on the property. The neighboring property owners are frustrated that there is nothing being done to improve the situation.

Our Code Compliance Officer provided the following notes regarding the subject property on January 8, 2024 (the letter to the property owner is also attached for your reference):

"Due to the long-standing vacancy and code violations of this property, City Attorney Steve Chesebro recommended sending a request for objections to an interior inspection of the subject property. The interior inspection was suggested to determine the extent of damage and deterioration to the interior living space. A letter was drafted and sent to the property owner, Dennis R Sotebeer. The letter was dated and sent on December 14, 2023. The property owner made no objections to the interior inspection in the 15 plus days allowed and the interior inspection was completed on January 4, 2024. During said inspection, it was determined that there has been long-term harborage of vermin, birds, etc. There is clear evidence of nesting materials from both exterior and interior views. There are areas where nesting materials are bulging out of and through interior walls, and evidence of vermin food particles and feces. There is good reason to believe that the finished flooring and/or sub flooring have been contaminated with rodent urine and feces. Additionally, it is likely that areas of the electrical wiring in the wall cavities have been compromised by various vermin/rodent harborage. It is also evident that the house currently has no utilities and has not for several years. The interior would essentially need to be stripped to the bare studs to ensure safe wiring; the plumbing and air ducts would need to be checked and cleaned for safe operation as well. In short, the HVAC, plumbing, electrical and all interior finishes would have to be replaced to make

the structure habitable. Repairs to the exterior siding (entrance/exit doors) and re-insulating would also be required. The cost to repair the structure would exceed 50% of the improvement value. Condemnation and razing of the structure are therefore recommended. The service door on the detached garage would need to be replaced as well. The door currently is compromised and there is evidence of vermin harborage in said garage."

The raze order (attached for your reference) was sent by our Building Inspector on March 11, 2024. The deadline to hear back from the owner was May 1, 2024. We did not receive a response. The Building Inspector has given an additional 30 days to the property owner before proceeding with razing of the building. If no action is taken by the owner, the city will proceed with razing the building. This does come with expenses to the city; those expenses get assessed to the property via a special assessment on their property tax bill. A budget amendment, or use of contingency, will be necessary to complete the razing of the building.

Thank-You
Brian Zirbes

Zoning and Floodplain Administrator
Building, Safety and Zoning