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Town Will Demolish Property on Josephine Street

March 14, 2012 by [Michael Dowling \(Edit\)](#)

The property at 23 Josephine Street has lodged itself into the Town of Berryville's agenda for more than six months, but at last night's council meeting the final disposition of the property was decided. In a unanimous vote the council decided to adopt the Town Manger's blight abatement plan for the property and proceed with demolishing the structures and billing the property owner for the costs.

The saga began when the town responded to complaints about the property and identified it as being blighted. Town ordinances dictate a process for spot blight abatement and the property at 23 Josephine Street was the first to be considered as a candidate for forced demolition. The owner, William Woodruff, acquired the property at auction and planned to renovate it as an investment. Woodruff did work with the town to board up the property and keep the grass cut, but as time passed and no renovations took place the property was labeled as blighted. As the town planning commission worked due process, Woodruff and many others from the Josephine Street community appeared at public meetings to seek a resolution that did not end in compulsory demolition. As a result, the planning commission granted a 3 month reprieve to Mr Woodruff in August of 2011 with the condition that he work with the town to develop an actionable plan to bring the property into compliance. At that point Mr. Woodruff went silent. Town officials had no contact with the property owner and no plan was produced.



Property at 23 Josephine Street Berryville, VA -
Photo Mike Dowling

The final public hearing was held Tuesday night. No one spoke at that hearing. Subsequently, the town addressed the issue in their agenda and Mayor Wilson Kirby opened the topic for discussion with the board saying, "Mr. Woodruff called me and I had a meeting with him on the first Monday of February. He told me he had applied for a loan from the VA for some improvements to the property and he said he was expecting to hear back from them on the following Thursday of that week and I haven't heard from Mr Woodruff since, so I'm interested in moving this forward." The Mayor added, "We clearly have a violation in our town with this building for more than six months, so I would ask council to consider making a motion on this issue."

Town Recorder Jay Arnold made the motion to approve the blight abatement plan and councilman Allen Kitselman seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous to approve.

Town Manager Keith Dalton said the process would begin within 90 days and that the town would seek competitive prices to select a contractor to perform the work. Dalton also commented on the long process saying. "This is the first time the blight abatement process has been exercised and this is a serious action, so it needs to move slowly."

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Comments

Why oh Why?? says:

[March 14, 2012 at 10:02 am \(Edit\)](#)

Oh well there should be no complaints since chance after chance was given to get it straight. Im sure the Josephine nay sayers will try to come up with some excuse to save it but let it go.



George Archibald says:

[March 14, 2012 at 12:45 pm \(Edit\)](#)

Having walked past the 23 Josephine Street boarded-up property daily for more than a year, I often wondered why it was not demolished by the property owner and a new home built? It's a wonderful location. Now the council has ordered demolition, why not serve owner William Woodruff with a binding order to get his own contractor by date certain to bulldoze the house and remove the debris under town supervision, and pay for the work himself? That would preserve property rights and restrict the town government from joining the nanny-state. What say people?



Lonnie Bishop says:

[March 14, 2012 at 3:44 pm \(Edit\)](#)



For a newshound, you sure don't pay attention sometimes. He had been given 6 months to come up with a plan – any plan, from improve the structure to demolish it – but he didn't do so. Per the town ordinance, he's now goin to get the bill for this "demolishment." The fact that others on that street remained silent this time would seem ton indicate that they knew he'd flouted the town rules and run out of chances.

It ain't about some "nanny-state" mess...it's about a fellow who was given half a year to come up with a plan, work with the town, but ultimately dropped the ball. I would imagine that, given some of those other structures there and elsewhere in the town, this won't be the 1st house to be in the sights for "demolition."

jennifer says:

[March 14, 2012 at 9:56 pm \(Edit\)](#)



So what is it George, do you want the "nanny state" out of our business or not? This is a run-down property that is fenced and boarded up. The neighbors are defending the owner and don't seem interested in government interference.

The economy is not currently conducive to a blighted property owner getting a contractor (by a government determined date) to demolish the property and build a new home. Where do you draw the line? Where it suits I guess.

Richie Blick says:

[March 15, 2012 at 8:59 am \(Edit\)](#)



The property has 2 homes on it. Are they both being torn down or just the one out front as shown in the photo? Why didn't Mr. Woodruff simply sell it As-Is? Short Sale if he has a mortgage? Auction? DONATE it to Habitat for Humanity!!!!

What's the process from here? Does the town will raze it and clean it up, bill the owner of which he has no funds to pay, then a process to collect the funds or place a lien on it and recover when the property is ever sold or transferred? Investors could have bought it and maybe fixed it. It is amazing what a couple of simple projects can do. Like \$100 in new facia boards, roof repair on the front, and a coat of paint would make all the difference. Those small windows can't be that expensive to repair or replace. It should have never been boarded up for longer than 6 months. If your home is that bad for that long without having a plan of repair on file with the town building inspector, a suit should be filed and let a Judge order demolition.

Who knows how bad the interior is and if it can be repaired. Has the building inspector been inside?

In my opinion the Town of Berryville and Mayor have been extremely patient and gracious while they took their time to make this decision. So much public time and energy has been devoted to this one property. After all, years ago someone saved their money to build this home and proudly lived in it. This is a perfect example of what happens when a home is grossly neglected.

The Shocker says:

[March 15, 2012 at 11:15 am \(Edit\)](#)



So the town knocks the house down and puts a lien on the property (assuming the owner cannot pay). Who is going to purchase a bare lot with multiple liens when there are other properties available? It seems that this is a death sentence to the lot. The town will then be out the money that the contractor(s) will be paid with virtually no hope of reimbursement in the near future.

I have no idea what the solution is, but it seems there must be a better one.

Too bad the neighbors and friends couldn't pitch in a bit and make it somewhat better looking....a little sweat equity would go a long way here....

Right Winger says:

[March 20, 2012 at 10:19 am \(Edit\)](#)



Let the Fire Department do a training burn.

livein22611 says:

[March 15, 2012 at 6:56 pm \(Edit\)](#)



Can anything be done about the building on Main Street that has all the holes in it? You can stand on one side and look straight through to the other. I fear there are apartments on the second floor. Looks like those people could fall straight down one day. Shouldn't we worry about what Main street looks like too??

