



Property owners push back against city's blight fight!

- [By AARON WEST The Daily News](#)

TEXAS CITY

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When Jeremy Nolan bought his house on 22nd Avenue in Texas City in 2016, he planned for the dilapidated residence to become his family's home.

Nolan, who works as a youth pastor at Northside Baptist Church in Texas City, had grown up in the neighborhood. Texas City feels like home to him, and moving into the house, which he concedes was in poor condition when he bought it, would be a dream come true, he said.

"I got a great deal on it," he said. "I had to pay off around \$25,000 in taxes the previous owners owed on it, but I was about ready to start moving in."

But two years after buying the house and working to pay off the taxes owed on it, Nolan still hasn't moved in. Instead, he's fighting the city to keep it from being demolished.

In early January, a municipal court judge in Texas City gave the city permission to demolish Nolan's house. The decision came after months of nuisance abatement notices from the city, for violations having to do with the building's deteriorating roof, overgrown weeds and trash, Chris Rasco, Nolan's attorney said.

The city maintains that the house is a "sub-standard property" and isn't safe for habitation, City Attorney Russell Plackemeier said. Nolan didn't comply with the abatement orders and now the city is moving to have the property demolished.

But Nolan sees the situation differently, attorney Cris Rasco, who represents Nolan, said. The city is moving too fast, he said.

Nolan had spent thousands of dollars attempting to clean up the mess, and was about “90 percent done” with the work the city was asking for, but city officials moved ahead with demanding the demolition of his property, Rasco said.

“As far as I’m concerned, he took care of everything on the order,” Rasco said. “But the city’s position is he still isn’t in compliance, and the judge agreed.”

Now Nolan is suing to stop the demolition in a lawsuit he filed last month in Galveston County district court that claims the city violated his right to due process when it asked a judge to grant its demolition request. It’s the same reason why Wendy Seghers, who co-owns Texas City Apartments, a condemned apartment complex on Ninth Avenue, filed a separate lawsuit against the city last month as well.

The city condemned her property last September after a gas inspection at a nearby property revealed defects that led to building officials shutting the apartment complex down. Officials contend that Seghers didn’t do enough to address the rotting walls and floor that made the structure inhabitable, but Seghers disagrees and is suing to be able to reopen her apartment complex.

Both Seghers and Nolan believe that something more devious is afoot, they said.

In Seghers’ opinion, officials have targeted the apartment complex because it’s in the middle of the city’s 6th Street Revitalization District, she said. Similarly, Nolan believes the city wants his house demolished so new homes can be built on the lot that will bring in more property tax dollars.

“They want to take down properties like this because they’re not desirable,” Nolan said. “They want the tax money that they could get by building more houses.”

At the very least, it’s a violation of people’s constitutional rights, Rasco, who is also representing Seghers in her lawsuit, said.

“The city is trying to make Texas City a better place to live and work and that’s fine,” he said. “There are a lot of eyesores and dilapidated buildings that need to be torn down. But they have to do things right. These people’s constitutional rights are being violated because the city isn’t following the correct process. They’re cutting corners.”

For its part, the city just sees the two properties as hazards to tenants and neighbors, Plackemeier said.

“I fundamentally disagree with Cris Rasco’s analysis,” Plackemeier said. “We don’t want anyone’s properties, and this isn’t some overarching conspiracy. We just want structures that are safe for our citizens.”

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