

off Highway 17 North, only a few hundred feet from private homes.

Most residents immediately adjacent to a burning area off the Ocean Highway seemed unconcerned as the fire approached their homes. Several were convinced that green vegetation between their homes and the fire would provide sufficient protection.

One resident, Elizabeth McNeil, poured water from a hand-held bucket on burning underbrush as the fire edged toward her neighbor's home. She discontinued her efforts, however, when neighbors assured her their homes were safe.

The McClellanville Fire Department said there had been no reports

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Staff Photo By Edward C. Fennell

A Little Water To Fight A Fire

Elizabeth McNeil throws water from a hand-held bucket on the approaching edge of an underbrush fire associated with a larger forest fire burning at the Francis Marion National Forest. Though

the fire burned close to some Highway 17 North residences near McClellanville, no homes had been damaged by the fire late Wednesday.

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Over Dilapidated Properties

Officials Threaten Court Action

By MARY A. GLASS
Staff Reporter

Charleston city housing inspection officials threatened Wednesday to take several property owners into Municipal Court if immediate repairs or demolitions aren't accomplished.

The news was given to several property owners at hearings on the status of dilapidated properties in the peninsular city. The owners who did not attend, including some from out of state, will receive orders in the mail.

"The city is plagued with vacant buildings, substandard buildings, the whole nine yards," Building Inspector Ellis M. Gillum told the owner of 32 Cedar St., Ervin L. James. Gillum warned that if repairs were stalled on the building much longer, "You may not have a building" to repair.

Gillum said attempts to board up the structure, like scores of others in the city, are futile because vandals break through the barriers.

James was given 30 days to begin major repairs on the structure and was threatened with legal proceedings if he doesn't meet the deadline.

Gillum and his staff have prepared 11 cases for prosecution in Municipal Court next week, the first housing cases to go to court in about two years.

Officials promised Wednesday there would be more cases unless deadlines are met for repairs and demolitions.

In one case heard Wednesday, Gillum gave the owner of 216 Rutledge Ave. 30 days to have structures demolished and the lot cleared. Mrs. Gertrude Weintraub, mother of the owner, pleaded for 60 days to do the job, saying she has signed a contract

that gives a demolition crew two months.

Gillum said the owner had instructions from the city for fixing up the property since 1970. He promised that the city would demolish the buildings and place a lien on the property, plus summon the owner into court, unless the lot is cleared in 30 days.

"Thirty days is the max," Gillum said. "We can't let it go on any longer. Someone is going to get killed in that building."

When Mrs. Weintraub told Gillum she resented "the way you push people around," Gillum responded that the city has been "more than lenient."

In other cases:

— The 10 heirs of 15 Felix St. were given 30 days to repair their structure, which officials said has a roof about to collapse on an adjoining house. The city relocated tenants from the house, officials said.

— Frederick J. Cook was given 30 days to begin repairs at 46 Kennedy St., a dwelling that housing officials say may be beyond repair. Gillum said the owner had been under orders for 17 months to repair the building "and vir" — "no work has been done."

— Three owners of 127 Cannon St. were ordered to have that structure vacated and repaired in 60 days.

Housing Inspector Lawrence Urie said 10 people live on the third floor of the house. He said the floors in the bathrooms are collapsing and human waste flows from one floor to the other. The structure is "worse now than ever," Urie said, despite

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BAR Denies Request To Demolish 44 Pitt

By MARY A. GLASS
Staff Reporter

The Charleston Board of Architectural Review denied a request Wednesday to demolish a house at 44 Pitt St.

Building inspection officials last week halted demolition work on the house, which had been the subject of two prior discussions at BAR meetings. Contractors contended they had been given verbal approval to tear down the dwelling.

But James Smalls told Robert Seigel of Community Builders, Inc., that board members had listened to tape recordings of the previous BAR action and found that permission wasn't sought to tear down the whole building, nor was it granted.

Seigel and Ben Polis, of the same firm, were granted permission to tear down an addition to the structure in July. At an August meeting, they told the board of extensive termite damage they had found during the demolition.

They said they left that meeting with the understanding that due to the termite damage, the building could be demolished and replaced.

Seigel told the BAR the house lacked a foundation, and he said he was "very concerned" about the safety of the building next to 44 Pitt.

Julian V. Brandt III, acting chairman of the BAR, said the building inspector had informed the board the structure can be rebuilt.

Smalls recommended that the board deny the demolition application, and personally inspect the structure later.

The house is said to be more than 100 years old, and is rated "significant" in the city's historic preservation inventory. During a public hearing on the proposed demolition, however, there were no objections from preservation groups to the demolition.

Action was deferred on proposed demolition of 28 Anson St. because the applicant did not appear at the session. Officials said the proposal involves a request to build condominiums on the site.

In other action, the board gave preliminary approval to design of two structures the city Housing Authority wants to build at 143-147 Coming St.

The structures would have a total of four units and are part of a major building program the authority has entered. The new buildings would be located between Warren and Radcliffe streets, and would resemble typical Charleston singles houses.

The board also approved proposed renovations at 567 King St.

...Structure's Fate

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precise recollection of what happened during the board's August meeting.

At one point in the dispute, however, Steinert called the building inspector's office to confirm the contention of contractors Ben Polis and Robert A. Seigel that permission to demolish the building had been given.

Seigel and Polis, both of Community Builders, Inc., said Wednesday their original plans, which were approved in July by the BAR, called for demolition of an addition to the house and renovation of the original structure into a home which Polis plans to occupy.

Once demolition of the addition began, however, Seigel said a rear portion of the structure collapsed due to termite damage that had not been anticipated.

City building inspection officials, who received a complaint that the collapse actually was an illegal demolition, told the contractors to halt work at that point.

Seigel charged that Building Inspector Ellis M. Gillum refused to let the contractors shore up an exterior wall of the house which was about to collapse on an adjoining structure.

Gillum termed the statement a "misstatement," and said he directed the contractors to shore up the wall.

Meanwhile, the contractors were to appear at the August meeting of the BAR for final approval of what restoration of the original building the contractors initially intended.

Seigel said he and Polis went to the BAR meeting with fresh knowledge that the restoration was impossible, due to the termite damage they had discovered.

He said the board agreed that the termite damage was so extensive as to justify complete demolition of the building, which would be replaced

with a replica. But the building inspection officials later refused to issue a permit for the demolition, they said.

Zoning Administrator Paul Reavis said while the BAR agreed that termite-ridden sections of the house could be removed and replaced, the BAR had no notion that work would involve complete demolition of the house.

Seigel contends that any problems which exist in the BAR's instructions exist between the BAR and the Building Inspection Division, not between the BAR and the contractors. "Our hands are tied. They won't give us a permit" to finish demolition, Seigel said. "The building is shored but I don't know how long it will stay." Seigel said the building inspection division had displayed a lack of concern about the safety of an adjoining property owner's house, which he said at one point was threatened by a wall almost ready to collapse.

Gillum, however, said it was at his insistence that the wall was propped up. He said deterioration of the house at issue is typical of the decline of many Charleston homes which are left vacant and open to the elements.

Gillum said if he determines the building must be demolished, he will order it taken down. But he said it poses no apparent safety hazard at this point. He said he expects to make a recommendation to the BAR on what should be done with the structure's remains.

Steinert said the situation stemmed from a "minor communications breakdown", which has progressed into a major controversy. "It's got to be resolved," he said. Under normal circumstances, the BAR advertises proposed demolition requests and conducts public hearings on those requests.



Staff Photo by Bill Jordan

44 Pitt St.

44 Pitt Structure's Fate Sparks Squabble

By MARY A. GLASS
Staff Reporter

The fate of 44 Pitt St. remained up in the air Wednesday amid a dispute over whether or not demolition of the old house has been authorized.

The squabble, involving contractors and an array of city officials, is under review by the city's legal department.

The structure is more than 100 years old, carries a "significant" rating in the city's historic preservation inventory and is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Architectural Review.

Contractors contend they were given verbal approval by the BAR this month to tear the building down, but the city Building Inspection Division halted the demolition on the grounds that the BAR didn't give such permission.

BAR Chairman Charles Steinert said Wednesday he plans to listen to the BAR tapes, along with other BAR members this week, for a more

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