

CITY MANAGER'S COLUMN – November 2020

What you need to know about Housing Conditions in the City of Statesville

Have you ever driven by a house in the city and wondered why it hasn't been fixed up? You are not the only one; neighbors, your city planners and city council do too! This month, Statesville Planning Director Sherry Ashley is going to give you an overview of the recent housing conditions inventory that was conducted this summer to help us develop a strategy on how to improve housing. I appreciate her department's commitment to this issue and believe you will learn a lot from her article:

In April of this year, during the initial onset of COVID-19 (when we were finding ways to conduct business and help customers virtually), the Planning Department began conducting a housing conditions inventory for the City. Hence, you may have seen city employees out and about taking photos of houses.

Thanks to the assistance of the Recreation and Parks and Information Technology Departments, this study included 9,120 houses inside the city limits and was conducted over a 3-month time period from April through June of this year.

The results were presented to the Statesville City Council in August. Overall, 89.31% of the housing stock in Statesville is in good condition with no visible signs of violations or deterioration. However, 2.16% of the housing stock (which equates to approximately 197 houses) need some amount of repair to meet the city's minimum housing code. And of those, 38 homes are in such poor condition that they could be condemned and demolished. Recently, however, City Council decided to pursue the option of foreclosure over demolition for at least six of these properties so that new owners can improve the appearance, safety and stability of the neighborhood in which these houses are located.

The cost of taking a structure through the process of condemnation and demolition is usually about \$10,000 per house. In previous years, funding levels would allow 3-5 houses to be demolished annually. The cost of foreclosure would be significantly less provided the property sells at auction.

At least 50 or more of the remaining 159 structures that appear to have code violations are rental properties. Another suggestion offered by Council is for the Planning Department to notify the landlords of the violations and meet to strategize how the homes can be brought up to code. Council

instructed the Planning Department to make public the addresses of the homes in hopes that the property owners will correct the problems without an official violation notification.

The results of the housing conditions inventory and additional information can be found on the City's website at www.statesvillenc.net/housing.

The Planning Department will continue to receive direction from Council on a program to improve the housing conditions in Statesville. Even though 8,923 of the homes are suitable for occupancy, and more than 800 – 1,000 new homes are slated for construction over the next five years, it is important to improve the existing housing stock as quickly as possible because all of our citizens deserve a safe and fit place to live.

The Planning Department is concerned about what might happen to current occupants of these 197 homes, and we want to work with both landlords and homeowners to keep current residents from having to vacate their homes because they are not up to the minimum housing code. Therefore, we recommend contacting the Planning Department to find out how to improve properties determined to be in this 2.16%. The Planning Department's main number is 704-878-3574 or you may contact Christopher Hooper, Code Enforcement Inspector at 704-878-3560 or chooper@statesvillenc.net

Note: Since the results of the study were initially provided to City Council, 22 homes are being addressed either through foreclosure, condemnation, or are being repaired to meet code.

*The housing inventory was completed in house by using existing staff at a cost savings of tens of thousands of dollars and kept city employees from being furloughed during the COVID-19 pandemic.