



Media Advisory

December 5, 2018

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Blight Reduction Update: New Fellowship Baptist Church

ROCKFORD, Ill. – Yesterday, the City Legal Department began the demolition process for the property located at 804 2nd Ave. (New Fellowship Baptist Church) by posting a 30-day notice as required by Illinois statute. In addition to the posting, the City will be sending notices to New Fellowship Baptist Church via certified mail, publishing notice in the newspaper and recording notice against the property.

In recent weeks, City attorneys have been in contact with lawyers for New Fellowship regarding the status of the property and the progress of the church's lawsuit against its insurance company in federal court. City attorneys have also advised them of the City's actions. The City is in the process of scheduling a meeting with them to discuss the future of the site post-demolition. The City will take action after 30 days pass, provided that there is not a legal objection filed. If a legal objection is filed, the City will move to immediately bring the matter to a trial and seek a court order to complete the demolition activity.

Timeline leading up to this action:

- **August 10, 2017**—**The City was alerted to possible structural issues at the New Fellowship Baptist Church.** The Church was being inspected by a representative from New Fellowship's insurance company who noticed that the roof was in disrepair. The City's building inspection administrator responded to the property and determined that the roof was in disrepair.
- The following day, on **August 11, 2017**, inspection staff was permitted to enter the church and discovered significant cracks in the ceiling of the sanctuary indicating that the roof structure had failed. As a result of the inspection, the code official for the City determined that the property posed an imminent risk to the public and **the property was condemned by the City for structural failure.**

- Between August 11 and August 29, 2017, representatives from the City's Construction and Development Services Division stayed in touch with representatives from New Fellowship about the condition of the property and plans for repairs.
- **On August 29, 2017, the roof structure partially collapsed at the church.** The City's code official, building inspection administrator and an attorney for the City responded to the location and consulted with representatives from the church and from the insurance carrier for the church. Based on the condition of the property and the inability of the church to pay for an emergency demolition, the **City's code official ordered the partial demolition of the church structure as an emergency measure.**
- Following the partial demolition, the City turned the site over to New Fellowship with the understanding that the church and/or the insurance carrier were going to complete the demolition and clear the site in the immediate future.
- **On November 27, 2017, the insurance carrier, Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company, filed a suit in the U.S. District Court in Rockford claiming that they did not have to cover the collapse of the roof of the church.**
- In January 2018, following the church being served with the lawsuit and retaining an attorney, the City's Department of Law and representatives from the Construction and Development Services Division met with attorneys for New Fellowship.
- **Between January and June of 2018, the City remained in communication with attorneys for New Fellowship** about the status of the litigation, and ultimately, in July of 2018, asked for authorization to complete the demolition work.
- **With New Fellowship not taking action to clear the site,** and without a likely resolution in the litigation between New Fellowship and its insurance carrier, **the City instituted code hearing proceedings against New Fellowship on October 22, 2018.** No party appeared to represent New Fellowship, and a fine was entered in the amount of \$3,500 against New Fellowship.
- As a result of the condition of the site, the lack of progress in the clean-up of the site, and the site's status, the City initiated the demolition process yesterday.

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NOTE TO MEDIA – Legal Director Nick Meyer will be available at 4 p.m. on the 8th floor of City Hall for interviews on this topic. Please let me know if you plan to attend.