

# MANCHESTER DAILY EXPRESS

FRIDAY, JAN. 12, 2007 • WWW.MANCHEXPRESS.COM ► TODAY'S NEWS IN 20 MINUTES ► GOING TO THE GUN SHOW THIS WEEKEND?

## Manchester and the 'broken window' theory

By Will Stewart  
*Guest Columnist*

It starts with trash on the sidewalk. Before you know it, there's an old couch and a set of box springs out there too. Then graffiti starts to pop up. After that, petty crime becomes a problem. More serious crimes follow. Before long, residents who can begin to flee the neighborhood.

Vacancy rates go up as landlords have trouble finding good tenants. Careless landlords end up renting to just anybody to fill their units. Property values decrease and residents begin to feel unsafe.

So begins neighborhood decay.

Known popularly as the Broken Window Theory, this scenario is beginning to play out, yet again, in a number of pockets across Manchester. The result is the decline of some neighborhoods and a threat to many others.

To stop this creeping urban blight be-

fore it spreads even further, the Community Services Committee of NeighborWorks Greater Manchester recently proposed four ordinance changes aimed at giving city government more tools with which to pursue problem landlords and other negligent property owners.



Last Tuesday night, the Board of Mayor and Alderman's Committee on Administration and Information Services discussed our suggestions, ultimately adopting one of them, namely raising fines for a number of housing- and trash-related violations. This is a positive first step, but it does not go far

enough.

As was brought out in committee discussion Tuesday night, the neighborhood decay problems faced by various sections of the city are systemic. They will not be solved by simply upping fines, or even hiring a new compliance officer. Alderman Mike Lopez was absolutely correct when he stated the obvious: "the system isn't working."

Ward 10 Alderman George Smith was also correct when he stated that as aldermen, with whom the proverbial buck stops, "we have to do something."

I am hopeful that the remainder of the Board and Mayor and Aldermen, as well as the departments involved, will heed Alderman Smith's advice when they discuss this issue during their Jan. 16 meeting.

The issue of problem landlords and negligent property owners is hardly confined to any one part of the city. Indeed, there are pockets of decay across the city. Some parts are less affected than others today, it's true, but like a cancer, blight and decay have a tendency to spread. Tomorrow they might be in my neighborhood, or yours.

It's all connected. When one part of the city suffers, we all suffer. And if we don't nip the problem in the bud now, it's just going to get worse for everyone.

*Will Stewart is the Community Services Specialist at NeighborWorks Greater Manchester and serves as staff liaison to the Community Services Committee.*