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ROSELAND, PULLMAN

Roseland Neighbors Complained About A Problem Building For Years. The City Only Tore It Down After A Man Was Fatally Shot

The house had numerous safety issues, attracted squatters and was an eyesore for neighbors. They complained for years, but it wasn't until this week that the city tore down the building.



By Maia McDonald March 30, 2022



Crews demolish an abandoned Roseland home on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago

ROSELAND — A vacant and collapsing Roseland house dubbed a dangerous eyesore by neighbors was demolished Monday, about a week after a 62-year-old man was killed there.

Neighbors watched from the sidewalk and celebrated Monday while crews tore down the house at 160 E. 111th St. They appealed to the city for years to do something about the house.

There have been multiple fires at the property, leaving it with holes, open windows, an open roof and other damage, neighbors said. Its sewer line was missing its lid. The city noted numerous violations during inspections and had an order to demolish the house. People would regularly hang around the house and in the backyard, with some apparently squatting at the property, neighbors said.

Despite those issues — and many attempts from neighbors to get the city to intervene — the city didn't tear down the house until after a Block Club reporter asked about the property and a man was killed there.



A balloon on the porch of 160 E. 111th Street, on March 23, 2022, where a community member was shot and killed days before. Credit: Arlene Echols

Brothers David and Tony Flowers have lived in the two-flat next door for 38 years. The two shared wine with Pullman resident Arlene Echols and her partner, Roderick Lewis, as they watched the demolition Monday.

Echols is a member of St. George and St. Matthias Episcopal Church. She and other members of the church — whose yard neighbored the vacant house — said it had been months since they'd heard anything from the city and Ald. Anthony Beale's (9th) office about the house.

"It's been a long time coming," Tony Flowers said. "I'm happy about it, and it'll make the community look a lot cleaner and a lot stronger. We won't have people lingering and just sitting out for no reason at all. And there's a lot of negativity which took place, which is why it's coming down now."

While neighbors said they're glad the house is finally coming down, they're sad it didn't happen until a man was killed.

The fatal shooting happened about 5:15 p.m. March 20, police said. The man had been sitting on the porch of the house, eating, when someone shot him, neighbors said. Neighbors also said the shooting started as an argument with someone walking past the house.

The man died at Advocate Christ Medical Center, police said. Detectives are investigating, and no one has been arrested.

"We're kind of sorry that it took someone getting killed off to have to them come and take this down," David Flowers said. "Only one week has passed since it happened over here."

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Crews demolish an abandoned house at 160 E. 111th Street where a community member was shot and killed the week before, on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago





Crews demolish an abandoned house at 160 E. 111th Street where a community member was shot and killed the week before, on March 28, 2022.



Roderick Lewis (left), David Flowers (middle) and Arlene Echols (right) talk while watching the demolition of the house at 160 E. 111th Street on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago

Years Of Neighbors' Complaints

The church's members have reported the building to the city in the past, but they began seriously working to have it removed last year.

Bill Taylor, the church's junior warden, emailed the 9th Ward office in March 2021 with photos of the building to see if Beale could intervene. Beale said the photos would be sent to the Chicago Department of Buildings, which oversees permitting, inspections and code enforcement for buildings. Taylor never received a follow-up from Beale or the city.

Echols got more involved when she started gardening in the church's side yard. She found piles of debris that had fallen from the property next door. Other material from the vacant house — including pieces of its roof, broken glass, wooden support beams and trash — also fell into the yard, which the church uses for outdoor services and events.

Echols noticed in November the house's backyard sewer line was missing its lid, and its garage collapsed after a heavy storm one winter, she said.

"This is the only abandoned house" on the block, Echols said. "And when I say abandoned, I don't want people to think that it's just empty. It is dilapidated and seems to be collapsing."



Pieces of the house at 160 E. 111th St. in the side yard of St. George and St. Matthias Episcopal Church in Roseland on March 22, 2022. Credit: Arlene Echols

Echols wrote to Mayor Lori Lightfoot's office in April 2021 but only received an auto-reply. Echols and Taylor also tried to determine the owner of the house through online records.

Neighbors think the house belonged to a man who left the property to his family when he died, but they could not locate the owners.

Block Club attempted to reach the family, but they did not respond to requests for

comment.

The Cook County Treasurer's Office's website shows property taxes for the house were last paid in 2016. More than \$10,000 in property taxes were owed on the house by the time it was demolished.

Building inspection records show 77 violations reported at the house between 2005 and 2018 for electric, plumbing and other problems at the house.

Documents from the Cook County Recorder of Deeds' Office show courts authorized the city to demolish the house in November 2018. The documents called the building "dangerous, unsafe and beyond responsible repair" for a litany of issues: Its electrical system was exposed, its floor was missing in sections, its plumbing had been stripped and was inoperable, its roof was damaged and its stairs were partially collapsed, among other problems.

A demolition order was also issued by the Department of Buildings for the property's garage in 2017 for posing a "public safety threat" and "presenting an actual and imminent danger to the public."



Fire damage at the house at 160 E. 111th St. before it's demolition on March 28, 2022. Credit: City of Chicago Vacant Buildings



The roof of the house at 160 E. 111th St. before its demolition on March 28, 2022. Credit: City of Chicago Vacant Buildings





The roof of the house at 160 E. 111th St. before its demolition on March 28, 2022. Credit: City of Chicago Vacant Buildings

Echols also submitted vacant building complaints through 311 in 2018. Subsequent inspections said there were “no alleged code violations” for the property despite online records showing dozens of past code violations for failed inspections.

Echols and other community members said they felt the city didn’t care about the problems. They weren’t sure what to do next.

After the March 20 shooting, Taylor went to the local police station to register a complaint about the home, and he was told an officer would call him, he said.

“When I went by [the day after the shooting], there were a couple of individuals walking through the yard ...,” Taylor said. “The fact that the incident happened wasn’t a big deterrent to everybody.”

Why the building wasn’t torn down more than three more years after the city served the owner with a demolition order isn’t clear.

Crew members tearing down the building on Monday said an “emergency demolition” for the house was ordered March 25, after Block Club reached out to the city about the house.

A spokesperson from the city’s department of buildings did not respond to questions about why the building wasn’t torn down earlier.

Beale said neighbors did exactly what he recommends to get vacant and abandoned buildings addressed by the city: send information to the alderman’s office and contact 311.

‘This Block Can Work On Healing’

Beale said the house was one of many “problem buildings” in Roseland that need to be addressed. The ward can’t act independently to get abandoned properties demolished, so it’s up to the city’s buildings department to issue and carry out demolition orders, he said.

“The thing is that the people are doing what they’re supposed to do,” Beale said. “They either call 311, or they call the automated office, and we get it in the system, we call, and we put it in a system. We have it inspected, and we get it in the court. We go through the process that the city has laid out for us to take.



The collapsed garage at 160 E. 111th Street a week before its demolition on March 28, 2022. Credit: Arlene Echols

“But when you get an order from a judge to tear a piece of property down, and it takes years to tear down, it should not take somebody getting shot before you say, ‘Oh, let’s tear this building down.’”

Beale said addressing vacant and abandoned buildings has become increasingly difficult during his time as alderman, and demolition orders should not take more than 60 days to carry out.

Property owners also bear some of the responsibility, Beale said.

“These people don’t maintain them. They don’t board them up,” Beale said. “With the amount of properties that we have on the South Side, it is a challenge keeping up with them. But it’s up to the owners, it’s up to the financial institutions, to do the right thing, maintain these properties, keep them boarded up, keep them secure.”



A demolition order on the garage of 160 E. 111th Street from July 20, 2017. Credit: City of Chicago Vacant Buildings

the right thing, maintain these properties, keep them boarded up, keep them secure.

Now that the building is gone, community members said they feel their block can move forward and convert the land into something positive.

David Flowers said he wants the city to remove abandoned cars on the property. He also would like to buy the lot and fix it up, building a garage and flower beds in honor of his mother.

“My mother always had flower beds, and I promised her that I would put a flower bed in front before she passed, and so that will be done,” David Flowers said. “I’ve been here forever. ... Who better to take it over than me and my brother? We’ve been taking care of this lot forever.”

Echols said she’s also interested in continuing to care for the property and plans to contact the city about her church acquiring the property to expand its yard.

Beale said the owner of the property is still in charge of the maintenance of the lot even though the building has been torn down. If the owner gives up the property or if it’s acquired by the city, it could potentially go to a scavenger tax sale.

For now, the Flowers brothers and Echols said a big weight has been lifted.

“It feels like this block can work on healing,” Echols said. “Before we were always battling the blight of the building, and now we can work on improving.”



The house at 160 E. 111th St. in Roseland before it's demolition on March 28, 2022. Credit: City of Chicago Vacant Buildings



An excavator moves pieces of an abandoned Roseland house at 160 E. 111th Street on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago



A crew demolishes an abandoned Roseland house at 160 E. 111th Street on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago



Roseland resident David Flowers (left) with his brother Tony Flowers (right) on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago



Pullman resident Arlene Echols on 111th and Indiana on March 28, 2022. Credit: Maia McDonald/Block Club Chicago

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