

Brighton-Pittsford Post – “From the Supervisor” column – March 19, 2015 issue
Submitted by Pittsford Town Supervisor Bill Smith

A Year’s Progress on Derelict Properties

Recent news reports have discussed the problem of derelict properties around Monroe County. These are houses, vacant and typically in foreclosure, that have deteriorated visibly, blighting the immediate neighborhood and virtually inviting crime.

Over a year ago Pittsford began to address this problem with determination. At the Town Board meeting on February 4 of last year, I asked the Town Attorney to begin work on changing local law to give the Town greater authority to act.

Subsequently we held a well-attended public forum on the subject last April 1 where we learned much. The next day I inspected personally every property identified as a problem by residents at the previous night’s meeting, accompanied by the Town Engineer, our Compliance Officer and Councilman Matt O’Connor.

This close-up look at the problem gave us first-hand knowledge and experience to change Town laws, to allow us scope to take a more aggressive approach. Councilwoman Mary Doyle led the project that drafted new provisions of the Town Code. A principal goal was to permit the Town to act when the appearance of a property begins to show signs of being abandoned, rather than having to wait until the building’s condition poses an actual risk to public health or safety.

At our meeting last July 15, the Town Board and I voted unanimously to approve Local Law No. 7 of 2014. This added to the Town Code a new Chapter 66, “Buildings and Property Maintenance.”

If a bank holding the mortgage on a property or its property-management company doesn’t maintain a property, the Town can order specific work to be done. If ignored, the Town can perform the work or have it performed. The cost is added to the tax bill on the house – which is paid first when the house ultimately is sold in foreclosure. We’ve learned that out-of-state headquarters of some banks will return messages promptly, when the message refers to a demolition order.

Results are now visible around the Town. As we approach the first anniversary of our initial public forum, the most important and gratifying status report is comprised of calls and messages from neighbors expressing satisfaction with the results achieved.

The work continues. As properties move off the list of derelicts, others join it. Your Town government will address them with the same determination that’s motivated us over the past year.

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