

History of abandoned home gets longer and sadder

By JACKIE KLEIN

The windows of the tumbledown, vacant house on Seminole in Southfield are boarded shut. But the doors have been broken open and the structure is unsafe.

Inside the dilapidated home, it is filthy. The furniture has been exposed to freezing and thawing and some has been discarded in the weed-choked backyard.

Sometimes the wheels of city administration grind exceedingly slow. In 1971, Kenneth Siler, owner of the ramshackle dwelling, was asked to clean up the mess and make the property safe.

Clayton Diebel, director of Southfield Department of Building and Safety Engineering, seven years ago recommended that city council authorize barricading of the house and removing of debris until Siler could take care of it himself. Otherwise, he suggested, the house should be razed. Southfield City Council met Jan. 23.

City Attorney Sigmund Beras told members they were to discuss the continuation of condemnation proceedings against Siler's premises. Proceedings began according to building regulations in the Southfield city code.

IT HAD been called to the attention of the building department, after an investigation, that the structure was unsafe, Beras said. In the meantime, Siler has been left with an abandoned shell, a blight in the John Grace area neighborhood, and a potential hangout for youths.

A hearing officer confirmed the findings of the building department. City Council Jan. 23 set a hearing to show cause why the findings shouldn't be confirmed. That's part of the long, legal process of condemnation. Siler received a notice of the hearing from the city clerk by registered mail. To make it more binding, Beras personally forwarded to the homeowner a notice by certified mail. But Siler

failed to show up Jan. 23.

Instead, the owner of the deteriorating home sent a letter to council, asking for time until April to correct the many problems on his property. But officials noted that Siler had made similar promises to council and never complied.

Beras pointed out that nothing more than what the hearing officer recommended was being asked of Siler. And that was to barricade the premises and clean up the debris. The same recommendation was made in 1971.

If council approved the hearing officer's finding, Siler could within 20 days appeal to Oakland County Circuit Court to change the order. That's another part of the legal system.

THE COST of the recommended action would become a lien against the property, Beras said. Expenses would include material and labor.

"I did live in this house for some years, and this house did have sewer and water in it," Siler wrote. "When I came to Florida for the winter, this

house did have sewer and water in it and was in good condition.

"I did put plywood over the windows. However, if this house does need water and sewer or repairs, I will do it as soon as the weather there breaks and my health is better. I am sick at this time and under the doctor's care. However, by April 1978 or before, I will be able to take care of this matter."

"If for some reason I could not take care of this house on Seminole by April, I will have whatever is needed done to make it safe by a builder. I don't live in this home myself. I plan to rent it to a responsible man who will keep it cleaned up. If the city will give me a permit, I will build three more homes on my lots."

City council received another letter, this one from homeowners in the neighborhood. They asked for positive action to remedy the "unsafe, unhealthy and unsightly" conditions at Siler's unoccupied residence.

"OUR NEIGHBORHOOD has been

afflicted with the oppressive situation for years and your assistance in resolving the dilemma would be greatly appreciated by the entire community," the communication said.

City records showed that the hearing officer in October 1977 recommended that the Seminole house be barricaded until it's made habitable or removed. The officer also ordered the weeds and

debris cleared from the property and for all this to be completed by Nov. 15, 1977. This was never done.

Southfield City Council affirmed the decision of the hearings officer that the building be barricaded and cleaned. But that was suggested in 1971, and the abandoned shell is still a blemish on the neighborhood landscape.

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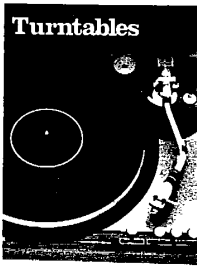
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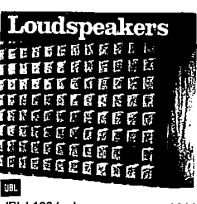
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