



TIM VIZER/News-Democrat

William Gorsich says his home passed a city inspection last fall. This year, the city wants it condemned.

## CITY PUSHES HOMEOWNER

By LISA P. WHITE  
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — William Gorsich may have saved his house from the wrecking ball by continuing to work on it despite the city's order to have it condemned.

Last fall, the city said the 82-year-old, three-bedroom house on Granvue Drive needed a lot of repairs, but was basically sound. By April, the city wanted to tear it down.

Gorsich, who has worked intermittently on the house with his sons since he bought it in 2002, wonders why the city deemed the house sound in September and fit only for razing this spring.

"Looking at the place now and even looking at their own paperwork — and that's what I'm going on — how can they say the place is so dilapidated and run down?" said Gorsich, 45, as he sat on a sofa in the cluttered living room. "There's never been an issue with the structural part of this."

The petition for demolition the city filed in St. Clair County Circuit Court in April de-

scribes the house as "structurally unsafe, damaged and dilapidated."

It further alleges "... the commissioner of buildings has determined the building to be deteriorated and so weakened that it is dangerous and was declared to be a public nuisance beyond reasonable repair."

According to housing department records, Building and Zoning Commissioner Paul Bauman made a markedly different assessment of the house last September.

City inspectors cited Gorsich for multiple building code violations, including missing roof brackets, rotten window sashes, and broken plaster. But Bauman concluded, "the house overall is in good structural condition, but numerous violations need repair or replaced."

When asked about the quick turnaround on the city's part, Mike Eckert, the city's director of sanitation, housing and health, said Gorsich had done a "considerable amount of work in the last few weeks" since the city filed the demolition petition.

"It wasn't a lie that we said

that stuff was structurally deteriorating," Eckert said. "We're not lying, it's just that there is a time span in there, (and since) the time we stated it was in falling-down condition, he's done a lot of work."

Eckert said the city filed the demolition petition to push Gorsich into completing the work on the house. While Gorsich received tickets for trash in his yard, Eckert said the housing department never ticketed or fined him for failing to bring the house up to code.

"We probably could have, but we know he's probably on limited dollars and we'd rather see him put the dollars into the house. We could write a lot of tickets but that doesn't get the job done," he said.

Gorsich hired Belleville attorney Edward Blake, who filed a response on June 2 asking the court to dismiss the petition.

Assistant City Attorney Mike Flynn, who filed the petition, did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Law professor Celeste Hammond, director of the Center for Real Estate Law at John Marshall Law School in Chica-

go, said the city is legally responsible for regulating the health and safety of residential property.

"This is legitimate, this is not the same as eminent domain," she said of the dispute between Gorsich and the city. "The fact that (Gorsich) retained an attorney and now will have a right to have a hearing, which is the essential thing in our property system, is good. It's a balance between the rights of the homeowner and the rights of society.... That's how we look at it legally."

Eckert said the city has agreed to let Gorsich set a timetable for completing the work and will drop the demolition petition if the house passes the occupancy permit inspection.

Gorsich, though, is still upset.

"They won't give me a reason for starting this other than it's taking me too long, which by no means justifies what they've done," he said.

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