

Parish council toughens nuisance ordinance

BY WILLIAM JOHNSON • WJOHNSON@DAILYWORLD.COM • AUGUST 22, 2008

By a vote of 11 to two, the St. Landry Parish Council on Wednesday approved a new nuisance ordinance giving the parish more power to clean up blighted property.

District 9 Councilman Glenn Stout, who joined District 11 Councilman Jay Guidry in the 'no' column, said he didn't have a serious problem with the ordinance.

"I just felt like we needed to look at this a little bit more," Stout said. "This is going to affect a lot of people. I wanted to make sure we are doing the right thing."

On the other hand, Vincent Malbreaux, who operates what he describes as a "hobby" auto repair business near Lawtell, had a lot of problems with the ordinance.

"I should be able to do what I want with my property. I won't be pushed around," Malbreaux told the council. "I don't get scared easy and if I feel I'm right, I'm going to fight you."

Malbreaux was objecting to a provision in the ordinance that declares junked or abandoned vehicles a public nuisance.

The new law, which takes effect in 30 days, allows the parish to haul such vehicles away. The law requires the parish to first give the vehicle's owner 15-days notice. If the owner doesn't act, he faces a \$100 fine as well as the cost of removing the car.

Malbreaux has about a dozen cars in various stages of repair on his property at the moment.

Parish President Don Menard said all Malbreaux has to do is pay \$35 for an occupational license and erect an 8-foot privacy fence to meet the new standards.

Despite the complaints, Menard argued the new ordinance is just an update to existing ordinances designed to bring the parish in line with state laws.

The nuisance ordinance also makes it illegal for landowners in a residential area to allow their grass to grow to a height of more than 12 inches or to allow their lot to "become a haven for rodents, other dangerous animals or reptiles."

For properties outside of subdivisions or neighborhoods, the grass can't be higher than 24 inches. The ordinance does not apply to agricultural land, forests or woodlands.

Violators will be given 10 days to correct the problem for a first offense and five days for all subsequent offenses. If the problem is not corrected, the ordinance gives the parish the power to clean up the property and bill the owner for the work.

Also covered by the ordinance are dilapidated or dangerous buildings. After being notified that their building is considered dilapidated, the owner will be given a hearing before the parish council.

Should the council find against the owner, parish crews can demolish the building after a further 10-day delay unless the owner appeals the council's decision.

If the parish demolishes the building, the cost of the demolition will be billed to the owner.

Jessie Bellard, the parish administrative assistant, said there is no reason to fear the new ordinance. He said the parish attempts to work with a property owner to make the clean-up process as painless as possible.

"If you need more time, you can call our office. We usually give people the time they need. We can reach a peaceful solution," Bellard said.