



Housing reform: Alton's new director discusses much needed action in the city

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – The City of Alton recently bolstered its housing and coding enforcement through the hiring of former Alton Police Detective Gary Cranmer.

His appointment as Director of Housing and Coding Enforcement during the Sept. 12 Alton City Council meeting was a sign the city is serious about holding both problematic tenants and landlords accountable for the conditions of their properties. Cranmer took the position earlier this month, starting operations on Sept. 4. Since then, Cranmer and his team have visited 12-15 properties a day, every day, which has resulted in two people being charged with trespassing and drug-related issues. Those arrests come directly as a result of eight properties being condemned since the beginning of the month.

“There are all sorts of problems in some of these properties,” Cranmer said. “There are roaches, bedbugs and scabies. They have exposed wiring and holes on the floor where children are playing. They are living in deplorable conditions, and the landlords are not taking care of it.”

Once declared “condemned,” former tenants are not allowed to return to their former homes. Cranmer said the lack of proper safety in these properties requires them to not come back. The two arrested for trespassing were charged for returning to a condemned residence.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker, himself a landlord in Alton for the better part of two decades, described housing reform in the city as a sort of “final frontier” for Alton's continuing growth. He said landlords are not regulated like traditional businesses, despite landlords being a major economic force in the city.

“I'm just guessing, but I personally think as many as 40-50 percent of homes in Alton are rentals,” he said. “A lot of them run unchecked, which is why I'm guessing, we just don't know. We are in the process now of going through what we do have – not just for the quality of life for the tenants, but also to let people who are buying homes in Alton know their investment will be protected. No one wants to lose the equity in their homes or see property values fall.”

Cranmer said he believes a “small minority” of landlords are contributing to a problem the mayor described as one of the last big hurdles Alton has to face to take the city to the next level. Cranmer believed 450-500 landlords operate within Alton, and of them 300 have complied thus far.

“Even the people we cite say this is a good idea,” Cranmer said. “They even said they like seeing what the city is doing with this issue.”

Outside of the two arrests, Cranmer said the department has issued a “myriad of tickets,” adding they are “aggressively enforcing” the Illinois Litter Control Act, which Walker said is targeting such eyesores as heaps of garbage and derelict cars.

