

Abandoned condos magnet for crime, residents say



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HOUSTON (KTRK) -- A group of northwest Houston residents are fighting to make their neighborhood safer, saying an abandoned condominium complex has become a magnet for crime, drug dealers and squatters. They've been asking the city to do something about it for years. The fight centers around what was once the Candlelight Trails condominiums on DeSoto near Antoine.

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For four years Christine Williams has stared at the same mess, frustrated that after all her complaints, Candlelight Trails still remains.

"It's just an eyesore. It's horrible to look at this every day," she said. "I'm to the point that I really want to move because I'm sick of looking at it."

In 2007, the city ordered the condos vacated because of their dangerous condition. But since then the complex has only fallen into deeper disrepair. Nearby residents have petitioned the city to tear down the structure, but so far it still stands.

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Wayne Norden with the Near Northwest Management District said, "We're really doing our part. It's now time for the city to step forward and do what they said they were going to do two years ago."

City attorney David Feldman says the problem is being handled. In 2009, the city sued the 130 owners of the condos to seek power to demolish. The problem he says is that the number of defendants is so large.

"There are so many stakeholders, in other words, so many owners, that are entitled to be served the process and answer," Feldman explained.

The cost of the demolition is also a factor -- upwards of half a million dollars. Feldman says the city wouldn't want to proceed without making sure a judge backs the demolition. For nearby residents, however, time is up, calling on City Council to take a stand.

"This isn't just me. It's not two or three other individuals," Norden said. "This is the entire community."

Residents say occupancy rates have been affected at nearby apartment complexes. Organizers plan to transport about 50 area residents to City Council Tuesday to present their argument.

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