

# The Vindicator

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## RIGHTING CITY BLIGHT



The Vindicator/Robert K. Yosay

**STANDING UP TO BLIGHT:** James London, president of the Idora Neighborhood Association, stands in front of a vacant and haphazard property owned by Mack Properties. The complex on Parkview Avenue on the city's South Side is stamped with a warning sign from the Ohio Department of Health deeming it unsafe for occupation. This property is included on a list created by the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative and other community organizations as a potential for demolition.

### Cleanup collaborative enlists cooperation from landlord

*MVOC and block watch groups met with a landlord in their attempt to eliminate blight in some Youngstown neighborhoods.*

By **KATIE SEMINARA**  
VINDICATOR STAFF WRITER

**INSIDE**  
Detective Patrick Marsico of the Warren police is trying to reduce that city's high number of condemned homes. **B1**

**YOUNGSTOWN** — Broken windows and doors, rusted propane tanks and stacks of tires and garbage on vacant properties are all-too-common sights in some Youngstown neighborhoods.

With so many houses unfit for occupation, crime transpires. The Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative, whose focus is to clean up neighborhoods in Youngstown and Warren with the help of other community organizations, recently set sights on battling the plagues in certain areas, taking aim at some problem landlords.

Officials from the U.S. Census Bureau estimate Youngstown has about 8,400 vacant housing units. Engaging landlords in neighborhood cleanups is in its infancy. Mack Properties is one on a list of other local landlords and was put on top because of the number of properties in need of demolition.

It was a show of "good faith" that Mark King, owner of Mack Properties, attended a recent meeting arranged by MVOC, said Christine Silvestri of the Boulevard Park

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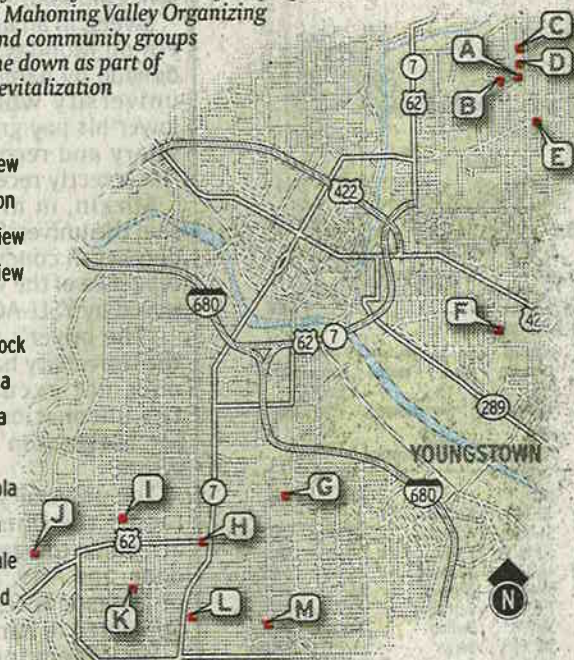
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### MACK PROPERTIES

#### Vacant and abandoned properties on the demo list

The following are locations owned by Mack Properties that have been processed for demolition by the city. These are 13 of 29 properties proposed by the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative and community groups that should come down as part of neighborhood revitalization efforts.

- A: 1514 Forrest View
- B: 1535 Bennington
- C: 1406 Forrest View
- D: 1445 Forrest View
- E: 1112 Stiles
- F: 1578 Council Rock
- G: 413 E. Pasadena
- H: 50 W. Indianola
- I: 481 Laclede
- J: 908 W. Indianola
- K: 437 W. Boston
- L: 21 E. Auburndale
- M: 275 Ravenwood



Source: Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative, Youngstown Demolition Department

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## BLIGHT

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Block Watch and the 7th Ward Citizens Coalition.

The meeting was the second chance for King to sign an agreement prepared by MVOC and other community groups concerning those properties vacant or in disrepair. At a private meeting Monday, King signed the agreement on grounds that some clauses were altered, according to MVOC.

"For us to get a community agreement signed was a big accomplishment," said Silvestri.

"It's like baby steps, but it's more than what we had," she said.

King has been a landlord in Youngstown for 20 years and owns more than 250 properties in the city.

King, per the agreement, agreed to demolish four properties in town within one month and also that he will meet monthly with MVOC and community group leaders for the next three months and then quarterly thereafter.

The group first met to discuss King's properties Nov. 20. King did not attend.

At that meeting, residents who live near dilapidated properties

owned by King discussed their concerns, and a slide show detailed some properties on a list of 29 that should be torn down — a recommendation supported by MVOC and community groups.

"We have to hold these landlords accountable," James London, president of the Idora Neighborhood Association, has said.

London said the agreement with King gave him a "positive outlook."

"We're communicating," said London, who hopes one of the four properties to come down is a property on Parkview Avenue in his neighborhood.

"[King] said he would demo four and it took us a long time to get to that," said London, referring to the changes in the agreement.

Originally the goal was to get King's consent to pay for demolition of the 29 vacant and abandoned properties. Of the recommended properties to be demolished, 13 have been processed for demolition by the city.

"Being processed does not necessarily mean they will be demolished — just that the owner was notified to repair or raze," said Jean Schaefer, rehab assistant for the city's demolition department.

The city has cut back on the number of demos in the past year

to about 215 structures, whereas in 2006 and 2007 Youngstown demolished a total of about 1,100 properties.

Next year, Youngstown is slated to receive \$2.7 million to use as part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A portion of that money will go toward demolition and should bring the numbers back up, said Sean McKinney, commissioner of building and grounds for the demolition department.

Of the 250 properties he owns, King said at most 10 percent are in disrepair and that's due to crime and vandalism.

"The biggest thing that has beat up my property is crime," said King.

"I know as a property owner it's my responsibility to clean it up, but it's hard to battle thieves," he said of the reason so many properties have fallen below livable standards.

It's a cycle of a property becoming vacant, then getting stripped of copper pipes, water heaters, front doors and siding, therefore leaving it not suitable to rent, said King.

"I'm fully in favor of neighborhood watch groups because they help stunt the growth of crime,"

he said.

The community watch groups don't deny crime plays a role in creating substandard housing, as well as problem tenants, but they want King to be serious about the terms of the agreement.

"We our one community, one unit, and we mean this. He needs to be committed," said Silvestri.

"These are real basic things I do in the first place," said King of some of the agreement's conditions.

Paying for his own demolitions, tenant screenings and evicting problem tenants are standards for Mack Properties, he said, noting that he evicts six to 10 tenants a month.

"Maybe [Mack Properties'] screening process needs to be better," said London.

"You can't take care of what you have, so why are you still buying properties?" said Silvestri.

King most recently bought a property on Florida Street on Dec. 5, according to records at the Mahoning County auditor's Web site.

He said he buys new properties in better areas to offset or replace rundown properties.

"Why not sell the properties recently bought and use the money to demo the bad ones," suggested London of how King can eliminate more than four problem lots.

### MOVING AHEAD | In agreement

Mark R. King, owner of Mack Properties, which owns about 250 rental properties in the city, has agreed to the following:

**Attend a landlord training course.**

**Screen tenants** thoroughly by requiring full employment history, criminal background check, rental history, references and full identification.

**Provide all** tenants with a Tenant's Bill of Rights.

**Demolish four** of the worst properties within one month with the understanding that a financial plan to tear down and rehab all 35 of its properties will be developed within three months.

**A payment plan** for all properties previously torn down by the city will be included in the financial plan.

**Register all** rental properties within the city as required by the landlord registration ordinance.

**A plan to bring all structures in compli-**

**ance with city codes** will be included in the financial plan to be developed in three months.

**Evict problem tenants**, engaged in illegal criminal activity, in a timely manner consistent with renter's rights.

**Before purchasing** any additional properties, contact the local neighborhood association or block watch to notify the group of intent to purchase a property within their neighborhood.

**Meet with a group of community leaders**, convened by the Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative, on a monthly basis for the first three months and then a quarterly basis to review the progress made on items listed in this agreement and to discuss any new issues with properties.

Source: Mahoning Valley Organizing Collaborative