

THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE  
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

# RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 55

Approved January 21, 1985

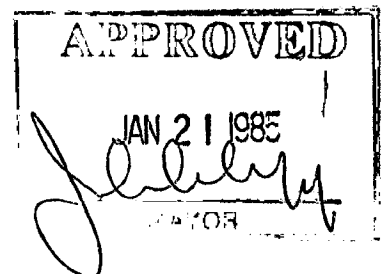
RESOLVED, That the Director of Inspection and Standards is hereby authorized to waive the Demolition Lien on that property located at 64-66 Wood Street, Lot 45, as set out and delineated on City Assessor's Plat 36, in the amount of One Thousand Six Hundred and Seventy (\$1,670.00) Dollars, pending certification from the Director that the property meets minimum standards in that it is cleaned and appropriately surfaced for its intended use.

IN CITY COUNCIL

JAN 17 1985

READ AND PASSED

*[Signature]*  
*Rose M. Mendonca* CLK



THE COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE

Approves Passage of  
The Within Resolution

*Robert M. Manduca*  
Chairman

*January 7, 1985*

96  
21

CITY OF PROVIDENCE  
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

PETITION TO THE CITY COUNCIL

TO THE HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE:

The undersigned respectfully petitions your Honorable body  
as follows:

I am the attorney for LAURA BOYD, the owner of the real estate located at 68 Wood Street, in the City of Providence, Assessors Plat 36, Lot 45.


The real estate located next to this property and designated as 64-66 Wood Street, Assessors Plat 36, Lot 44 is vacant, unimproved and currently in arrears in back taxes in the sum of \$933.66. The petitioner is desirous of obtaining an assignment of tax title to this property by paying back taxes. Attached hereto and made a part hereof is a copy of a letter from the City Treasurer regarding this matter.

Your petitioner intends to improve this currently vacant land by landscaping and other improvements. It will be utilized in conjunction with her presently owned property which she has recently purchased and which is being renovated.

The parcel of vacant land in question has a demolition lien on it for approximately \$1,670.00 as stated by the building inspector's office. Your petitioner is seeking a waiver of this lien. The cost of back taxes in addition to the lien would make acquisition cost of the property prohibitive.

In the interest of beautifying the neighborhood and in conjunction with the revitalization of this section of the city, it is respectfully submitted that this lien be waived to permit the petitioner to invest in improving this lot.

Respectfully submitted,  
LAURA BOYD,  
By her attorney,

  
MICHAEL FITZPATRICK ESQ.  
116 Orange St. Providence, RI  
751-6900

FILED

SEP 4 11 09 AM '84  
DEPT. OF CITY CLERK  
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

IN CITY COUNCIL  
SEP 20 1984  
FIRST READING  
REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
Rose M. Mendon - CLERK

THE COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE  
Recommends Be Continued  
Rose M. Mendon  
Clerk  
Oct 15, 1984

From the Clerk's Desk

STEPHEN T. NAPOLITANO  
CITY TREASURER



JOSEPH R. PAOLINO, JR.  
MAYOR

CITY TREASURER  
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903

August 15, 1984

Michael Fitzpatrick, Esq.  
116 Orange Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: LAURA BOYD  
ASSESSOR'S PLAT 36 LOT 44  
ASSIGNMENT OF TAX TITLE

Dear Mr. Fitzpatrick:

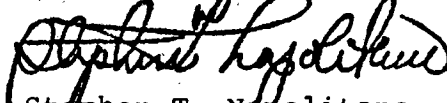
Please be advised that this office is now ready to issue an Assignment of Tax Title for the above described property.

The Assignment of Tax Title will be available for purchase on Friday, August 17, 1984.

The total amount of back taxes, including current-year taxes, must be paid in full at the Tax Collector's Office, located on the second floor in City Hall.

Upon receipt of payment to the Tax Collector's Office, an Assignment of Tax Title will be issued by this office.

Very truly yours,

  
Stephen T. Napolitano  
City Treasurer

rgc

City of Providence



Rhode Island

Department of City Clerk

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: September 25, 1984

TO: Merlin A. DeConti, Jr. Director of Inspection and Standards

SUBJECT: ACCOMPANYING PETITION

CONSIDERED BY: Councilwoman Carolyn F. Brassil, Chairwoman-Committee on Finance

DISPOSITION:

Attached is a petition presently pending before the  
Committee on Finance.

The members request your opinion as to the releasing of  
the demolition lien.

City Clerk



## DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTION AND STANDARDS

October 16, 1984

Councilwoman Carolyn F. Brassil  
Chairwoman-Committee on Finance  
City Clerk's Office

Dear Mrs. Brassil:

I have reviewed the petition to the City Council by Laura Boyd, owner of real estate located at 68 Wood Street. Ms. Boyd has requested that a demolition lien placed against the property at 64-66 Wood Street, on Assessor's Plat 36, Lot 44, amounting to \$1,670 be released by the City.

In reviewing the file for 64-66 Wood Street, I found an extensive newspaper story covering the abandonment and eventual demolition of this building. I have included a copy for your information. I do not think it is necessary to re-hash any of the background of this property since it is covered fairly well in the Providence Journal story.

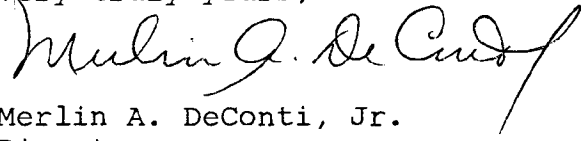
I feel that the purchase of vacant lots throughout the City is probably the best solution to the problem that they present throughout the different City neighborhoods. Most of these lots have been created by the demolition of vacant boarded-up buildings. Most also have substantial liens placed against them. The Law Department and this Department have both attempted to collect these liens, but these efforts have been mostly unsuccessful. Owners of these properties usually stop paying taxes and permit the City to take tax title to the property because the lot has very little value with such a large lien placed against it. The lot becomes a dumping ground for garbage and debris, a place to deposit junk cars, and sometimes a good place to run an auto salvage operation, unlicensed, of course.

October 16, 1984

Unless the City has plans to start an aggressive campaign to collect back liens, which I do not think will work, or wants to hold on to these properties to create a land bank, I feel the purchase of the lot by a neighboring property owner is the only alternative.

In this particular instance, the neighboring property owner has paid the back taxes. I do not think it is proper to burden a new property owner with a lien incurred by the previous owner. As long as this lot is going to be improved and maintained I recommend that the lien be released.

Very truly yours,



Merlin A. DeConti, Jr.  
Director

MAD, JR:np



DEPT. OF CITY CLERK  
PROVIDENCE, R.I.

OCT 19 11 39 AM '84

FILED

High costs, vandalism, fires  
discourage landlords but  
SWAP is an aid to buyers

# The Second

The Providence Journal, Monday

## 64-66 Wood Street — its history is tragedy

By ROBERT W. STEWART  
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE — Phyllis Bergantini remembers the big, gray, turn-of-the-century house at 64-66 Wood St. as the home where she and her husband raised their son and daughter.

"We lived there for 12 happy years," the North Providence housewife reminisces. "It had large rooms with high ceilings, and hardwood floors, and a big granite fireplace in the dining room. It had all that fancy woodwork and moldings along the ceilings. It was really exquisite."

Like more than 400 other houses throughout the city, 64-66 Wood St. was boarded up by a landlord who could no longer afford to keep up repairs with the rental income from his tenants. While the landlord was looking for a buyer, the house was broken into, vandalized, and finally set afire. Six times.

Day and night, the charred remains haunt a 73-year-old widow who lives next door, barely seven feet away, in a freshly painted three-decker. She says she is scared to death that next time the flames will reach out and destroy her home as well.

The widow remembers the day last August when a 20-month-old boy died in a

***'We lived there for 12 happy years. It had large rooms with high ceilings, and hardwood floors, and a big granite fireplace in the dining room. It had all that fancy woodwork and moldings along the ceilings. It was really exquisite.'***

tenement fire at 23-25 Wood St., less than a block away. Since the first fire at 64-66 Wood St. five months ago, she says her daughter has tried to get the city to tear down the house. Nothing has happened so far. She can only hope that the wrecking crew gets to the house before the arsonists come back.

Today, 12 years after the Bergantinis moved out of the West End, the three-story house is a charred, burned-out skeleton waiting for the wreckers ball. Shattered slate shingles, broken glass and blackened clapboards litter its backyard and sidewalk. Plywood that once covered the front and rear doors lies in the street.

This is the story of one house on Wood Street. It has no heroes, and no villains. Only losers.

***'I'M SO AFRAID*** of this house that no-

body does anything about. During the night I hear noises. I hear pieces of wood falling down. I'm so afraid that I put my house up for sale last summer, right after the first fire. But I can't sell it. I'm 73 and I'm scared."

Mrs. Amelia DePetrillo has lived next door to 64-66 Wood St. for the past 36 years. She remembers the days when she would sit in her backyard and watch Arthur Bergantini trim the neat lawn next door. "Oh, they kept that place wonderful. They kept it nice," she recalls.

Now, Mrs. DePetrillo, who had a mild stroke seven years ago, doesn't get around as well anymore. She has lost strength in her left hand and left leg.

Three years ago, her husband died. Now she shares the house with her daughter and son-in-law. And, she says,

Monday, November 6, 1978

the neighborhood has changed.

"The people are different, they're not as sociable anymore. When I moved in here everybody used to know everybody. It's not like that anymore."

**THE BERGANTINIS MOVED** to North Providence in 1966, when their daughter was 11 and their son was 7. A year later, they sold the house on Wood Street to Ernest Kortick, now 57, a manufacturer's sales representative who lives in a neat, modest home in Cranston.

Kortick bought 64-66 Wood St. through Elkay Realty, a business run by his family. At its peak the firm owned no more than five or six properties. Now it owns only the hulk on Wood Street. Kortick, a soft-spoken man, says the building was supposed to be an investment for the future. Instead, it turned into a nightmare that would not go away.

About five or six years ago, the city told Kortick he could no longer rent the third-floor apartment unless he installed a fire escape. He decided to stop renting, even though it would cut his income by one-third, because he didn't think he could ever recoup the investment in the fire escape.

As more and more houses in the neighborhood were abandoned, Kortick had an increasingly difficult time attracting tenants — not just top-quality tenants, but any tenants at all. Other landlords on the street said they had the same problem. At least five other houses in the immediate neighborhood now stand empty and abandoned.

Kortick says he has no bad words for any of his tenants, but he concedes that some were less conscientious than others about keeping up the house. And sometimes they didn't pay their rent.

"You missed the payments when they were planning to move. You missed the slow payments when they couldn't pay. And there were some legitimate circumstances when they just couldn't," Kortick says.

Had he been living in the building, like other landlords on the street, Kortick says he would have had more "clout and visibility" with his tenants, and could have kept a better eye on the building. But he adds that he is not the typical absentee landlord, with hundreds of properties, who make huge profits by charging high rents and reinvesting almost nothing in maintenance.

With rising inflation, it cost more and more to clean and repair the apartments. When the last tenant moved out last Thanksgiving, Kortick decided to close up the building and put it on the market.

"The overall interior work that needed to be done to bring that place back up — the cost of painting, papering and making repairs — was just too much for me."

"We sank a lot of money into it. I don't really know how much. It was just a very bad situation. You're talking \$150 a month (rent). With that you've got mortgage payments, interest, insurance, water bills, routine repairs," Kortick says. "It was just getting to be too much for too little."

ON DEC. 12, 1977, city building inspector James A. Mahoney was on a routine tour of the West End, looking for empty buildings to add to the computerized list of abandoned property kept on file at his office and the Fire Department. He spotted the house at 64-66 Wood St.

Between January and March, while the Buy Rite Realty agency was showing the house to "one of two people who decided they didn't want to pay the money to have it fixed up," Mahoney inspected the building four times and found it locked and secure.

On March 21 he inspected it again. This



—Journal-Bulletin Photo

**64-66 WOOD ST.: Burned-out and boarded-up, the building has a history.**

time, he found the rear door wide open. Kortick was told to secure the door. Seven weeks later, the work was still undone. Kortick later told city officials that he had never received any letters notifying him of the violations.

Merlin A. DeConti Jr., director of the city's Department of Building Inspection, hauled Kortick into Providence Municipal Court on May 30. Kortick pleaded innocent to a criminal misdemeanor charge of maintaining an unsafe building.

He was ordered to close up the building by June 6. Later, Kortick told DeConti that he had the rear doors boarded up immediately after he appeared in court.

On June 4, about 6:30 p.m., after the house had been empty for seven months, a fire of "suspicious" origin broke out on the second floor. It destroyed more than half the roof, and did "considerable" damage to the top two floors, according to city Fire Marshal Thomas J. Doyle. No arrests have been made.

Kortick hired the Bromley Construction and Appraisal Co. to board up the build-

house. There have not been any arrests.

After the second big fire, renovations and repairs were out of the question. The potential buyer backed out. In late October, Kortick told DeConti he wanted to tear down the house, but couldn't afford the estimated \$1,100 to \$1,700 demolition cost because he still hadn't settled with his insurance company.

DeConti agreed that the building was a hazard, and should come down. He put the work out to bid Oct. 23, with the understanding that Kortick will later repay the city for the demolition. In the meantime, the city slapped a lien on Kortick's property, so that it cannot be sold until he pays off the debt. The house should be down by the end of the year, DeConti says.

**OF THE APPROXIMATELY 430** abandoned homes in Providence, only about 40 or 50 are burned-out shells similar to the house on Wood Street, according to DeConti. More abandoned houses than these

***'I think if kids have it in for a house, there's no way you can keep them out. It's a matter of surveillance. I guess you almost have to stand in front of a house. And there's just not enough policemen around to do that.'***

ing completely. Meanwhile, he started negotiating with a buyer who would be willing to take the fire-damaged house off his hands for a fraction of what he paid for it. But the sale could not go through until Kortick settled his insurance claim. And that was taking time.

DeConti postponed a final hearing on the unsafe dwelling charge while Kortick continued negotiations during the summer. Meanwhile, Mrs. DePetrillo's daughter said she was getting nowhere in her attempts to get the city to do something about the vacant house.

**BETWEEN** June 5 and Sept. 23, vandals ripped down the plywood boards at 64-66 Wood St. at least five times. Firemen extinguished minor rubbish fires inside the house on July 4, twice on Aug. 18, and on Sept. 4.

On Sept. 23, two days after vandals again ripped down the plywood, another fire of "suspicious origin" all but finished off the house on Wood Street. The fire destroyed the rest of the roof, and heavily damaged both staircases in the rear of the

have been burned out, but those houses have been demolished.

Last year, the city spent between \$50,000 and \$60,000 demolishing damaged houses, DeConti estimates. That figure is down considerably from three and four years ago, when the demolition budget was between \$120,000 and \$150,000.

DeConti attributes the decrease to organizations like SWAP (Stop Wasting Abandoned Property) and an increased effort on the part of landlords to recycle their houses.

But even when landlords have the best of intentions, things sometimes just don't work out.

"In fairness to the guy (Kortick), I have to say that he made attempts to secure that building," Mahoney says.

"I think if kids, or whoever it was, in that neighborhood have it in for a house, there's no way you can keep them out," adds DeConti. "It's a matter of surveillance. I guess you almost have to stand in front of the house. And there's just not enough policemen around to do that."

January 23, 1985

Michael Fitzpatrick, Esquire  
116 Orange Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Mr. Fitzpatrick,

Enclosed herewith is certified copy of Resolution No. 55,  
approved January 21, 1985, which is self-explanatory.

Very truly yours,

Rose H. Mendonca,  
City Clerk.

RMM/jme  
Enclosure