

How do you fix the worst New Bedford streets? Start with the problem landlords

Last Tuesday night New Bedford police officers descended onto a North Front Street apartment and arrested 10 people, to include a minor, on cocaine trafficking charges. **Officers seized over 44 grams of cocaine, packaging materials, digital scales and \$962 in cash** – your basic drug dealer's starter kit. Last night, **New Bedford narcotics units did a drug sweep across the city arresting another 10** and of course a North Front Street heroin dealer was one of those busted. It's no coincidence that the police visit the same streets, and some times the same apartments, over and over.

If you read the daily police blotter that details the basics of crimes and arrests in New Bedford, the same streets seem to pop up daily – Ruth Street, Ashley Street, Ashley BLVD, Tallman Street, Acushnet Ave., County Street and North Front Street to name a few.

North Front Street is a long street that runs north/south and parallel to Acushnet Ave in the north end of New Bedford. Drive down it and you'll notice "No Trespassing – No Loitering – Police take Notice" signs dominate the street. Walk it during the day and you'll probably be fine, but it's not a place to be walking at night unless you are satisfying a vice or simply like to live dangerously. There are plenty of good people that live on the street, but sadly, the street has a large amount of drug dealers. See this article's first paragraph for a taste.



North Front Street problem properties, like most bad streets in the city, are owned by many of the same landlords who do little to ensure quality residents move in to their properties. Like a cancer, move in a few bad apples, and property values go down as good tenants move out. The properties continue to be bought up by the irresponsible landlords until a street becomes what North Front, Ruth and Ashley streets have become. Repeat this process around any city and this is how good neighborhoods become bad, forcing good citizens to live in fear on the street their family has lived on for decades.

The fix? Hold the problem landlords more accountable

Massachusetts holds bars accountable when they over serve a patron that crashes their car into someone else. Why not hold landlords accountable to their tenants that sell drugs out of their apartments? I'm not talking about one time offenses, but the worst offenders.

In 2015, New Bedford came up with a 'Problem Properties' ordinance. You can review it [**here**](#).

For example, 31 Ashley Street was (and may still be) a problem

property when **Mayor Mitchell announced the ordinance in 2015.** Between 2009 and 2015, police were called to 31 Ashley Street more than 200 times. That's not a misprint – 200 times. It would have been cheaper to just open up a satellite police station across the street than show up 200 times.

Today, if properties get eight valid police phone calls over 12 months, the property is considered a problem property and the landlord can get charged for the cost of the police calls. Once you are designated a problem property, you just wait 12 months without any police calls and then you are off the list.

Sounds more like a money maker for the city than something for problem landlords to fear. If you have six major drug busts and no other complaints over 12 months you are not a problem property per the ordinance. Really?

Additionally, landlords are smart and buy up properties under different business names. There are property owners in New Bedford that own over 100 properties throughout the city, in their name, or under some shell realty group. If your property is nearing the problem property limit, it might be cheaper to not rent out the property until the 12-month window passes.

Want to fix the problem property ordinance? Stop grouping all police calls as the same. Is a major drug bust where 10 people cutting up heroin and cocaine the same as a neighbor calling the police because a TV is too loud? They are equal under the problem property ordinance. It would take 8 drug busts in 12 months to get a drug house listed as a problem property. Wouldn't two suffice?

If the New Bedford City Council is serious about cleaning up the worst properties in the city they need to put together a real problem property ordinance with teeth. The goal should not be to recover the cost of police showing up to the properties, but to put landlords that sell to drug dealers on notice and eventually out of business.