

# Gifford Gardens: Worth refurbishing or headed for wrecking ball?

- By [Henry A. Stephens](#)
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Tony Brown, left, the president of the Indian River County NAACP, and deputy Teddy Floyd of the Indian River County Sheriff's Office, talk about the former Gifford Gardens Apartment complex that currently sits vacant. Since the last tenants were evicted earlier this year, the empty buildings have been used by transients, drug users and prostitutes. CQ: Tony Brown, Teddy Floyd IR gardens1.jpg TAKEN: October 7 2010



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**GIFFORD** — Broken-out windows, signs of stolen plumbing and railing, evidence of drugs, garbage-strewn rooms and even human feces met Indian River County officials Thursday as they updated their case for demolishing the 57-year-old Gifford Gardens Apartments.

“This is like a cancer to the community,” county Environmental Health Specialist Julianne Price said.

Price visited the 55-unit complex with sheriff's Deputy Teddy Floyd, neighbor R.C. Weaver and Tony Brown, president of the county branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Brown recalled working as a youngster in 1963 helping builders in the construction. It was a nice complex, he and Weaver said, adding their respective grandmothers were among the first tenants.

But that changed, Brown said, after the original owners sold it and a series of investors took it over. Price said banks sold it to a buyer who planned to refurbish the complex, but who became stymied by the magnitude of the problems.

What tenants remained in July were made to move, Price said, after the county's Building Division posted the property as unsafe.

"This is unacceptable," Brown said. "Would you want this near your home?"

Mary McBride, property manager at the Housing Authority-owned Victory Park complex to the north, said she has boarded the new windows of units facing Gifford Gardens lest vandals visit her complex next. She said it has been hard to get those units filled.

"This is a difficult time," McBride said. "People come and see that (Gifford Gardens) and they say it's an eyesore."

But Aaron Raymond, special assets officer for City National Bank, the property's Los Angeles-based mortgage-holder, said Gifford Gardens would be worth refurbishing.

The bank has foreclosed on the complex and plans to take possession in December from the current owner, A to Z Home Management LLC of Stamford, Conn.

Contacted at his office, Raymond said he is currently trying to get a service to cut the overgrown weeds at the complex, fence the property and board all the windows. After getting possession, he said, the bank will look to improve and sell Gifford Gardens.

"It seems no one is concerned about the complex's economic issues, just the physical appearance of it," Raymond said.

Raymond said he hasn't visited the complex, but has seen pictures of its condition.

When the market was better, and buyers spent more, Raymond said, he could understand why a buyer would balk at having to fix up too many problems in the complex.

But now, he said, a buyer could get a discount for the property's distressed condition and have money left to do the needed improvements. He said vandals and others would cease their activities once the property is fenced and boarded.

Price, Floyd and Brown all scoffed at that idea.

"You've got to replumb this, put in new electric, doors and find some way for air-conditioning," Brown said. "Personally, I'd take a bulldozer and be done with it."

Notice to correct violations

Julianne Price, an environmental specialist with the Indian River County Health Department, is having process servers deliver to A to Z Home Management LLC's Lantana office the following conditions and needed corrections at the Gifford Gardens Apartments:

Violations: Abandoned apartment units are open to the elements and attracting transients. Much of the indoor plumbing has been removed. Some units contain human feces, dried blood, evidence of rat and cockroach infestation, garbage, debris and standing water.

Corrections: Demolish the complex or repair the problems with this timetable:

Within a week, clean up the debris, fence and board the property and get a pest exterminator.

Within two weeks, get permits to demolish the complex or repair the problems.

Within a month, complete all the demolition if that is the solution chosen.

Within three months, complete all the repairs if that solution is chosen.

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