

ID#04196

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Dear Madison Common Council Members:

As owners of our modest yet highly tax assessed ranch home for 12 years we have lived adjacent to the long-standing apartment buildings on Russett Road. Also in our immediate area are Balsam and Raymond Roads, both of which include large sections of apartments. For the past two years, we have spent a lot of time and energy dealing with, as well as monitoring and reporting a growing amount of nuisance activities surrounding the area apartments. We talk to the tenants when possible; we call landlords and the police when needed. In reality, we've been doing the landlords' jobs of monitoring their tenants, and we are growing weary of it.

We present this letter in full support of the pending Chronic Nuisance Premises Ordinance, which would help alleviate our stress and degraded quality of life.

As recent civic dialog in the Southwest Neighborhood will attest, the atmosphere of our neighborhoods has changed dramatically in the last two years or so. Today, challenged neighborhoods and hot spots include more than just Allied Drive. In the Southwest Neighborhood area, they are spread out and they are taxing the West Police District.

From our experiences and through information gathered by attending the Southwest Neighborhood Planning Committee meetings and the recent meetings held with the Mayor and the Chief of Police in our district, we have determined that the responsible "landlord business" has become a major challenge.

From our house we've heard loud arguments, mothers using vile language with their children, an increase in disturbing (lyrics) and disturbingly loud music from car stereos. Within the last year, we've had guests at our house go out to their cars to see that they had been shot up by a high-powered pellet gun. A man from a nearby neighborhood faced an attempted armed robbery as he took an evening walk down the street in front of our house. Ill-behaved children walk into the middle of Hammersley Road and Whitney Way, and loiter to stop traffic and hassle motorists.

We believe the ordinance, by virtue of enforcing some basics of civility, will indirectly mitigate these types of behavior.

Thanks to a temporary neighborhood police officer this summer, our baby-sitting of the landlords was able to suppress the obnoxious behaviors that were escalating with improved weather. It appears that the Madison Police Department used resources to do something landlords are supposed to do-- instruct residents about the responsibility of neighborhood living.

This spring, as the annoying behavior began to ramp up, one family on our street priced their house and sold it well below market price so that they could quickly leave the area. Three houses on our street (adjacent to the Russett Road apartments) are now for sale; other neighbors have discussed moving.

We have been renters. However, our landlords would not have allowed us to get by with the activities that we now witness. Clearly some landlords are not holding their tenants and the tenants' guests to standards of civility. Some landlords aren't even screening tenants to protect their investment or the neighborhood. For these reasons-- and as a check on their business practices-- they must be held accountable.

Good landlords help provide shelter-- a basic human need-- and should be applauded. Communities, police and society must charge housing providers with the responsibility of safe, comfortable housing for everyone in neighborhoods. The Ordinance is in effect an agreement between society and housing providers for that purpose. Landlords who have not met the most basic standards of their industry have a choice; adapt and comply or get out. For those business interests looking to get into the "housing provider market", the ordinance will stand as a documented social compact.

We have read version #4 of the Chronic Nuisance Premises Ordinance in its entirety and believe it is a sincere safety net that apartment tenants, homeowners and landlords alike can use to protect themselves from poor housing providers. It, like any law, is an insurance policy that one hopes to use infrequently if at all, but it's a worthy tool when needed.

Owners of premises that comply will relieve the taxed Police Department and the Department of Neighborhood Preservation resources from their excessive calls for service. The good people in those departments will be able to apply their skills when real needs arise, and when good citizens request the services they deserve.

In the end, the ordinance will assist all landlords, tenants, neighbors and business owners as well as the City of Madison and its Police Department to maintain safe, welcoming and peaceful neighborhoods.

Sincerely,
Tony Smick & Marlys Miller

