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Crime-ridden Dallas motel checks out for good

South Dallas: Residents have no reservations on seeing American Inn crumble

05:06 AM CDT on Monday, October 1, 2007

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It took the bulldozer less than an hour to end a 20-year nightmare.

A low-slung brick building peeking from behind a high wall at the corner of Scyene Road and Bertrand Avenue, the American Inn Motel gave way quickly – a surprise perhaps to those who fought for so long against the prostitutes and drug dealers who made it a home.

Their fight, which at times seemed hopeless, became a victory Sunday afternoon under a blazing blue sky.

"The things that used to be allowed here, we will see them no more. The lives that were lost here, both literally and figuratively, we will see that no more," said the Rev. Donald R. Parish, pastor of True Lee Missionary Baptist Church, which sits next door in South Dallas.

Joined by Mayor Tom Leppert and three members of the [Dallas City Council](#), the church's parishioners cheered, prayed and sang hymns as they waited to watch the motel come crashing down in a pile of dust.

For nearby residents, the American Inn was a constant source of trouble that seemed impervious to their best efforts to shut it down.

No sooner would they bring a complaint to the courthouse or City Hall than the hotel's ownership would suddenly change and the bureaucratic paper chase to have it shut down had to begin again.

But their luck began to change last year with an effort led by council member Dwaine Caraway, who at the time was running for office.

Mr. Caraway and other activists raised \$1,000 with Mr. Parish's help to take the motel before the city's Board of Adjustment.

The city also sued the motel for failing to pay back taxes and illegally operating a sexually oriented business.

"This place was notorious for drugs, prostitution, women displaying themselves openly in the day and night," Mr. Caraway said.

Mr. Caraway and others succeeded in persuading the Board of Adjustment to rule that the motel had to shut down, which took place in May 2006.

Today, the American Inn is an empty slab, a sight 69-year-old Dorothy Beasley thought she would never see.

Ms. Beasley has lived in the same simple A-frame house on Imperial Court for 37 years.

For the last 20, her home backed up to the American Inn.

"I've endured it all," she said, standing on her front porch, pointing to a bullet hole in her siding.

"At 5:30 in the morning, it was like rush hour," with men picking up prostitutes on her two-lane street, she said.

Before her husband, Charles, passed away earlier this year, he would often wake up before dawn to chase the women off the streets.

When the city finally managed to shutter the motel, the neighborhood underwent a sudden change.

"It's been very quiet and peaceful," Ms. Beasley said.

[Mr. Leppert](#) said Sunday that he wants the city to become more aggressive about places like the American Inn.

Dozens of similar operations are in business in Dallas, primarily in the southern sector, where they thrive on illegal activity, officials said.

The city has a long-standing ordinance that prohibits motels with 60 rooms or fewer from operating without a specific-use permit.

But neighborhoods often don't challenge the motels or, when they do, they see the case linger interminably before the Board of Adjustment.

Mr. Leppert said he has asked City Attorney Tom Perkins to be as aggressive as possible in targeting motels where crime festers.

"We're going to push it. We're going to push as it far as we can to make sure we use every single tool ... to try to take these down," he said.

Mr. Leppert said he also wants the Board of Adjustment to make cases against such motels a priority.

In the neighborhood around Bertrand on Sunday, there was a sense of hope that finally, outside of the shadow of the American Inn, better times are ahead.

The motel site was purchased by Frazier Revitalization Inc., a nonprofit group dedicated to bringing about a vibrant mixed-use community in the Bertrand area, said Frazier president Jon Edmonds.

The company paid a premium of \$347,000 for the site, but the property was critical to bringing to fruition long-term development of the community, Mr. Edmonds said.

As the bulldozer carved into the walls of the American Inn, the parishioners of True Lee seemed to agree that, whatever the price, it was money well spent.