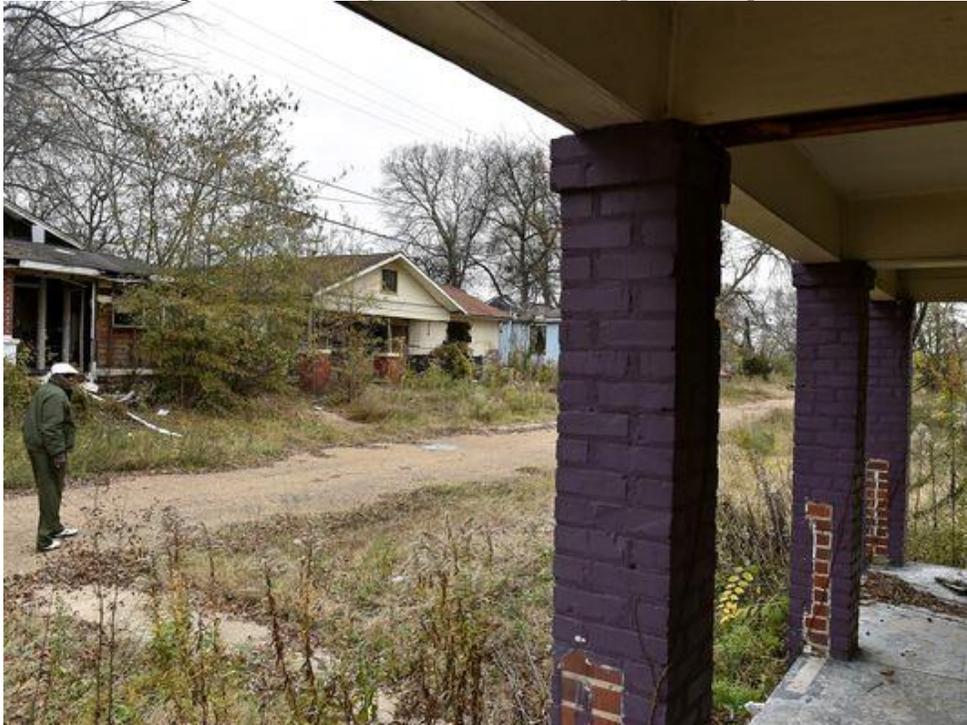


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JSU development stalls; neighborhood tired of blight

Anna Wolfe, The Clarion-Ledger Published 3:49 p.m. CT Dec. 16, 2016 | Updated 5:34 p.m. CT Dec. 16, 2016



(Photo: Justin Sellers/The Clarion-Ledger)

Several run-down, abandoned structures outside Jackson State University's campus in west Jackson are the result of stalled progress on a proposed dormitory.

For some of the school's 2016 graduates, the blight just off their campus is all they've known, because the issue has persisted on the property for four years.

State Sen. John Horhn, D-Jackson, said the student housing proposal, a \$65 million to \$75 million private-public partnership, wouldn't have cost the university a dime, but Institutions for Higher Learning halted the project. In an October board meeting, overwhelmed by [JSU's financial woes](#), IHL officials declined to hear JSU's request to enter a contract to build the dorm, suggesting it should focus on getting its books in order.

"We don't know the reason why because this deal does not affect Jackson State's cash balance. It has nothing to do with Jackson State's cash balance," Horhn said. "It's been crafted in such a way

where private developers would come in and do long-term leases on this property as well as some existing dormitories."

Horhn urged IHL to get the ball rolling. The commissioner's office did not return several calls from The Clarion-Ledger, but emailed a statement from Glenn Boyce, commissioner of Higher Education, that said IHL understands the community's concerns and is "confident that the JSU Foundation, working with the university, the city of Jackson and others in the community, will address the situation."

"We need to take our students out of these motels and hotels where they have to be transported back and forth to the campus and put a development into the ground, on this ground where we stand today," Horhn said at a Working Together Jackson meeting Friday morning just off Poindexter Street, surrounded by dilapidated structures.

The community, including members of surrounding churches, just want the blight gone. It is asking the JSU Foundation, which owns the properties, to find an estimated \$200,000 for demolition and to turn the area into a green space while the university waits to develop the area.

Members of the nearby St. Mark's Episcopal Church have [complained about an increase in illegal activity](#) in the area due to the roughly 20 to 25 abandoned homes, which includes an old apartment complex.

On the opposite end of the block from St. Mark's is the university's baseball field, which hosts games as well as football practice.

"Those of us who live and work in inner cities know abandoned houses are not abandoned," said the Rev. Luther Ott of St. Mark's. "There's going to be somebody, if the walls are up and there's a roof on it, who's going to be in there. And they're going to be doing things that are dangerous for our community. It's only a matter of time until we're going to a funeral."

The JSU Foundation [found itself in hot water](#) earlier in the year when an independent accountant discovered administrators made thousands of dollars in unauthorized purchases using foundation credit cards.

In the 2016 session, the Mississippi Legislature passed Senate Bill 2629 to give JSU the authority to enter the proposed public-private partnership, one of the last required steps before development could begin.

Horhn said the foundation has acquired "a considerable amount of debt to assemble this property, and all of a sudden we're at a standstill."

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