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Jefferson political notes

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RAZE OR REHAB?

When Jefferson Parish Councilman Chris Roberts headed to the hospital for kidney stones Wednesday, he asked Councilman-at-large Tom Capella to handle all the agenda items he had prepared for that day's council meeting. The only problem was that Roberts hadn't intended to act on two of the resolutions that Capella eagerly offered for votes.

On Capella's recommendation, the six remaining council approved the demolition of a string of apartments on Holmes Boulevard and Ruby Street in Terrytown. Roberts has kept the proposed resolutions on council agendas for months, ever since identifying the properties as unsightly messes that he wants their owners to clean up.

Parish attorney Tom Wilkinson said the mistaken vote wasn't a serious blunder. He said it's simply a resolution of intent that the administration might use to start the legal process of notifying owners and laying out a blight case for a hearing officer. Wilkinson said the administration would likely watch pending sales on the properties and ignite the demolition process only if the deals fall through.

"At the end of the day, that's what we're trying to get done: rehab them and get them back into commerce," Wilkinson said.

The vote will likely become irrelevant to the Riverchase Apartments at 112 and 200 Holmes Blvd., because a Baton Rouge investor said he closed on the sale Thursday. Howard Gyler of B-G&G Investors said he plans to pump \$31,000 into each of the 82 units and have the first apartments ready in four months, with overall completion in eight months. He said he expects to close on a separate sale for the Cedarcrest Apartments at 250 Holmes Blvd. before October, when he would start a similar eight-month project.

From the hospital, Roberts said he will continue to hold the hammer over the remaining properties.

"We're only going to demolish them if the sale doesn't go through, because the existing owners have been very reluctant to put any money into them," Roberts said.