



## Officials discuss improving stores

By William K. Alcorn (Contact)

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If stores don't comply with sanitarian orders, their license to operate can be revoked.

YOUNGSTOWN — City public health and elected officials were to meet this morning with leaders of the Idora Neighborhood Block Watch to discuss how they can work together to clean up corner grocery stores along Glenwood Avenue.

Too many of the stores are filthy inside and a blight in the neighborhood outside, as well as attracting criminal activities, said 1st Ward Councilwoman Annie Gillam at Monday's Board of Health meeting. Gillam is chairwoman of council's public health committee.

Today's meeting came at the urging of Germaine Bennett, a member of the health board, and Gillam to clear up any misunderstandings that might exist about the health department's duties and authority.

Health Commissioner Neil Altman said he pledged at a meeting about the corner stores earlier in the year to devote more staff time to this issue.

However, Altman said Monday, he could not neglect the other duties of his Environmental Division, which include inspecting food establishments, such as restaurants and festival booths, rat infestations, and high grass, trash and garbage in yards.

He said Monday the department's job is made more difficult because three sanitarians and the director of environmental health lost to retirement through the city's buyout program have not been replaced by city council. Sanitarians inspect restaurants and stores, among other things.

In addition, other personnel lost to the buyout and not replaced by council are the department's nursing and sexually transmitted disease directors, Altman said.

Altman said the purpose of today's meeting was to renew his pledge to work with the residents and Gillam to get the stores in question in clean operating condition. He said the law requires grocery stores be inspected at least twice a year, and if they serve food, "we like to go more often."

If stores don't comply with sanitarian orders, the health department has the authority to remove their license to serve food or operate, Altman said.

Gillam said some of the stores are dirty inside, but some people who live in the area don't have transportation to go elsewhere to buy groceries and other necessities.

“If we can get our sanitarians back, we need them to check store cleanliness and food,” Bennett said of the stores. The residents deserve better, she said.

“We need to get these [health department] sanitarians in place and hire really aggressive people. We’ve got to do something about these stores. They are a blight on the community,” Gillam said.

“We want to work with the block watches in an amicable way and to partner with them. They can be our eyes and ears in the community,” Altman said.

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