

H. 109 Testimony

For the record, I'm Rep Woodman Page of Newport, I'm here to introduce and discuss H109 which is an act relating to municipal ordinances governing the maintenance of properties within downtown districts.

Newport is my hometown and district and is a very different town from the Newport in which I was born and raised in. Like many small Vermont towns, it has fallen on some hard times.

Newport currently has a building within its downtown designation that has been vacant for several years and needs some major renovations. The building was originally a JJ Newberry's five & dime store. As one walks by this building and looks closely through the windows one can see that the roof is leaking and that the building is not being properly maintained. In many ways, the building reminds me of the social experiment involving broken windows. You may be familiar with this experiment that originally was with abandoned vehicles; one was left in a poor area and the other in a well to do area. Within the poor area the abandoned vehicle was almost immediately vandalized and only when the creator of the experiment broke a window of the vehicle located in the nice neighborhood did vandalism begin to occur. The experiment became known as the broken window theory and evolved to include broken windows of buildings which sends a message that a neighborhood is uncared for, uninviting and may not be safe to be around. There are no broken windows in the building, but the building does look very tired. Next to that vacant building is one in which it too is now recently empty but not abandoned or deteriorating. The Newberry's building will eventually need to be torn down if repairs are not made soon.

There are many reasons why a business or building owner chooses to let a building deteriorate. It may be too costly to repair or bring the building up to code, it might be best to keep the building as an asset or a tax write off, there may be difficulties in finding and opening businesses when the market or community isn't supportive or simply the owner lacks the finances to make repairs. Whatever the reason is, these buildings need to be looked after if our designated downtown areas are to flourish and ultimately attract new businesses, visitors, tourists and residents to the area. So, this is the reason for H. 109. It would be nice if this bill could fix all of our abandoned or vacant buildings throughout Vermont, especially the JJ Newberry's building in Newport. I realize that H. 109 is not the ultimate solution to our struggling downtowns, but it might give municipalities another tool to address deterioration of buildings and possibly initiate the recovery of our downtown designated areas.

I would now ask that Mr. Anderson join in the discussion of H.109.

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