

When I moved into my apartment at 19 Homestead Pl in Brattleboro about 10 years ago it was a quiet and seemingly safe neighborhood. My building and the building next door at 25 Homestead PL are both owned and managed by Windham Windsor Housing Trust. The two buildings have 5 apartments each and they share common spaces, a parking lot, a laundry room, a storage shed, and a small amount of open space. The property was well cared for and the tenants who lived there got along well. There may have been the occasional problem but nothing out of the ordinary, nothing that could not be handled. Then the drug dealers moved in, first a young woman and later on her boyfriend who already had, as far as I have been able to find out, a long criminal and drug related history. When they began dealing drugs from their apartment everything changed.

It is hard, if you have not lived through it, to appreciate how awful and all encompassing the atmosphere became. It may sound to your ears like an exaggeration but what came to my mind while it was happening was the Alfred Hitchcock movie *The Birds*. Drug addicts came in an almost constant stream by foot, on bicycles and in cars and trucks. It was a small invasion of drug addicts onto the property and the streets surrounding it. I have compassion for those suffering from addiction. I wish that every single one of them could get the help they need to overcome their addiction but their overwhelming presence in the neighborhood created an almost dystopian atmosphere. If the drug dealers had not been living where they lived, the neighborhood and the property would not have been overrun by addicts and the people helping the dealers with their illegal enterprise. A once quiet and pleasant neighborhood was being destroyed. I also have compassion for the drug dealers. They have made a horrible life choice. I wish that they too could get the help they need in order to change their addictions and the way they have chosen to live. But my compassion also extends, in great measure, to those of us who became the almost invisible

victims of their drug dealing. There needs to be consequences for dangerous criminal behavior. Tenants who are living quiet lives, paying their rent, being mindful of their neighbors and their shared responsibilities to maintain a safe, clean and quiet environment in which to live, need to have their rights addressed the right to a quiet, safe, habitable home.

In order to give you a clearer picture of what it was like living in my apartment when the drugs dealers lived next door and shared the public spaces I utilized, I will highlight three areas, safety, quiet, and the habitability of shared common spaces. Although I am singling them out separately, they are, of course, interrelated.

First **safety**. People high on drugs are not known for exhibiting rational behavior. Not every drug addict presents a safety risk but the presence of so many drug addicts within a small area ups the possibility of harm coming both to them and to the residents residing there. On a number of occasions my drug dealing neighbor engaged in loud shouting matches with people outside his apartment. It was scary to witness. His temper was obvious. He clearly posed a danger to anyone who might cross him, other addicts, residents of the buildings, the maintenance people who serviced the building. On the day he was finally arrested I watched the Brattleboro police remove him from his apartment at 6:30 AM in an obviously well planned raid. After that I watched the police take 9 guns from his apartment and place them in the back of a police SUV. My drug dealing neighbor possessed nine weapons along with a temper which he displayed on many occasions.

There was also the danger of discarded needles left on the property. A single mother with two young children lived in one of the apartment in 25 Homestead. She could not allow her children to play outside and had to advise them to never pick up anything from off the ground. Also directly opposite the dealer's apartment

was the apartment of a frail elderly woman. I worried about her safety given the people who were coming in and out of her building day and night. Finally there was the safety risk posed by all the cars. Homestead PL is a small oneway street. Children play outside on the street. In normal times there is not much traffic. The drug dealing created frequent traffic in cars and trucks driven by people either high on drugs or looking for their next fix. I worried for the children's safety.

Next **noise**. I learned that people using drugs definitely don't prioritize fixing their cars. Almost every car that entered the property was noisy and there were cars entering and exiting the property at all hours of the day and night. The driveway goes right by my bedroom window and almost every night I would be awakened by cars or trucks coming on the property and, a few minutes later, leaving the property. When this happens day after day after day for approximately 2 years it is hard to remain unaffected. My sleep was interrupted almost nightly. I was not the only one so affected. Also activities related to the drug dealer and his friends would occur at any time of the day and night. He and his friends would be outside doing any number of things, fixing his car, bringing into the parking lot probably stolen property or property bartered for drugs and leaving it there, either out in the open or in the shed designed for community use not the storage of ill gotten gains. In a word, there was almost constant noise which was especially difficult to handle when it happened late at night when most of us were trying to sleep.

And finally the **habitability of the public spaces**. The public spaces were commandeered for use by the drug dealers. The parking lot often contained cars of the people buying drugs. Sometimes they would sit in their cars for long periods of time. I thought I should probably buy narcan just in case someone ODeD on the property. On several occasions the male drug dealer brought unregistered cars onto the property, junkers

usually, and would just leave them there for weeks at a time, until we tenants complained enough and they would be towed away. Once, after a warning, such a car was removed by the dealer himself and then returned the next day. As I mentioned before, the shed, meant for the storage of trash cans and recycling bins, was filled with what I presumed to be stolen goods or goods bartered for drugs. These would be accompanied by signs warning people off from touching or removing anything. There was a filing cabinet, a headboard, even a small motorcycle for a while, just all sorts of miscellaneous stuff, leaving no room for the shed to function in the way intended. This stuff spilled out onto the outside space. A very large trailer was parked for a long time on the small grassy areas beside the shed. It was the the size that would need a large pickup truck to pull it rather than a car or even an SUV. The small paved sitting area with a bench installed was also littered with their stuff. It could no longer be used by others to sit in. It became simply part of the territory they claimed as theirs. They also installed numerous cameras to monitor outside activity, an invasion of our privacy. A few times threatening messages were left posted on the laundry room door by the woman dealer. I can't now remember exactly what they said or why they were posted but they always threatened some repercussions.

I do not know what the solution is to the opioid crisis. My view is more narrow. What I know is that when drug dealers move into a property every one who lives on that property is effected. The simple desire to have a save quiet place to live becomes unattainable. The tenants living on Homestead PL in Brattleboro were all victimized by the two drug dealers who set up business on the property along with all the people they attracted by their drug dealing. Landlords need to have some way to provide their tenants with a safe secure place to live, to mitigate if not eliminate all the damage done by having drug dealers engaging in their illegal business on the properties, transforming those

properties from homes to continuously active disruptive crimes scenes.