

GUEST COLUMN to the MONROE DISPATCH

For the Thursday, September 29, 2016 Edition

From: Mayor James E. "Jamie" Mayo

Mayor Jamie Mayo among Leaders Selected to Speak at 2016 Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference in Baltimore

I am pleased to inform you that I, and Councilwoman Juanita Woods (District 3), will be attending the 7th *Annual Reclaiming Vacant Properties (RVP) Conference* September 28-30, 2016, in Baltimore, Maryland. This conference will bring together approximately 1,000 change-makers who are working to find solutions for vacant, abandoned, and other problem properties. Themed "*In Service of People and Place*," the 2016 RVP will explore how work to reclaim vacant properties can improve the well-being of residents and the places they call home.

I am honored to have the opportunity to network and share best practices with other Mayors, municipal leaders and community stakeholders from across the country. After a long couple of years, the passage of our *Fight the Blight* laws by the Monroe City Council puts Monroe in the discussion with other progressive cities who are taking action to address the aesthetic, public safety and property value issues caused by blighted and abandoned property. Upon our return, Councilwoman Woods and I look forward to sharing what we learn to help benefit our entire city.

At the RVP, I will also be participating in the *Mayor's Roundtable Plenary Session* on September 29. The plenary will focus on the role of local leadership as the catalyst for transforming vacant properties into productive spaces. Other participants in this session will include Mayor Tom Barrett (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), Mayor Lestor E. Taylor, III (East Orange, NJ), Mayor Karen Weaver (Flint, MI), and Erika Poethig (Institute Fellow & Director of Urban Policy Initiatives for the Urban Institute).

Citywide beautification efforts have been a long-time focus of under my administration. The City of Monroe participates and/or supports efforts such as The Great American Cleanup, Ouachita River Sweep, America Recycles Day, Household Hazardous Waste Day, Adopt-A-Spot, and multiple neighborhood cleanups. During my 15-years in office, the City of Monroe has demolished over 1000 dilapidated and abandoned structures, eliminating unsafe eyesores that were potential crime havens.

After two years of door-to-door canvassing, community meetings, and sessions with the Monroe City Council, Code Enforcement officers and Monroe City Attorneys, I am pleased to announce on September 27, 2016, the Monroe City Council unanimously voted for final Adoption of our new *Fight the Blight* laws. These new laws will help hold property owners more accountable for their blighted, vacant and abandoned properties - by imposing fines and stiffer penalties, such as potential property liens, for a failure to bring these properties into compliance.

By working together, we are making a difference. Monroe is one city, with one future!