

Gregory T. Holding



City Hall
730 Washington Avenue
Racine, Wisconsin 53403

(262) 880-4500
greg.holding@cityofracine.org

Office of Eleventh District Alderman

July 23, 2008

Alderman David Maack
President of the Common Council
City of Racine
730 Washington Avenue
Racine, WI 53403

Dear Mr. President:

The recent spate of violent crimes in our city has moved me to bring forth an idea I have been working on for some time now. We must take some major steps to eliminate gang and drug crime in our city. Our police have been working hard on this. Recent federal arrests and prosecutions would not have been possible without the work of the Racine Police Department. The department deserves our thanks and continued support. However, there is more we can do as a city to attack this problem. Wisconsin law provides us with two tools. The Common Council should authorize and fund the use of these tools by city staff.

- 1) Wis. Stat. 823.113 declares that any building or structure used to facilitate the distribution of drugs or the activities of a criminal gang is a nuisance. It empowers the city to petition in circuit court to order the closure of the building and issue injunctions against those involved in the activities. The statute also allows for the seizure and sale of the property. We should use the reporting capabilities of our new Phoenix system to rapidly identify properties that are nuisances and proceed against them in civil court. Gangs and drug dealers must no longer have safe harbor anywhere in Racine. The Common Council should authorize the City Attorney's office to begin working immediately with the Police Department to aggressively pursue the abatement of nuisance properties.
- 2) In June of 2006, the city commissioned a report from a local law firm on the feasibility of pursuing civil litigation against gangs in Racine. Wis. Stat. 895.444 allows cities to sue gangs in civil court for economic damages and injunctive relief. The report discusses the possibilities of pursuing this in Racine and concludes, "The civil case against gangs is a tool to affect the quality of life of gang members." Gang and drug activity has been negatively affecting the quality of life in Racine's neighborhoods for too long. It is time we return the favor. This can be an effective tool, but a lot of work needs to go into making it happen. It is possible we would need outside counsel and associated costs to bring a case or cases in civil court. The Common Council should appoint an ad-hoc committee to act on the report and make recommendations on how to proceed, estimated costs, and suggested funding sources.

Due to the serious nature of this concern, I would ask you place it on the Committee of the Whole agenda as a direct referral.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg T. Holding".

Gregory T. Holding
Alderman of the 11th District