

Act gives county ability to clean

By CHRIS HENLEY
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A long battle that's being waged on Claiborne Road could see an end should voters approve the second referendum on the June 6 ballot.

Residents are being asked to ratify the highly debated home-rule act aimed at cleaning up unsightly property in the county.

The measure, named the Alabama Limited Self Government Act, passed the legislature and must be voted on by residents in unincorporated areas of the county.

For Claiborne Road resident Marty Grantham, the act couldn't come any sooner.

"My first home was in Semmes and it was right next to junky houses. My lifelong dream was to build a house away from people so I didn't have to live next to trash," he said.

Grantham bought nine acres on the road, built a house for himself and his father including a pond. Last October, he noticed someone hauling junk cars onto a lot a few doors down from him.

"We knew they were demolition cars being sold by a fellow that ran a salvage company. The owner had been evicted from his previous lot and was trying to move in with a broken down trailer."

"We tried to talk to them but all they said was, 'it's

The act specifically allows ordinances to control overgrown weeds, junk yards, litter and rubbish, noise, pollution, sewage and animal control.

Furthermore, it specifically denies the commission to use the act to raise or levy taxes, establish planning and zoning, regulate utilities or landfills or to expend money on private property.

Saraland Environmental Officer Sgt. Steve Stafford said he was all too familiar with why people didn't want to clean up their yards.

"I run into a lot of cases where someone's died and a vehicle has sentimental value. In other cases, people just don't want to take the time and effort to maintain their yards," he said. "We don't have any junk yards in Saraland but for the county, it's about time someone did something. Those places are unsightly and no one wants to live next to them."

One area targeted by the county is a junk yard on Churchula-Georgetown Road.

The junk yard lies on both sides of the road and includes everything from broken down cars to household garbage. A sign by the road indicates someone is holding a yard sale, though no one was present for comment.

If the act is ratified, the commission could require owners to maintain the property including up to removal of the garbage.

unrestricted so you'll have to live with it.' That's when the ball got rolling."

Grantham tried every avenue of government to block the junk yard. He contacted ADEM, the EPA, the county commission and the health department.

"It's not legal by any standards but those standards aren't being enforced," he said.

He said the junk yard has more than 60 cars on a 2.5 acre lot. In some cases, junk cars are less than 20 feet from a neighbor's new double-wide trailer.

Residents on Claiborne Road aren't alone. The county has identified more than five private junk yards in unincorporated areas.

If ratified by voters, the county commission will be able to pass ordinances aimed at cleaning up junk yards and unsanitary sewage.

The act would allow commissions to pass ordinances fining residents who fail to comply. The maximum fine allowed is \$150 per day, not to exceed \$5,000.

Mobile County Commission be authorized to exercise certain health and safety powers in the unincorporated areas of Mobile County as provided by Act No. 2005-200?"

The Mobile County Commission has officially taken no stance on the issue.

Rep. Rusty Glover said five of the six local delegates in the Republican Party voted against the Act in the Legislature.

"Yes there is a problem with neighbors and weeks in unincorporated areas but there is some very de-

Though some have labeled the act as too broad, Grantham said he's not worried about the far-reaching effects it may have.

"You spend a lot of money to build your property value up and some fellow puts a junk yard next to you and the property value drops though your taxes don't," Grantham said. "It's not right. Even if you're not wealthy, it doesn't cost anything to be clean."

Grantham hopes the county will be able to enforce any ordinances it passes.

"The only people who should be against this law are the ones with junky yards," he said. "I don't think it will give the county too much power. The biggest thing is enforcement. There are laws on the books right now that are not being enforced."

The wording on the referendum was created by the Association of County Commissions and does not specifically mention junk yards or home rule.

It reads, "Shall the Mo-

ceptive wording in this act," Glover said. "People feel it will allow the county commission to issue fines at their discretion. I've heard from at least 10 people against this law and not a single person for it."

"It is a problem that needs to be addressed but it gives the county too much authority to fine people. I'm not sure what the solution would be."

"I'm not for it or against it but I urge people to be a little cautious. If it is what they want, I will be happy to support it," he said.