

City of Spokane Abandoned Property Registry Briefing Paper
Councilwoman Amber Waldref – awaldref@spokanecity.org or 625-6719
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Purpose: To develop a system of identification and monitoring abandoned properties in order to prevent further deterioration of buildings and revitalize Spokane neighborhoods.

Background: Currently there are approximately 1500 properties in the City of Spokane which have received notices of foreclosure or have been foreclosed upon. The number of foreclosures in Spokane is closely tied to the housing recession of 2009 to present. Many buildings, specifically single family homes, are being abandoned and becoming nuisance properties. Typically owners walk away during the early stage of foreclosure thinking the banks are responsible for the properties. However, on average in Washington State foreclosures are taking 24 months. As a result these “zombie” properties “fall through the cracks” in regard to who is taking responsibility for their upkeep. The banks do not own them and property owners who receive foreclosure notices believe they are not responsible.

Council and Administration are proposing to take a proactive approach by creating an Abandoned Building Registry, which has been used in communities throughout the country. We want lenders and or the responsible party to take responsibility upfront for the conditions of the properties and to combat the negative community impacts such as transients, illegal dumping, graffiti and safety.

The proposed program has four elements:

- Registration –Lender or other responsible parties in a foreclosure process (defined in ordinance) must register the property with the City for a nominal fee and name a responsible party
- Responsible Party- Local contact who is authorized to monitor and respond to issues with the property
- Regular Monitoring - Regular review of the property to ensure secure and maintained properties by Responsible Party and City
- Mechanism to Resolve Nuisance Conditions - A waiver is required as part of the registration. If the responsible party does not address nuisance conditions, the City staff or contractors may secure, clean, paint or address conditions
- Enforcement – Failure to register may result in a Class One civil infraction with a fine for each day out of compliance; failure to maintain the property may result in a criminal misdemeanor violation

A proactive approach will increase neighborhood safety and create a process to manage complaints and problems early on. This approach has the potential benefit of keeping properties out of the City’s Substandard Building Official process and reducing Police Department responses to open homes.

Financial Impact: The City will charge a registration fee to recoup the time and costs associated with monitoring properties and administering the list. A determination of an appropriate fee will be made prior to the passage of the ordinance.

A public process with engagement by stakeholders to measure the value of such a program is being conducted including presentations to:

- Community Assembly
- CA Public Safety Committee
- Neighborhood Councils and other community, neighborhood business groups

Action: Once an ordinance is approved, registration is scheduled to be in place by Fall 2014. *(over)*

Examples of Ordinances in Other Cities

Wilmington, DE

<http://www.wilmingtonde.gov/docs/1447/Vacant-Property-Registration-Fee-Program-Brochure.pdf>

Florida City, FL

<http://www.floridacityfl.gov/Vacant%20-%20Abandoned%20Property%20Registration%20Form.pdf>

Newark, NJ

<http://www.ci.newark.nj.us/userimages/Vacant%20Property%20Registration%20Ordinance%20Important%20Documents.pdf>