



# Vacant Property Security Plan

SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENTED BY CITY OF MILWAUKEE DEPARTMENT OF CITY DEVELOPMENT,  
DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES, MILWAUKEE POLICE  
DEPARTMENT, OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION

# Vacant Property Security Plan

## Executive Summary

Over the past decade, the number of buildings acquired by the City of Milwaukee through tax foreclosure judgments has increased dramatically. Most of these structures are houses located within residential neighborhoods, and the majority are vacant at the time of acquisition.

The City has sold more than 3,000 tax-foreclosed structures and demolished just under 1,000 over the past 10 years. Despite these actions, a significant inventory of vacant properties remains, including both properties actively marketed for sale and approximately 350 City-owned properties that have been identified as raze candidates because sale and renovation are infeasible. While the rate of tax-foreclosure declined in 2017 and 2018, acquisitions continue, and new vacant structures regularly come into City ownership.

Numerous studies conclude that the presence of vacant buildings within residential neighborhoods contributes to falling property values, increased crime, and reduced social cohesion. The concentration of tax-foreclosed properties in the City's oldest neighborhoods, primarily on the near north side, particularly focuses these negative impacts on a relatively compact area of the city.

Common Council resolution file 181491 directed representatives of the Department of City Development, Dept. of Neighborhood Services, Milwaukee Police Department, and Office of Violence Prevention to devise a plan to reduce the negative impacts of vacant properties. This report presents the findings and recommendations of the work group. It includes specific information about crime reports linked to City-owned vacant properties during 2018, and notes from a literature review regarding vacant property issues.

Recommendations fall into three categories:

- 1) Measures to reduce the inventory of vacant properties
- 2) Measures to better secure vacant properties while they are marketed or awaiting demolition
- 3) Measures to educate, engage and empower neighbors to serve as eyes on vacant properties

A summary of the report's recommendations is found on page 13-14.



## The hazards of vacant and abandoned properties

Numerous articles have examined the causes for property vacancy; the impact of high rates of vacancy on crime and neighborhood stability, and strategies to counteract the negative impacts of vacancy.

The information below summarizes the findings of five such articles written between 2005 and 2019. The following sources were consulted for this summary:

- (1) A report, written by Keith Matheny of the Detroit Free Press and published March 5, 2019, describing research conducted by Wayne State University. The research project studied data on both violent and property crimes within the US Census block groups in which 9,400 houses in Detroit were demolished over a five-year period (2010 to 2014).
- (2) “Vacant and Abandoned Properties: Turning Liabilities into Assets,” published in the Winter 2014 edition of “Evidence Matters” published by the Office of Policy Development and Research of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. This article surveys multiple studies about the impact of vacant and abandoned properties.
- (3) “Vacant Properties: The True Costs to Communities,” published by National Vacant Properties Campaign, August 2005. This article summarizes the results of multiple studies.
- (4) “Urban Blight Remediation as a Cost-Beneficial Solution to Firearm Violence,” published in the American Journal of Public Health, December 2016. This article analyzes the results of a City of Philadelphia ordinance adopted in 2010 that requires owners of abandoned buildings to clean the facades of their buildings and install doors and windows in openings. The article also discusses the impact of a Philadelphia program that remediates vacant lots affected by illegal dumping, tall weeds, and trash.
- (5) “The Empty House Next Door,” published by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2018. This report evaluates home foreclosure impacts in both “legacy” and “sunbelt” cities. While the author’s research centers on Cleveland, Philadelphia and Baltimore, Milwaukee data is included for comparative purposes.

### Causes of property vacancy: Key findings

Note: Quoted text is drawn directly from one of the articles cited above. The number in parentheses identifies the source of each quote.

These articles discuss three major reasons for high levels of vacant, improved properties.

- 1) Foreclosure crisis
- 2) Falling population and disinvestment in central city neighborhoods
- 3) The gap between the value of a property and the costs incurred in keeping the property occupied

Falling population “has created a tremendous gap between housing supply and demand. Not only does this mismatch leave many structures vacant, but it severely weakens local housing markets, limiting the potential of market-based solutions to vacancy.” (2)

“...[T]he most common reason a property is abandoned is that the cost of maintenance and operation exceeds the apparent value of the property....[T]he longer a property remains abandoned, the higher

the cost of renovation. This leads to continued abandonment even when market conditions have dramatically improved.” (3)

“When vacancy rates approach 20 percent or more – what we have previously defined as hypervacancy – they indicate that market conditions have deteriorated to the point where properties that have become vacant are as likely or more likely to remain so and ultimately be abandoned rather than reused.” (5)

“When vacancies reach a certain point, the market no longer functions as a check on the further increase in vacancies and the share of vacant properties in the area’s building inventory, including vacant lots where buildings have been demolished, may continue to grow indefinitely.” (5)

### The impact of high rates of vacancy on crime and neighborhood stability

The articles discuss three impacts of high rates of property vacancy:

- 1) Property values fall in the surrounding neighborhood.
- 2) Social cohesion is reduced.
- 3) Crime increases.

“Research links foreclosed, vacant, and abandoned properties with reduced property values, increased crime, increased risk to public health and welfare, and increased costs for municipal governments.” (2)

“With abandoned buildings comes social fragmentation. Individuals who live in communities with an increasing number of vacant buildings begin to feel isolated, weakening the community as a whole. A large number of vacant buildings in a neighborhood symbolizes that no one cares, increasing the likelihood that property values will continue to decline and that further abandonment will set in. In the case of vacant properties, the problem is out in the open, for all to see. The aesthetic impact of abandoned properties, while not easily quantified in dollars, is another cost.” (3)

“...[T]raditional plywood coverings deteriorate quickly, look disheveled, signal obvious blight, and are often penetrated to allow illegal entry into abandoned buildings.” (4)

“Increased vacancies leave fewer neighbors to monitor and combat criminal activity. Boarded doors, unkempt lawns, and broken windows can signal an unsupervised safe haven for criminal activity or a target for theft of, for example, copper and appliances.” (2)

“After a property becomes vacant, the rate of violent crime within 250 feet of the property is 15 percent higher than the rate in the area between 250 and 353 feet from the property.” (2)

“Abandoned buildings and vacant lots may shelter or hide individuals who participate in illegal activity. These individuals often have previous criminal records and cannot legally carry firearms, despite needing some means to settle business or other disputes. Abandoned buildings and vacant lots can thus serve as out-of-sight staging or storage areas for their illegal firearms until they are needed. This may also help explain why firearm violence, but not nonfirearm violence, was significantly reduced after the treatment of blighted spaces.” (4)

Commenting on the Wayne State University study, Asst. Chief David LeValley of the Detroit Police Department pointed out that vacant buildings “create spaces for predators to hide or commit crimes, places for drug houses to exist, because these buildings aren’t being monitored or controlled...” (1)

## Strategies to counter the negative impacts of high rates of vacant properties

The articles recommend several strategies to reduce the negative impacts of vacant properties:

- 1) Selective demolition of vacant properties, combined with other neighborhood improvement strategies and improvement of vacant lots left by demolition.
- 2) Improving the appearance of vacant properties
- 3) Simplifying the sale of vacant properties to new owners, including investors, in order to rebuild confidence in a neighborhood

The Wayne State University study of the connection between crime incidence and demolition of 9400 vacant buildings in Detroit found that “For roughly every three demolitions completed [between 2010 and 2014], block-groups experienced an average reduction in crime of almost 1 percent. With the average block-group in the study experiencing about 10.7 demolitions during that span, the average reduction in crime was approximately 3 percent...But curiously, the study found no connection between a reduction in drug crimes and blighted home demolitions....” (1)

The Wayne State University study found that “block groups that had a low number of demolitions, one to five, actually [saw] a larger reduction in total crime than did moderate or high numbers of demolitions, six to 20 in a block group.” (1)

“...the rationale for a well-planned, strategic, large-scale demolition program in cities with large, long-standing, surplus building inventories appears to be sound. The supply of buildings is likely to significantly exceed demand for many years to come, and the damages done to their neighborhoods’ social and economic fabric by large numbers of abandoned properties is considerable.” (5)

“Determining which buildings should be demolished, which rehabilitated, and which stabilized for future rehabilitation needs to involve a thoughtful and systematic process that engages many stakeholders, including community residents. The process should take into account market conditions, financial resources, and constraints; neighborhood character; building features, such as architectural and historic value; contribution to the neighborhood fabric; and the current and potential blighting effect on the surroundings. Demolition should be part of an integrated neighborhood strategy, where demolition, rehabilitation, and reuse of vacant lots work together with regulatory initiatives to address substandard or poorly maintained occupied properties along with marketing strategies to draw new home buyers. Such a program may also need to address criminal and drug activity and incorporate efforts to improve the quality of life and opportunity for neighborhood residents.” (5)

“A vacant lot is a blighting influence in itself...left untreated and subject to trash accumulation and illegal dumping....Failure to improve vacant lots and ensure regular maintenance and cleaning may result in replacing one source of blight with another.” (5)

The Philadelphia experiments described in the American Journal of Public Health article require owners of abandoned buildings to install doors and windows in structural openings and clean the building façade. Buildings are inspected monthly for compliance. Owners of vacant lots that exhibit illegal dumping, tall weeds and trash are given clean-up citations. Non-response results in issuance of a right of entry that allows an organization to clean up the lot, install plantings and install simple wooden fences. Landscapers perform monthly maintenance on remediated lots.

The study compared the levels of gun violence on blocks in which vacant lots had been remediated and blocks where lots were not remediated. The study also compared blocks in which structures had been treated as required by the ordinance with blocks in which abandoned structures were not in compliance

with the ordinance. Over the four-year study period, blocks with remediated buildings experienced 39% less firearm crime and 19.6% total crime. Blocks with remediated lots experienced 4.6% less firearm crime and 2.2% less total crime. Reductions were sustained from 1 to almost 4 years.

“No legal tool changes the underlying economic conditions of a city or a neighborhood. When there is some demand for properties, however, even when it is modest and not well recognized by private developers or real estate brokers, affirmative tools such as land banks or receiverships can help unlock that demand by eliminating impediments that stand between potential users and properties.” (5)

## The local view

Safe & Sound is a non-profit organization that works with the office of the Milwaukee County District Attorney to strengthen neighborhood safety in numerous areas of Milwaukee: Thurston Woods/Old Milwaukee; Westlawn; Harambee/Riverwest; Amani; Midtown/Near West Side; 27th Street West; Metcalfe Park; Parklawn; Sherman Park; Clarke Square, and Layton Boulevard West. Community organizers and community prosecutors work in these neighborhoods to bring together residents, police and community resources to fight crime and build citizen engagement.

Members of the Dept. of City Development's real estate staff met with Safe & Sound community organizers to get their perspective about the impact of vacant properties on the neighborhoods in which they work. The observations of both organizers and community prosecutors provide on-the-ground reinforcement of the conclusions of the research cited above. Among the perspectives expressed:

- “The presence of vacant properties...reflects an appearance of disorder. This impression of disorder may lead some to believe that it is ‘ok’ to use these properties for criminal or nuisance behavior because no one is ‘in control’ of them.”
- “Residents on the block...might feel the residual effects of the criminal and nuisance activity that is associated with the vacant properties. They may feel helpless, frustrated and stressed out as to how to eliminate the activity or who to contact to effectuate change. They may be scared to report or help stop the activity occurring as they have to live and remain on the block.”
- “Can’t build community with vacants. Inhibits community efficacy. In addition, vacant properties attract crime – loitering, squatting, theft, etc. Vacant properties significantly increase blight in a neighborhood – lawns aren’t kept, snow is not shoveled, buildings are not maintained. These visible sources of blight affect the value of the neighborhood, and depress not only property values, but occupants living around these properties.”
- “Hard to feel safe when you are surround[ed] by vacant properties where crime occurs, and there are no ‘eyes on the street.’ Properties that house people add people to the community that can care for both the property and the activities within a neighborhood.”

## **Analysis of crime reported at vacant City-owned properties during 2018**

As an initial step in preparing this plan, the Department of City Development (DCD) and the Milwaukee Police Department's Office of Management, Analysis and Planning (OMAP) worked together to identify the number and type of crimes that occurred at vacant City-owned property during 2018.

DCD provided OMAP with a list of the 1230 improved, vacant properties owned by the City at any time during 2018. OMAP matched these addresses with the addresses of crime incidents reported throughout 2018, and provided additional details regarding these reports. DCD staff then examined the date of each incident, to determine whether the property was in City ownership on the date at which the crime occurred.

Crime incident reports identify the site of the incident as the closest identifiable street address. Incidents that occur in the public way are associated with the address of the closest structure. The DCD/OMAP analysis identified 81 reports that listed the address of a vacant property at the time it was owned by the City.

Twenty-eight reported incidents clearly occurred on the premises of a vacant City-owned property. The most serious of these incidents were two sexual assaults, one that occurred inside a vacant house and one that occurred in a car parked at a vacant house; and a homicide that occurred in the rear yard of a vacant house.

Other incidents included eight instances of arson, primarily involving arson to cars parked behind vacant houses; six incidents of shell casings being found in the yard or alley behind a vacant house; six reports of burglaries, theft and damage to property; two reports of armed robbery made by workers at vacant houses; one carjacking; an arrest for possession of a dangerous weapon, and a drug investigation involving a suspect found sitting on the steps in front of a vacant house.

One of the sexual assaults and most of the arson incidents and reports of criminal damage to property occurred at houses that had been referred for demolition by DCD real estate staff. This analysis reflects only incidents that were reported to the Milwaukee Police Department. A list of the incidents is found on page 8.



Incident Report #	Incident Description
180290051	Armed Robbery of person working at vacant property
180330045	Burglary at vacant church
180510009	Arson to vehicle parked on parking slab of vacant residence
180620129	Carjacking - victim parked his vehicle behind residence he knew was vacant
180740021	Criminal Damage to Property at vacant residence
181560140	Drug investigation where suspect was sitting on stairs of vacant house
181640065	Armed Robbery of DPW workers assigned to pick up garbage carts at vacant locations
181740021	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - casings recovered in alley behind location
181760037	Arson to carjacked vehicle at vacation location
181870165	Possession of Dangerous Weapon of Child by arrestee standing in rear yard of vacant location
181920111	Arson to garage at vacant location
182060010	Arson to motor vehicle parked in rear of location in alley
182060032	Homicide that occurred in rear yard of vacant location
182300119	Sexual assault that occurred in vacant residence
182480036	Theft investigation related to vacant property
182510023	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - casing recovered in parking lot of vacant school
182520128	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - casings recovered in gangway next to vacant building
182550133	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - surveillance footage showed actor firing firearm in alley behind vacant residence
182570019	Sexual assault that occurred in vehicle in driveway at location
182570149	Arson to stolen motor vehicle parked in rear of location in alley
182770055	Burglary at vacant school
182770154	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - casings recovered in rear yard of vacant residence
182810179	Arson to vacant building
182810190	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - casings recovered in alley behind location
182950172	Negligent handling of burning materials in front of location (set fire to leave pile)
183020053	Theft that occurred at vacant property
183160008	Arson to motor vehicle parked in rear of location
183420052	Burglary at vacant residence
183480004	Endangering Safety by Use of Dangerous Weapon - casings recovered near vacant building
183490060	Criminal Damage to Property at vacant residence

## Recommendations to improve the security of City-owned vacant properties

Both short-term and long-term strategies are required to improve the security of City-owned vacant properties. These recommendations fall into three general categories:

- 1) Reduce the inventory of vacant properties owned by the City of Milwaukee.
- 2) Secure and protect the physical asset effectively, to prevent unlawful entry.
- 3) Educate, engage and empower neighbors to serve as eyes on vacant properties.

Additional resources will likely be required to implement many of these recommendations.

### Reduce the inventory of vacant properties owned by the City of Milwaukee

Over the long term, the single most impactful measure to attack problems caused by the presence of vacant buildings is to reduce the number of vacant properties in inventory. A successful inventory-reduction strategy will have two prongs: demolition of the most blighted properties, and sales of those which private buyers deem appropriate for renovation and re-occupancy.

Because of the degree of damage and deterioration sustained over time, a significant proportion of the City's vacant property inventory will likely never be sold, renovated and reoccupied. Over the past decade, the City of Milwaukee has razed just under 1,000 vacant properties – an annual rate of fewer than 100 demolitions per year. This rate of demolition has not kept pace with the number of properties for which demolition is inevitable. As of mid-May 2019, approximately 350 City-owned properties – one-third of the City's total inventory – were slated for demolition. Approximately 70 demolitions are planned during 2019. Expenditure of additional funds set aside for deconstruction of about 50 more properties is expected to begin in fall 2019. Additional acquisitions obtained through tax foreclosure and aging, unsold inventory will continue to increase the demolition rolls.

Significantly stepped-up demolition activity is required to address this situation. We recommend that the City embark on a three- to five-year plan to reduce the number of demolition candidates in the City inventory to no more than 5% of the improved property inventory. Annual demolition/deconstruction funding would be determined by the level of razing required to meet this goal.

Contracting and cost issues have slowed implementation of the City's ambitious deconstruction ordinance, resulting in a one-year suspension of the ordinance throughout 2019. Given the volume of City-owned properties requiring razing, we recommend that the ordinance be repealed. The Department of Neighborhood Services should have considerable latitude to determine which City-owned properties are most suitable for deconstruction and which are more appropriate for machine demolition, which is faster and less expensive than deconstruction.

We further recommend that the City continue to incentivize the purchase, renovation and re-use of vacant properties through an expanded Milwaukee Employment/Renovation Initiative, which incentivizes the sale of vacant properties to developers who employ unemployed and under-employed Milwaukee residents for renovation work. Recommendations for a MERI 2.0 have been shared with the Common Council; implementation of MERI 2.0 will begin in fall 2019 as part of the Strong Neighborhoods Program.

To speed the repair and re-occupancy of vacant properties purchased from the City, the real estate division, in consultation with DNS, has adjusted the degree of renovation required at vacant properties before people can move in. Since January 2019, scopes of repair work have identified health and safety

items as “essential repairs.” These must be completed before anyone moves into a property that was vacant at the time of purchase. Other repairs necessary to bring the property into full compliance with the City’s building maintenance code may be completed after occupancy.

### Secure and protect the asset

Protecting vacant properties from vandalism or other criminal activity initially requires that window and door openings be protected with boards. Until properties are sold or demolished, it’s crucial to have systems in place to check periodically on their condition, and respond to identified problems.

The City’s vacant building inventory can be divided into several segments:

- 1) Buildings awaiting demolition
- 2) Buildings listed for sale by real estate brokers
- 3) Buildings listed for sale by the City of Milwaukee
- 4) Recently-acquired buildings that are not yet marketed
- 5) Buildings held off the market for various reasons (e.g., properties may be reserved for developers who are seeking financing to buy and renovate properties)

DCD’s real estate section has contracts with two board-up companies and a locksmith tasked with securing all vacant structures upon acquisition.<sup>1</sup>

As this report was being prepared, Dept. of Neighborhood Services inspectors were asked to comment on the quality of work being done by the City’s current board-up contractor. Inspectors noted several concerns, and recommended more frequent spot-checks of the contractor’s work, to ensure that code requirements are being followed.

Different strategies are used for ongoing monitoring of vacant buildings, depending on the category to which each building is assigned.

All vacant City-owned buildings are inspected annually by DCD real estate staff. However, only those properties listed for sale by real estate brokers receive frequent condition checks. Brokers are contractually obligated to submit a bi-weekly condition report for each City property they list.

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 275-32-7 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances provides the following requirements for boarding vacant structures:

- a-2. Boarding of a structure shall be required for all doors and windows on ground level, those doors and windows accessible to grade by stairs or permanently fixed ladders or within 10 feet of grade and any other doors, windows or other means of ingress or egress as directed by the commissioner.
- a-3. Boards shall be cut to fit door and window openings, and square head or star drive screws at least 3 inches in length with washers shall be used to fasten boards to a structure.
- a-4. At least one door boarded at the grade level shall be maintained with locks or hinges to permit entry for inspection purposes under subd. 7.
- a-5. Boards shall be a minimum of 5/8" thick and be painted to match the trim or siding color of the structure, or be painted forest green.

The other groups of buildings previously were inspected monthly by DNS inspectors. However, budget cuts ended the monthly DNS inspection program. DNS now conducts exterior inspections of vacant properties when a complaint is received.

There are several recommended approaches to expand monitoring to ensure that building security problems are reported and addressed promptly. These include:

- 1) Provide the budget resources required to dedicate workers to regularly monitor vacant properties and report problems. Such monitoring could be undertaken by City staff members, a private security firm under contract to the City, and/or gig workers.
- 2) When vacant properties are held off the market for more than one month at the request of a developer, require the developer to periodically monitor the condition of the properties and report identified problems until the sale closes or the hold agreement is terminated.
- 3) Amend the City's residential sales process to allow all vacant residential properties to be automatically listed for sale, rather than requiring aldermanic approval to put properties on the market. This process change would shorten the time between property acquisition and marketing.
- 4) Some City properties are referred to DNS for razing immediately after a post-acquisition inspection. If a buyer approaches the City to purchase such a property, the offer is treated as an "unsolicited offer," requiring Common Council approval. We recommend amending the sales process to allow direct sale of such properties without Council approval, as long as DNS approves the sale. This process change would simplify the sale of some properties that otherwise would be razed.

Maintenance of the landscaping surrounding vacant structures also impacts the safety of these buildings. Regular grass cutting, and trimming of shrubs and trees that block windows and doors, reduces the likelihood that illegal activities taking place in or near a vacant house will be shielded from view. Currently, contractors hired by the Department of Public Works are responsible for mowing grass. The City's board-up contractors trim shrubs when needed; DPW's forestry crews are sometimes dispatched to remove larger vegetation.

On-line forums for private individuals who own distressed properties suggest a variety of measures to ensure security of vacant structures. Dept. of Neighborhood Services and Milwaukee Police Department representatives reviewed this advice, and recommended the installation of (1) motion-detecting exterior lights, including lights that illuminate the rear yard and alley, and (2) deadbolt locks installed at exterior doors prior to boarding.

Because electricity is turned off at City-owned vacant properties, the work group recommended establishing a pilot project to determine the efficacy of installing solar-powered security lights at City-owned vacant properties. The fact that sunlight is weak approximately six to eight months a year in Milwaukee may hinder the effectiveness of such lights.

#### Educate, engage and empower neighbors of vacant properties

In its meeting with DCD staff, Milwaukee's Safe and Sound staff recommended a variety of techniques to engage neighbors who live near vacant properties in the ongoing task of addressing their impacts. Neighbors who see vacant houses every day are well-positioned to report suspicious activity: boards

have been breached, curtains have appeared in the windows, people are seen entering and exiting a vacant property, and so on.

Safe and Sound staff endorsed efforts to improve the appearance of vacant properties, such as the artistic board-up program operated by Dept. of Neighborhood Services. Such efforts involve neighbors in hands-on activities that build community as they design and paint more attractive window coverings.

The City's new Alert Neighbor Program makes neighborhood safety grants to neighborhoods that are committed to work with the Milwaukee Police Department and other partners to identify local safety issues and solutions to address them. These solutions include both physical improvements, such as lighting and security cameras monitored by MPD, and resident involvement strategies.

The following recommendations are designed to educate, engage and empower neighborhood residents to be part of the larger team working improve security at vacant City-owned properties.

- 1) Add vacant property problem reporting to the MKE Mobile service request cell phone app, and make vacant property problem reporting more visible in the Click for Action online problem reporting system. The Information Technology Management Division, which manages MKE Mobile, has agreed to include such functionality when it releases a new version of MKE Mobile in 2019.
- 2) Create and distribute tools, such as a refrigerator magnet, with simple instructions to report problems at vacant properties. Safe and Sound is willing to be a resource to assist with such contacts in the neighborhoods served by the organization. S&S Neighborhood Outreach and Awareness Campaigns, conducted by volunteers going door-to-door in S&S priority neighborhoods that have significant numbers of vacant City-owned properties, could be an effective tool to encourage neighbor reporting. Among the S&S priority neighborhoods that have large numbers of vacant properties are Amani, Midtown, Metcalfe Park and Harambee.
- 3) Restore annual City funding to support the Dept. of Neighborhood Services "artistic board-up" program. This program engages neighborhood residents and young people to create attractive works of art to cover window and door openings at vacant properties.
- 4) Use the City's network of block watch groups and participants in the Alert Neighbor Program to distribute information and tools that assist residents living near vacant City-owned properties to monitor their condition and report problems.

## Summary of recommendations

Recommendation category	Strategy	Budget implication	Comments
<b>Reduce the inventory of City-owned vacant properties</b>			
	Increase the pace of demolitions and deconstruction so that, within 3 years, only 5% of City inventory is awaiting razing.	Significant	Approximately 70 demolitions projected for 2019; small number of deconstructed houses anticipated by years end.
	Repeal the City's deconstruction ordinance.	None	DNS Commissioner would have flexibility to determine which City-owned properties should be deconstructed and which demolished with machines.
	Expand programs such as MERI that provide financial incentive to buyers to buy, renovate and reoccupy multiple vacant property	Significant	MERI 2.0 will be implemented in fall 2019; program design includes a set-aside for emerging developers
<b>Secure and protect the asset</b>			
	Institute regular monitoring of all vacant City-owned property. Monitoring could be done by a private security firm, City staff, or "gig" workers driving for ride-share or delivery services.	Significant	Private security firm: Estimated cost of appx. \$75/hour  Outsource of property monitoring to "gig" drivers would provide fill-in work for folks who are regularly driving in Milwaukee neighborhoods, such as Uber or Lyft drivers or workers signed up with Task Rabbit or Field Agent.
	Change sale process to allow all residential properties to be automatically listed for sale without individual aldermanic approval	None	This adjustment would reduce time required to bring properties to market.
	Change sale process to allow direct sale of properties that were	Moderate	Current process treats offers on such properties as "unsolicited offers," requiring Common Council approval.

	added to the raze list prior to listing for sale.		
	Install solar-powered security lights to illuminate building façade, rear yard and alley at City-owned vacant properties	Moderate	Solar-powered lights required because vacant houses do not have electric service. Would require installation by board-up contractor; questionable how well they would operate in Milwaukee’s very cloudy winter months.
	Require developers asking DCD to “hold” property for more than 30 days to monitor property condition during the holding period	None	Properties are held off the market as developers seek financing for purchase and renovation. This requirement would help to protect the condition of held properties.
<b>Educate, engage and empower neighbors</b>			
	Engage neighbors through platforms such as Safe and Sound, block watch groups, and the City’s Alert Neighbor Program to educate residents about the importance of reporting problems at vacant properties	Moderate	Creating simple tools such as a refrigerator magnet that instructs neighbors on how to report problems at vacant City properties will reinforce educational activity.
	Restore funding to artistic board-up program	Moderate	Program allows positive neighborhood engagement as it improves appearance of vacant houses
	Add vacant property reporting functionality to MKE Mobile app	None	ITMD is incorporating this functionality in its newest version of the MKE Mobile app.
	Do monthly updates of the City’s online map of vacant properties.	None	More current information will assist neighborhood groups to monitor property conditions.
	Provide modest grants to neighborhood groups to organize vacant lot clean-up and improvement.	Modest	Such projects can help to build neighborhood cohesion as they improve the appearance of lots.