Vacant Building Registration Program (VBA)
File # 090428

Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee

October 27, 2009

Nature of the Problem

- Foreclosure issues have greatly increased number of vacant buildings in the City
- Vacant buildings are often not maintained and create neighborhood problems:
  - Attract nuisance and criminal activity into a neighborhood
  - Hazards for neighborhood children
  - Contribute to blighted conditions
  - Discourage investment in neighborhoods
  - Reduce property values

What is a Vacant Building?

- Definition: A building that lacks the habitual presence of human beings who have a legal right to be on the premise

- Generally, when buildings are unoccupied for a period greater than 30 days, then registration is required

- Exceptions include:

  - Seasonally occupied property

  - Properties in pre foreclosure program

  - Properties undergoing renovation

  - Properties vacant as a result of a natural disaster

  - Properties in probate not subject to bankruptcy

Purpose of the Program

- Develop a systematic approach to vacant buildings in Milwaukee

- Maintain and share data on vacant buildings with public safety agencies

- Monitor conditions of vacant buildings to prevent negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods

- Provide an enforcement tool to ensure vacant buildings are maintained so hazards are eliminated

Program Details

- All vacant buildings registered with DNS

- The registration is valid for 6 months

- All vacant structures to be inspected at registration and renewal

- Inspection will require that buildings are:

  - Secure

  - Structurally sound and weather tight

  - Not housing hazards or fire loaded

  - The grounds are kept clear of trash, debris, vehicles and tall grass

Program Details (cont'd)

- No fee for the initial registration

- Base renewal fee of $250

- Level of fees increase in $250 increments per renewal period to a maximum of $1,000 when the condition of the property is not maintained in a code compliant manner

- Exterior conditions to be monitored between registration renewals

Program Details (cont'd)

- There are 1,300 known vacant buildings with that number expected to increase

- Program duties will be performed by district inspectors; it is necessary to add

  - 4 code enforcement inspectors

  - 1 office assistant

- Revenue projected at $325,000

- Budget estimated at $303,731

Program Implementation

- November 2009
  - Initiate changes to computer system
  - Develop training program for staff
  - Initiate public awareness campaign
  - Initiate hiring process
- December 2009
  - Send out notification letters
  - Complete changes to computer system
- January 2010
  - Complete hiring process
  - Conduct staff training program
  - Initiate inspection scheduling

Program Implementation (cont'd)

- February 2010

  - Start inspections of vacant buildings

- July 2010

  - Send out renewal notices

- August 2010

  - Start the inspection of buildings with renewed registrations

- September 2010

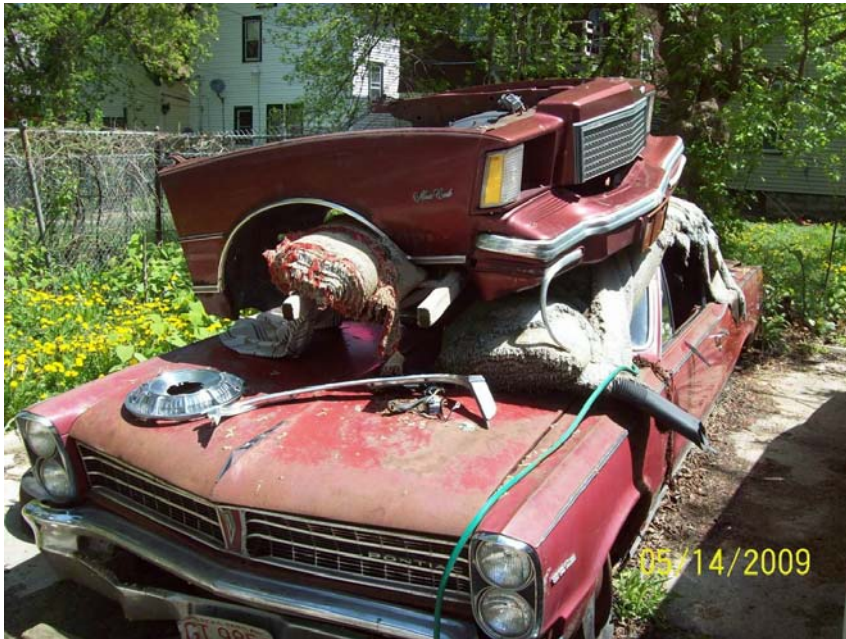 - Begin document preparation to place inspection fees on tax roll

Neighborhood Conditions

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