



**BETTER AGENTS ♦ BETTER COMMUNITIES**  
SAINT PAUL AREA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

The REALTOR® Associations of the Twin Cities are focused on the creation and maintenance of healthy housing stock. In times of serious economic downturn, cities and neighborhoods may see increases in property abandonment through foreclosure. Issues that arise when properties are abandoned include blight, break-ins, property damage and declines in value. Naturally, these problems are concerning to our cities, residents and REALTORS®.

Cities, seeking solutions, have started to turn towards adoption of “Vacant” Property Registration ordinances. Cities target properties that are not being maintained and/or occupied. We support municipal efforts to enforce code requirements through notifications and fines for incomplete maintenance, and believe that most cities’ current property maintenance codes can be utilized to address all property maintenance issues, including those on vacant properties. We encourage cities to be very cautious and narrow in their definition of “abandoned and blighted” properties to avoid placing unjust requirements on responsible property owners or inhibiting natural economic recovery in the housing marketplace.

Unfortunately, “vacant” property registration programs do not ultimately address the issue of proper care and maintenance of abandoned properties. Conversely, these regulations do frequently overburden responsible owners and present barriers to prospective buyers. Excessive fees and inspection requirements are often applied too broadly, and sweep up properties that are merely “currently unoccupied” rather than “abandoned and blighted.”

In addition, these registration programs regularly harm responsible owners who simply live in another place for periods of time. This happens because city ordinances do not distinguish between properties that are only “unoccupied” and those that have been abandoned. Property owners who may have to temporarily relocate due to employment, military service, age or health care issues are required to pay exorbitant fees, disclose personal information, and possibly have their homes invasively inspected without due cause.

It should also be noted that the increases in property vacancies to which cities are reacting are largely as a result of widespread economic problems. Fortunately, economic conditions are cyclical, meaning that as our real estate market and overall economies improve, these vacant properties will naturally be re-occupied. But cities will still have overbroad and financially burdensome regulations on their books, which could cause myriad unintended problems for property owners in the future.

Lastly, public registration and on-premise notifications of “vacant” properties can create a significant security risk through possible publication of all unoccupied buildings within a city, making those properties easy targets for squatters, thieves, and vandals. These policies are not necessary to effectively monitor vacant properties.

The REALTORS® Associations do not believe that the creation of property registrations will make headway toward clean-up and reoccupation of abandoned homes. Instead, such registrations can add significant cost and burden to the process of selling those properties. Registration fees are typically passed along to the next buyer rather than paid for by the owner (often a bank) – adding major costs to the property, which can discourage buyers from purchasing the home. Unanticipated expenses at any point in the purchasing process can kill transactions. Contrary to cities’ goals, the ultimate result is that vacant houses stay empty longer.

REALTORS® believe the best solution to vacant and abandoned properties is a return to occupied status and productive use by new owners and/or occupants. Vacant property recovery programs should incentivize home and property ownership, not present barriers.