



Saint Paul Area Association of REALTORS®

Vacant and Abandoned Properties Policy Position Statement

The St. Paul Area Association of REALTORS® (SPAAR) is committed to the highest possible quality of life for all members of our community. As such, SPAAR believes in maintaining high quality housing stock and attracting new residents. SPAAR is concerned when cities and neighborhoods experience an increase in vacant and abandoned properties. Challenges arising from blight, break-ins, property damage, and declining property values are endured by all members of our communities when it occurs.

SPAAR believes the best solution to vacant and abandoned properties is a return to occupied status and productive use by new occupants. Any vacant or abandoned property ordinance should avoid inhibiting natural economic recovery in the housing marketplace. Vacant and abandoned property ordinances and policies should incentivize home and property ownership, not present barriers.

SPAAR supports municipal efforts to enforce existing code requirements through notifications and fines for incomplete maintenance. SPAAR believes that most cities' current property maintenance codes are adequate and can be utilized to address all property maintenance issues. Additional registration ordinances do little to address the issue of proper care and maintenance of vacant properties while overburdening responsible owners and presenting 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."

Legitimate reasons for unoccupied property do exist and include the need to temporarily relocate due to employment, military service, natural disaster, age or health care issues. SPAAR is concerned when the unintended consequences of these additional regulations require homeowners and residents to pay exorbitant fees, disclose personal information, and have their homes invasively inspected without due cause. Moreover, public registration and on-premise notifications of vacant properties can create a significant security risk through publication of all unoccupied buildings within a city, making those properties easy targets for misuse and vandalism. To this end, posting properties with on-premise notifications is not advised and should be avoided.

In the case of forfeited (owned by government) vacant or abandoned property SPAAR recommends disposition policies that favor expeditious and effective marketing to encourage a return to highest and best use.

Adopted December 11, 2019 by the Government Affairs Committee

Adopted January 23, 2020 by the Board of Directors