

CHAPTER 1479
Vacant or Abandoned Property

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1479.01 PURPOSE.

The purpose of this chapter is to help protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizens by preventing blight, protecting property values and neighborhood integrity, avoiding the creation and maintenance of nuisances and ensuring the safe and sanitary maintenance of dwellings, commercial and industrial buildings. Due to economic conditions, mortgage foreclosures, and increased bankruptcies, many homes and buildings have become vacant and unsupervised. This has caused or may in the future cause properties to become attractive nuisances for minors and/or criminal activity. Vacant properties have a negative impact on surrounding properties and neighborhoods. Potential buyers are or may be deferred by the presence of nearby vacant abandoned buildings. There is or may be an increased instance of unsecured or open doors and windows, broken water pipes, flooded basements, theft of metals and other materials, overgrowth of grass, weeds, shrubs, and bushes, illegal dumping, and rat and vermin activity at vacant structures. Such neglect devalues properties and causes deterioration in neighborhoods and industrial and commercial areas. The City also needs to be able to contact owners for utility shut-off, fire safety and police reasons.

(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.02 DEFINITIONS.

- (a) "Certificate of occupancy" is defined as provided under the Construction Code.
- (b) "Construction Code" is defined as the State of Michigan Construction Code Act, Public Act No. 230 (MCL 125.1501 et seq.), adopted under the Southgate Code of Ordinances.
- (c) "Harborage" is defined as a shelter, harbor.

- (d) "Owner" is defined as one who has the right to possess, use, and convey something, i.e. the owner, occupant or successor to title by foreclosure, sheriff's sale or by court order.
- (e) "Property Maintenance Code" is defined as the International Property Maintenance Code adopted under the Code of Ordinances.
- (f) "Rodent" is defined as any of an order (Rodentia) of relatively small gnawing mammals (as a mouse, a rat, a squirrel or a beaver) that have in the upper jaw a single pair of incisors with a chisel-shaped edge; also: a small mammal (as a rabbit or a shrew).
- (g) "Vacant property" is defined as a lot, building, or structure that is not legally or currently occupied. Vacant property does not mean property that is temporarily unoccupied while the residents are away on vacation, personal matters or business, or is not intended by the owner to be left vacant.
(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.03 SCOPE.

The provisions of this chapter shall apply to all existing residential, commercial and industrial properties and structures in the City of Southgate, regardless of condition, including all vacant land in the City of Southgate.
(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.04 EVIDENCE OF VACANT PROPERTY.

Evidence of vacancy shall include any condition that on its own, or combined with other conditions present, would lead a reasonable person to believe that the property is vacant. Such conditions include, but are not limited to: overgrown and/or dead vegetation; accumulation of newspapers, circulars, flyers and/or mail; past due utility notices and/or disconnected utilities; accumulation of trash, junk and/or debris; boarded up windows; abandoned vehicles, auto parts or materials; the absence of or continually drawn window coverings such as curtains, blinds and/or shutters; the absence of furnishings and/or personal items consistent with habitation or occupancy; statements by neighbors, passersby, delivery agents or utility agents, including Department of Public Service and/or Police/Fire Department employees, that the property is vacant property.
(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.05 REGISTRY OF VACANT PROPERTIES.

There is hereby created in the City Building Department a registry of vacant properties.
(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.06 VACANT PROPERTIES TO BE REGISTERED.

Owners of real property are required to register all vacant properties within fifteen days of the property becoming vacant property. Structures that are vacant property at the time of the adoption of this chapter must register within fifteen days of the date this chapter takes effect.
(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.07 OWNER'S REGISTRATION FORM; CONTENT.

Owners who are required to register their properties under this section shall submit a completed vacant property registration form, as provided by the City Building Department, containing the following information:

- (a) The name of the owner of the property.
- (b) Common address and tax parcel identification number of the property.
- (c) The date on which the property became vacant.
- (d) Affirmation of utility connections or disconnections.
- (e) Affirmation of agreement to abide by property maintenance requirements.
- (f) A mailing address where mail may be sent that will be acknowledged as received by the owner. If certified mail/return receipt requested is sent to the address and the mail is returned marked "refused" or "unclaimed," or if ordinary mail sent to the address is returned for whatever reason, then such occurrence shall be prima facie proof that the owner has failed to comply with this requirement.
- (g) The name of an individual responsible for the care and control of the property. Such individual may be the owner, if the owner is an individual, or may be some person or organization other than the owner with whom the owner has contracted.
- (h) A current address, phone number, fax, and email address (if fax and email addresses are available) where communications may be sent that will be acknowledged as received by the owner or an individual responsible for the care and control of the property. If certified mail/return receipt requested is sent to the address and the mail is returned marked "refused" or "unclaimed," or if ordinary mail sent to the address is returned for whatever reason, then such occurrence shall be prima facie proof that the owner has failed to comply with this requirement.

(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.08 REGISTRATION FEE.

The registration fee shall be set by the City Council by resolution from time to time, to offset the cost of processing the form and administering compliance with this chapter. In addition, in the case where the owner has failed to register, there shall be assessed any added cost incurred by the City in having to determine ownership, which may include, but is not limited to title search.

(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.09 REQUIREMENT TO KEEP INFORMATION CURRENT.

If at any time the information contained in the registration form is no longer valid, the property owner shall within ten days file a new registration form containing current information. There shall be no fee to update the current owner's information.

(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.10 PUBLIC NUISANCE DECLARED; MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY REQUIREMENTS.

(a) It is declared a public nuisance for any owner to cause, permit, or maintain any property condition contrary to the provisions of this section. The owner or individual responsible for the care and control of the property must adhere to the vacant property maintenance plan as contained in this section. The owner or individual responsible for the care and control of the property shall perform regular weekly inspections of the property to assure compliance with the requirements of this section, and shall allow access to the property by the Engineering Department or the Building Department for the purpose of inspection and in case of emergency.

(b) Vacant property shall be kept free of the following:

- (1) Weeds or grass more than ten inches high;
- (2) Vegetation growth between sidewalk and/or driveway flags or from cracks in the pavement;
- (3) Dry brush, dead vegetation, trash, junk, debris, building materials, rodent harborage, accumulated snow on sidewalks and driveways;
- (4) Any accumulation of newspapers, circulars, flyers, and notices (except those required by Federal, State or local law);
- (5) Discarded items including, but not limited to, furniture, clothing, large and small appliances, printed material, signage, containers, equipment, construction materials; and
- (6) Any illegal outside storage of vehicles.

(c) Vacant property shall comply with the minimum security fencing, barrier and maintenance requirements of the Construction Code and the Property Maintenance Code.

(d) Vacant property shall be maintained free of graffiti, tagging or similar markings by removal.

(e) Vacant property shall be landscaped and properly maintained. Landscaping includes, but is not limited to, grass, ground covers, bushes, shrubs, hedges or similar plantings, decorative rock or bark designed and maintained in an appropriate manner. Landscaping does not include weeds, gravel, broken concrete, asphalt, decomposed materials, plastic sheeting, indoor-outdoor carpet, or any similar material. Maintenance includes, but is not limited to, regular watering, irrigation, cutting, pruning and mowing of landscaping and removal of all trimmings.

(f) Pools, spas, and other water features located on vacant property shall be kept in working order or winterized to ensure that the water remains clear and free of pollutants and debris, or drained and kept dry and free of debris, and must comply with the minimum security fencing, barrier and maintenance requirements of the Construction Code and the International Property Maintenance Code.

(g) Vacant property shall be maintained in a secure manner so as not to be accessible to unauthorized persons. Secure manner includes, but is not limited to, the closure and locking of windows, doors (walk-through, sliding and garage), gates and any other opening of such size that it may allow a child to access the interior of the property and/or structure(s). Broken windows must be repaired or replaced within forty-eight hours. Boarding up of open or broken windows is prohibited except as a temporary measure for no longer than forty-eight hours.

(h) Utilities at vacant property must be properly disconnected or connected and in proper working order.

(i) Building appurtenances at vacant property must be securely attached so as not to cause a blighting condition, including, but not limited to, gutters, downspouts, shutters, railings, guards, steps, awnings, canopies, signs, light fixtures, and fire-escapes.

(j) Detached signs and lighting systems at vacant property shall be structurally sound, and maintained so as not to cause a blighting condition, or removed.

(k) Vacant property fencing and retaining walls shall be maintained structurally sound. Any fence or wall with broken or hanging components shall be repaired, straightened, or removed.

(l) Perishables shall be removed from the interior of the structures located on vacant property.

(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.11 MONITORING OF PROPERTY; FEE; ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY.

(a) The City shall inspect and monitor the condition of any property required to be registered under this chapter under the supervision of the Administrative Officer ("City Administrator"), including building, water, fire, police/public safety, and any other inspections deemed necessary by the City Administrator. Monthly inspection and monitoring fees as set by resolution of the City Council from time to time shall be assessed against the property/owner to offset costs incurred by the City, including without limitation those associated with responding to telephone calls, complaints, inquiries, site visits, owner contacts, and/or the inspecting and monitoring of the site.

(b) The building official or his or her designee shall have the authority to require the owner to implement additional maintenance, security, or other measures not specified in this chapter as may be reasonably required to prevent further decline or blight of vacant property. The City hereby authorizes the City Administrator to adopt such reasonable rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the purpose and intent of this chapter.

(Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.12 OPEN PROPERTY; SECURING FEE.

Vacant property that is left open and/or accessible shall be subject to entry by the City in order to ensure that the property has not become an attractive nuisance and to ensure that the property is locked and/or secured. The owner of vacant property subject to this chapter, which property is found open or unsecured, shall be responsible for a securing fee as set by the City Council to offset the cost incurred by the City in contacting the owner or management company to secure the property, or if the owner and/or management company cannot be contacted or does not secure the property within a reasonable time - not to exceed twenty-four hours, the cost incurred by the City in securing the property. (Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.13 FIRE DAMAGED PROPERTY.

If a building regulated hereunder is damaged by fire, the owner has ninety days from the date of the fire to apply for a permit to start construction or demolition. Failure to do so will result in the property being deemed vacant property and subject to the requirements of this chapter. (Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.14 EVICTION OF PERSONAL PROPERTY.

When an eviction by court order occurs, the owner shall place on the private area of the owner's property only and not on any public area adjacent to the owner's property, a movable container of sufficient size and type, which will allow access from its side for disposal of the personal property. Any personal property not relocated from the premises shall be placed and disposed of only in the movable container. The movable container shall be removed from the owner's property within forty-eight hours of its placement. (Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.15 UNPAID FEES; ASSESSMENT.

All fees hereunder that remain unpaid after fourteen days written notice to the owner/management company shall be assessed against the property as a lien and included on the tax roll. (Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

1479.99 CRIMINAL PENALTIES; CIVIL INFRACTION.

(a) Except as otherwise provided, a violation of this chapter shall be a civil infraction and a strict liability offense regardless of intent. Any person, firm and/or corporation that violates any portion of this chapter shall be subject to prosecution and penalty under the City Code. Registration of property under this chapter is in addition to, and not in lieu of, the requirements of MCL 125.539(i), which allows for demolition of vacant structures, or nuisance abatement by the City.

(b) Failure to file the required registration form, or failure to maintain the registration form containing current information shall be a civil infraction and subject to

a one hundred dollar (\$100.00) fine. Each day that a registration form is not on file and each day that an owner and/or owner's agent fails to maintain current information in a registration form shall be considered a separate offense.

(c) Failure to comply with the requirements of this chapter shall be a civil infraction and subject to a one hundred dollar (\$100.00) fine. Each day that a registration form is not on file and each day that an owner and/or owner's agent fails to maintain current information in a registration form shall be considered a separate offense.

(d) Failure to make required repairs, or a second offense of any other requirement herein, shall be a civil infraction subject to prosecution and penalties under the City Code. (Ord. 911. Passed 7-21-10.)

