



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:
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Agenda Item Number: 3

Agenda Date: March 20, 2023

In Control: Planning and Community Development Committee

DEPARTMENT: Office of Historic Preservation

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Shanon Shea Miller

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Potential Expansion of the Vacant Building Program and Initiatives

SUMMARY:

Councilwoman Adriana Rocha Garcia and Councilman John Courage submitted a City Council Consideration Request in 2022 to revise the City's Vacant Building Program to include vacant lots and expand the program area to the entire city, in combination with a recommendation from city staff on additional funding for departmental staffing and property owner assistance programs. The Governance Committee considered the item on October 21, 2022, and referred it to the Planning and Community Development Committee.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Vacant Building Program (VBP) was created in 2014 with the goal to address the root causes of building vacancy, increase public safety, and encourage economic development by spurring

owners of vacant buildings to bring their dilapidated structures back into productive use. Initially, the program applied to the Central Business District, historic districts and landmarks, and a half-mile buffer around active military bases. After the successful pilot program, the City Council made the program permanent and expanded the program area effective in January 2017.

The City's Vacant Building Program currently covers 128 square miles of the city with 917 active cases. In the current inventory of active cases, 63% of the properties are single family that do not meet the standard of care required by the ordinance. The current program area includes the following:

- Historic Landmarks
- Historic Districts + ½ mile buffer
- Central Business District + ½ mile buffer
- Buffer of ½ mile around active military bases, Port San Antonio & Brooks
- Neighborhood Conservation Districts = ½ mile buffer
- City-initiated Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones + ½ mile buffer

Since the start of the program, over 1,220 cases are no longer subject to the ordinance because they are either no longer vacant or they are single family structures that meet the standard of care. Numerous successes can be tied directly to the program. OHP also provides property owner resources and assistance such as the popular Heirs Property webinars to educate owners and tackle challenges to redevelopment.

The Development Services Department operates citywide to address City code violations on vacant lots called in via 311 or identified proactively by Code Officers. Grass above 12 inches in height, trash, rubbish, debris, or brush and dead trees are all considered violations. If after receiving notice, an owner does not address a violation, the City performs the abatement and charges appropriate fees.

The Neighborhood & Housing Services Department manages housing production and rehabilitation programs in the city. Leveraging the Vacant Building Program for affordable housing is included as a strategy in the Strategic Housing Implementation Plan (SHIP). This strategy recognizes the opportunity that vacant buildings might provide for additional affordable housing units. Structures subject to the Vacant Building Program do not currently qualify for most City programs such as minor repair, major repair, and owner-occupied programs because they do not meet the occupied requirement or are commercial properties.

ISSUE:

In response to the CCR, several City departments (EDD, DSD, NHSD, and OHP) are contributing data to a Vacant Property Dashboard available on the City website to promote properties that may be available for redevelopment. Staff will continue to enhance existing resources for property owners, host quarterly sessions for vacant building owners to discuss opportunities for redevelopment and provide technical assistance. By engaging across City departments, a comprehensive approach may be taken to resolve the issues associated with vacancy while conserving housing stock, increasing public safety, and facilitating commercial

revitalization. Additionally, OHP will collaborate with the SAPD Problem-Oriented, Place-Based Policing Working Group as part of the SAPD Violent Crime Reduction Plan. This strategy is designed to improve place-based conditions that contribute to violence, such as vacant lots and structures.

Instead of immediate expansion citywide, expansion will focus on place-based strategies to reduce criminal activity and target affordable housing opportunities. A phased expansion of the program's area, in combination with a proportional increase in resources to the program, would work toward providing long-term solutions for vacancy benefiting property owners, neighborhoods, businesses, nonprofit developers, and the City of San Antonio. Staffing complement needed for the phased expansion will be proposed through the City's annual budget process over the next 3 years.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Briefing Purposes Only

ALTERNATIVES:

The current program area would remain in place.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the proposed expansion be considered in the annual budget process and as part of SAPD Problem-Oriented Place-Based Policing Strategy to address safety concerns often tied to vacant buildings.