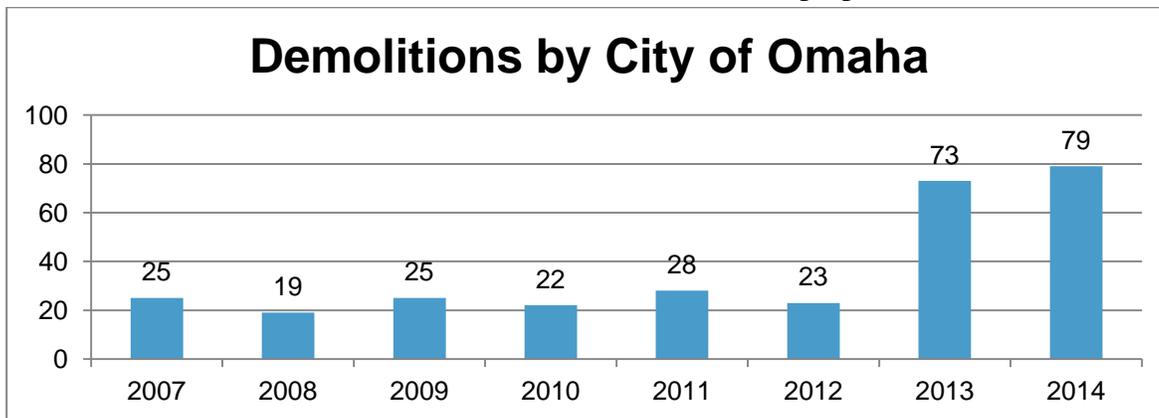




# Omaha Together One Community (OTOC)

**Increased Housing Re-inspection fees:** Prior to 2012, owners of properties with housing code violations routinely ignored the City’s demand that they repair their property and pay a re-inspection fee of \$41. The re-inspection fee was set so low as part of the settlement of a lawsuit brought by large landlords against the City several years before. Some large property owners ignored the \$41 re-inspection fee because it was too low to appear on the owner’s credit report or be subject to collection efforts by the City. Even if paid, the fee did not come close to covering the City’s cost to re-inspect the property. In October 2011, OTOC advocated for increased fees for housing code re-inspections so that housing code enforcement could have a greater impact on neglectful owners. Over the loud opposition of the large property owners, City Council adopted a program of gradual fee increases so that at the end of 3 years the re-inspection fee would be \$125, more in keeping with the costs the city incurs for the inspector’s work.

**Increasing Funds for Demolition of Condemned Properties:** After the 2008 recession, the number of abandoned, dangerous properties began to increase in Omaha. Due to lean budgets, the City of Omaha invested only \$245,000 to \$350,000 per year during 2009 to 2013, allowing demolition of only 20-30 dangerous properties each year. Although OTOC advocated each year for a larger demolition budget, the City made minimal increases until August 2012 when OTOC convinced Mayor Suttle to make an additional one- time increase of \$300,000 in funding. In May, 2013, 350 OTOC delegates won the commitment of candidates for five City Council district to make an ongoing investment \$1 Million in demolition funds. The five elected City Council members then convinced our new Mayor to heed OTOC’s call and Mayor Stothert has recommended \$957,000 in demolition funding in the 2014, 2015 and 2016 City budgets, allowing the City and partners like Habitat for Humanity to demolish over 100 structures per year. Despite the increased rate of demolitions, the number of abandoned and condemned properties remains over 700.



**Omaha Municipal Land Bank:** The Omaha Municipal Land Bank is a governmental entity that seeks to “serve as a redevelopment tool that will create more affordable housing and safe neighborhoods.” The seven member board of the Land Bank is authorized to acquire vacant and abandoned properties by purchase, donation, tax sale and other means. The Land Bank can then re-

develop these properties for the benefit of the whole community. Since 2013, OTOC, in partnerships with

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OTOC Housing Co-Chair Gloria Austerberry with Sen. Heath Mello, Jamie Bergland of the Chamber of Commerce, Amanda Brewer of Habitat for Humanity, Willie Barney of Empowerment Network and other local leaders after they convinced City Council to support adoption of the Land Bank.



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Habitat for Humanity and other community organizations, testified in support of creation of the Land Bank at the Unicameral and City Council. The Land Bank was established in late 2014 and hired their first Executive Director in late 2015. OTOC continues to monitor and encourage its progress in becoming an important tool to revitalize our neighborhoods. You can follow the progress of Land Bank at <http://www.cityofomaha.org/planning/boards/omaha-municipal-land-bank> .

## **Vacant Property Registration Ordinance:** OTOC has advocated since 2013 for passage of a Vacant



**In November, 2015, OTOC leaders held a press conference in support of the Vacant Property Registration Ordinance at a house with a “Zombie Mortgage” where Deutschebank refused to foreclose for over 8 years while the once fine home deteriorated. While OTOC supported the revised ordinance, leaders pointed out that the revised ordinance does not cover the Zombie Mortgage problem.**

and Abandoned Property Ordinance in Omaha as a tool that would create incentives for property owners to sell, demolish or donate their vacant properties instead of abandoning them and letting citizens pay for their demolition. At OTOC’s strong encouragement, the City Council in late 2015 adopted an ordinance requiring owners and banks with an interest in vacant and abandoned properties to register their properties and pay a \$500 registration fee each 3 months. OTOC has prepared a summary of the new ordinance and will continue to

encourage the public to report possible abandoned properties to be included in the registration program.

## **Number of City Inspectors:** OTOC has consistently sought to assure that the City of Omaha hires enough

highly qualified Housing Code Inspectors to assure that the City is able to adequately enforce existing codes. Although the number of inspectors authorized in the budget has been as high as 12, the actual number employed has usually been 8 or 9 over the last 5 years. In 2015, at OTOC’s encouragement, the City Council again authorized addition of a new inspector to bring the total to 9 inspectors in the field and 1 in the office doing work that supports the 9 in the field. OTOC has also asked that the all inspectors receive training to become certified as Housing Maintenance Code Inspectors and receive a wage that is commensurate with that level of training and experience.

## **Other changes to City Code which OTOC has supported:**

- **Adoption of rapid Schedule for Housing Code inspection by the City and action by the property owner:** As part of a City settlement of a lawsuit brought by Metro Omaha Property Owners Association, the City Staff negotiated a proposed schedule for a more rapid inspection of properties with possible code violations. The new ordinance also created an appeals process for owners who challenge that their property is in violation of Code or that their repairs were inadequate.
- **Requirement that Boarding Houses be inspected:** OTOC testified in support of new requirements that Boarding Houses be inspected annually. OTOC raised the question of whether the City has sufficient inspectors to add this responsibility to the existing staff and the subsequent conversation between City Staff and City Council resulting in the Mayor and Planning Department asking for 4 new Housing Code inspectors for 2016, including one who will work to inspect existing homes for code violations.