

## **New Ordinance Aimed at Cleaning Up Abandoned, Vacant Properties** Updated: Tue 5:55 PM, Nov 17, 2015 WOWT Channel 6 NBC

The City of Omaha is cracking down on abandoned and vacant properties.

The City Council voted unanimously Tuesday afternoon to approve new rules. The new ordinance would make property owners more responsible for their upkeep. If the home is vacant and looks like it's vacant and isn't up to code homeowners would have 30 days to fix the violations or register their homes and face fines.

**Omaha Together One Community** says the city also needs to focus on banks that don't complete the foreclosure process and then don't take responsibility for the run down property. OTOC officials call that a "zombie mortgage."

"...we also feel something needs to be done with the state bankers. So I think we have to look at the information about the Nebraska foreclosure laws and make sure then they are not allowed to go over five years on properties," said **Karen McElroy with Omaha Together One Community**.

OTOC members support the councils new ordinance that they hope will make homeowners more responsible for properties like these, but they plan to push harder to make banks responsible for the properties they foreclose.

There are people who believe that no new laws are needed. John Chatelain of the Omaha Property Owner's Association says the ordinance is redundant.

"I think the ordinance is an unnecessary regulation. The city already has the tools to deal with the problem before," said Chaterlain.

City Council officials hope the ordinance will put pressure on what they call "slumlords" to clean up their properties.

# City passes amended Vacant and Abandoned Property Ordinance

*Jake Wasikowski Channel 3 New, CBS Affiliate*  
6:30 PM, Nov 17, 2015

All over Omaha, homes that were once places of comfort are now dilapidated because they've been vacant for years. The city has a new tool to keep this from happening anymore.

Tuesday afternoon, the Omaha City Council unanimously approved the Vacant and Abandoned Property Ordinance.

The ordinance holds property owners accountable if the city's received complaints about a home being in disrepair by charging a \$500 registration fee every three months it's not taken care of. There are more than 800 homes on the city's demolition list, and they don't want taxpayers footing the bill anymore.

“What this is going to do is going to send a message to specifically some of our slum lords in the community quite frankly who have not chosen to take care of their properties who have chosen only to collect as much rent as they can get and then move on to the next thing,” said Council President Ben Gray.

“Zombie Mortgages” are a major concern for organizations like **Omaha Together One Community, Habitat for Humanity, and neighbors.** “Zombie Mortgages” are homes where the owner can’t pay the mortgage so they’re turned over to the bank, but the bank doesn’t complete the foreclosure process so it becomes abandoned. They worry the new amendments to the ordinance don’t address these situations.

"The progress of a neighborhood being halted and traditions lost. All of those are moral topics, banks that hold zombie loan mortgages are failing morally," said **Pastor Jason Emerson of the Episcopal Church of Resurrection, and OTOC.**

The city's law department says the ordinance will still cover some of these “Zombie Mortgages.” They say it doesn't have to be foreclosed upon by the bank for them to register as long as one of 3 identified transfer processes have started.

Investors who are flipping homes, snowbirds, and others in similar situations would not be forced to register.

The city says a large part of these vacant or abandoned properties are owned by out of state banks.

## Here's a New Plan to Get Rid of Abandoned Homes in Omaha

By Shannon Smith Tuesday, November 17th 2015

OMAHA (FOX42KPTM) -- The city of Omaha has said for years it would do something about all of the abandoned homes in the city. Now it says it's getting serious. The city says it will now crack down on the people who own those homes. And it says it will hit those owners with a small fine-- \$500 every 3 months the home isn't fixed.

"Don't sit and do nothing, do something."

The city of Omaha says that's the goal, to fix up neglected homes.

"We see the house sitting here. We see the possibility of putting a great hard-working family in this house," said **Traci McPherson with Habitat for Humanity**.

The city wants to make home owners or whoever is responsible for an abandoned home to either fix it or pay \$500 every three months.

"This was a nice house and to see it just disintegrate in the community day after day," said **Elvin Siebert, who lives near an abandoned home in North Omaha**.

Now property owners will have to register that abandoned house with the city of Omaha.

"When a house has been vacant for years and years that's not a landlord house. That's a vacant house and we don't know if that was ever a rental house," said John Chatelain, the president of the Metropolitan Omaha Property Owners Association.

In order to be registered, the home must be vacant. It also must look vacant and unkempt. Another change, now owners will get a grace period. They'll have 30 days to clean up a vacant home and keep it maintained.

If they do they won't have to register it with the city.

"I'm still concerned that it will discourage people from buying properties, the very properties the city is talking about and rehabbing them because they're afraid they don't want to get caught up in this new regulatory scheme," said Chatelain.

But the city says a new owner won't have to pay if they have a plan to rehab a vacant home.

City council says this plan is all about making sure people can feel proud about their neighborhoods and this will send a message to those property owners who aren't doing anything.

City council says this plan won't affect snow birds or people who leave her homes empty during winter months, people who travel a lot throughout the year or those who may buy a vacant home and plan to flip it. This plan is expected to take effect in about two weeks.

## Council reaches compromise over abandoned properties

Roseann Moring / World-Herald staff writer | Posted 10 hours ago

The City of Omaha is taking new steps to get owners of abandoned properties to either clean up the structures or sell them.

Tuesday, the City Council voted 7-0 to approve an ordinance that would assess fees on owners of abandoned structures.

As part of a compromise between city officials who pushed for the measure and representatives of banking and property owners' groups, the final version of the ordinance is less aggressive than the original proposal.

As in the original version, property owners of abandoned structures must register with the city and pay a quarterly fee.

But the definition of an abandoned property under the ordinance was narrowed. Now, the ordinance applies only to structures that are vacant, show signs of vacancy such as graffiti and have problems with their title or code violations.

Owners of vacant lots can register with the city but do not have to pay the fee.

**David Weber, a law professor at Creighton University** who has studied similar ordinances, described Omaha's plan as more limited than some other places and said other cities have instituted more aggressive versions.

Council President Ben Gray said he's pleased with the ordinance.

"This ordinance is not going to be a magic bullet, but it is going to be an extremely effective tool in addressing some of the problem properties," he said.