



Legislation Text

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AN ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTION 10-3 RELATED TO VACANT BUILDING REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

CITY PROPOSAL:

The city of Duluth does ordain:

Section 1. That Section 10-3 of the Duluth City Code be amended as follows:

Article II. Demolition of Damaged or Unsafe Buildings.

Sec. 10-3. Demolition procedure.

- (a) General. Whenever it comes to the notice of the building official that any building or structure is in a damaged, dilapidated or dangerous condition, it shall be his or her duty to make an inspection of such building or structure. It shall be unlawful to repair or alter any building or structure located in the city if, in the opinion of the building official based upon information documented in the official file and records, such building or structure has been damaged or deteriorated from any cause to the extent that the building official's good faith, reasonable estimate of the cost of repairing and restoring the building is more than 60 percent of the current fair market value of the building, as shown in the records of the city assessor or as adjusted by the assessor for accuracy, and all such buildings or structures so damaged or deteriorated shall be torn down and removed when so ordered by the building official; provided, however, that the building official, or the building appeal board in cases appealed to it, may allow such a damaged or deteriorated building to be repaired, for good cause shown related to the use, location or unique characteristics of the building, when the owner shows that he or she has dedicated sufficient funds to pay for the repair, have entered into a valid contract to have the repair completed, and will complete all the repair and restoration work within a reasonable time, not to exceed 18 months;
- (b) Orders for demolition and assessment of costs. All orders for the demolition of a dangerous, defective or deteriorated building, or for repairs to the same, shall be in writing, signed by the building official, and shall allow not less than 30 days in which to comply with said order. Each order shall identify the structure, state the legal basis of the order, the date of the order, the fair market value of the building, the building official's good faith, reasonable estimate of the cost of repairs, the calculation that forms the basis for the opinion that the damage requires that the building be demolished, the time and procedure for appeal, and other information deemed relevant by the building official. Should any such order not be complied with within the time allowed therefor or, should the structure constitute an immediate threat of bodily harm to

the public, or the appeal provided for in Section 10-5 of this Chapter not be taken, the building official shall, in writing, communicate such information to the city council. The city council may direct the building official to proceed with the work ordered, or to contract to have the work done. In case of the demolition of a building, should the sale of the salvage from such building exceed the cost of the demolition, the balance in excess of the cost shall be paid to the owner of said building or to such other persons as may by law be entitled thereto. A statement of the cost of such work shall be transmitted to the city council which may cause the same to be charged against the land on which the building existed as a municipal lien, which lien shall be recorded with the register of deeds or registrar of titles as a lien against such land, or to be recovered in a suit at law against the owner, or to cause any or all of such costs to be assessed against the property from which such removal takes place. If the city council decides to assess the cost of demolition against the affected property, such assessment shall be made by resolution of the council, and such resolution shall state a time by which such assessment shall be payable, which time shall be not less than 30 days after publication of such resolution and service of notice of the assessment upon the property owner. Notice of such assessment and the time within which it shall be paid, shall be served on the owner of such property in the manner provided in Subsection (c) of this Section below, except that it shall not be necessary to post such notice on the affected property or to publish such notice other than to publish in the regular manner the resolution by which such assessment is made. Delinquent assessments shall be certified to the county auditor of St. Louis County for collection in the same manner as other assessments, pursuant to Section 70 of the Duluth City Charter;

- (c) Service of Notice. Except as otherwise provided for in Subsection (b) above, service of all orders provided for in this Section shall be made as follows:
 - (1) Posting the order in a conspicuous place on or about the building or premises;
 - (2) Delivering a copy of the order by any reasonable means including, without limitation, personal delivery, electronic mail or United States mail to (a) the owner of record (or the owner's agent if the agent is in charge of the building or property), and (b) any other known lienholder of record; and
 - (3) Publication once a week for two weeks in any legal newspaper located within St. Louis County. For purposes of this section, "owner of record" and "lienholder of record" means an individual or entity holding a right or interest in the building or property, the evidence of which is recorded in the offices of the St. Louis County Recorder or Registrar of Titles.
- (d) In addition to other provisions of the Code, this Section 10-3(d) is enacted;
 - (1) Policy. Pursuant to authority provided in Minnesota Statutes, Section 463.26, permitting cities to enact and enforce ordinances on hazardous buildings, and in order to enhance the livability and preserve the tax base and property values of buildings within the city, and based upon the findings contained in Section (2); and because of the need to assure that buildings which are capable of rehabilitation are promptly rehabilitated and buildings which are not capable of rehabilitation be promptly demolished, the city hereby declared that it is the policy of the city to promote rehabilitation of vacant and unoccupied buildings, and to assure a prompt process for demolition of hazardous buildings through a procedure fixing

appropriate responsibility in accordance with due process requirements;

- (2) Findings. The city council finds, determines and declares that buildings which remain vacant and unoccupied for any appreciable period of time become an attractive nuisance to children, a harborage for rodents, and invitation to derelicts, vagrants and criminals as a temporary abode, and an increased fire hazard, and that the unkempt grounds surrounding such property invite the dumping of garbage and rubbish thereon; that such buildings are permitted to become dilapidated since such buildings are often economically obsolete and the owners of such buildings are unwilling to expend the necessary funds to repair or raze the buildings; that such buildings contribute to the growth of blight within the city, depress market values of surrounding properties to the detriment of the various taxing districts and require additional governmental services; that the use and maintenance of property in such condition and manner endangers the public safety and health, constitutes an unreasonable use and condition to the annoyance, discomfort and repose of a considerable number of the public, is detrimental to the public good and to the common welfare; and that renders a considerable number of the public insecure in the use and enjoyment of their property, and thus may constitute a nuisance condition. Adequate protection of public health, safety and welfare, therefore, requires the establishment and enforcement of the means by which such nuisance conditions may be abated; and more government services are required per year for the vacant building as the period of vacancy increases;

- (3) Securing vacant buildings;

- (A) In general, if any building becomes vacant or unoccupied and is deemed hazardous due to the fact that the building is open to trespass and has not been secured and the building could be made safe by securing the building, the building official may order the building secured and shall cause notice of the order to be served upon the owner of the premises. Such notice may be served personally or by mail. Service by mail is complete upon mailing a copy of the order to the owner at the last known address. If the owner fails to comply with the order within six days after the order is served, the building official shall cause the building to be boarded up or otherwise properly secured;
- (B) Emergency. When it is determined by the building official or the chief of police, or the fire chief that an emergency exists with respect to the health or safety of persons in the community, and immediate boarding and securing of a building is required, and where danger will exist to children, transients or others in the absence of an immediate boarding or securing of the building, the building official or the chief of police, or the fire chief may waive all requirements herein and immediately board or otherwise secure the building, provided that:
1. The conditions showing the existence of an exigency are documented in writing by the building official or the chief of police or the fire chief or their designees;
 2. Notice be mailed immediately by the department invoking this Section to the address of the owner and taxpayer, and, if recorded on the assessor's rolls, the

address of the mortgage holder, of the date of boarding or otherwise securing and the reasons therefore;

(C) After a vacant or unoccupied building has been boarded or otherwise secured under this section, should the owner fail to maintain the building in a secured condition until such time as it has been repaired and reoccupied, the building official shall re-secure any openings into the building whenever it again becomes open to trespass, without further notice to the owner. An administrative fee shall be set in accordance with Section 31-6(a) of this Code and all other costs incurred by the city for boarding or otherwise securing a building under this Chapter, including, but not limited to the actual costs for boarding, posting and monitoring the building, building and housing code compliance inspections, police or fire department inspection, response, or protection; public health and safety investigation; control of people or property wrongfully on the premises shall be assessed as provided in Duluth City Code Section 10-3. The above fees, when collected, shall be dedicated to the use of the department (s) that administer(s) the enforcement actions. Owner, for the purposes of this Section, shall mean the person who is listed as the contact person on the current rental licensing application on file with the city, if any; or, if none, the person listed as owner by the city assessor on the homestead record; or, if none, the taxpayer as shown by the records of the city assessor;

(4) Vacant building registration;

(A) The owner of a residential building or building located in a residentially zoned area shall register the building with the building official within 30 days after it becomes a vacant building. The owner of any commercial building or building located outside a residentially zoned area shall register the building with the building official within 30 days after it becomes a vacant building.

1. In this Section, a residential building is deemed vacant under one or more of the following circumstances. If at least one of the following.

- i. Condemned;
- ii. Unoccupied and unsecured for 30 days or more;
- iii. Unoccupied and secured by means other than those normally used in the design of the building for 30 days or more;
- iv. Unoccupied and has multiple housing maintenance, fire or building code violations existing for 30 days or more;
- v. Unoccupied and an existing owner or lienholder requests registration in accordance with the provisions of this Section;

2. In this Section, a commercial building is deemed a vacant building under one or more of the following circumstances:

- i. Condemned
- ii. Unoccupied and unsecured for 120 days or more;
- iii. Unoccupied and secured by means other than those normally used in the design of the building for 120 days or more;

- iv. Unoccupied and has multiple housing maintenance, fire or building code violations existing for 120 days or more;
 - v. Unoccupied and an existing owner or lienholder requests registration in accordance with the provisions of this Section; or
 - vi. Unoccupied and secured for over 365 days.
- (B) The registration shall be submitted on forms provided by the building official and shall include the following information supplied by the owner:
- 1. A description of the premises;
 - 2. The names and addresses of the owner or owners;
 - 3. The names and addresses of all known lien holders and all other parties with an ownership interest in the building;
 - 4. The period of time the building is expected to remain vacant; and
 - 5. A plan and timetable for returning the building to appropriate occupancy or for demolition of the building;
- (C) The owner shall submit a plan and timetable that must comply with the guidelines adopted by the building official. The guidelines are adopted for purposes of preventing nuisance conditions and maintaining compliance with this Code. These guidelines shall be made available to building owners. The plan shall be submitted at the time of registration, or within a reasonable period of time thereafter to be determined by the building official;
- (D) The owner shall acquire or otherwise maintain fire, property, and liability insurance in an amount not less than \$300,000 for buildings designed primarily for residential use and not less than \$1,000,000 for any other building; the owner shall name the city of Duluth as an additional insured on said insurance policies. Evidence of this insurance shall be submitted to and approved by the city attorney.
- (E) The owner shall comply with all applicable laws and codes. The owner shall notify the building official of any changes in information supplied as part of the vacant building registration within 30 days of the change. If the plan or timetable for the vacant building is revised in any way, the revisions must meet the approval of the building official;
- (F) The owner and the subsequent owners shall keep the building secured and safe and the building and grounds properly maintained until the rehabilitation or demolition has been completed;
- (G) Failure of the owner or any subsequent owner to maintain the building and premises that result in abatement completed by the city shall be grounds for revocation of the approved plan and shall be subject to any applicable penalties provided by law;
- (H) The new owner(s) shall register or re-register the vacant building with the building official within 30 days of any transfer of an ownership interest in a vacant building. The new owner(s) shall comply with the approved plan and timetable submitted by the previous owner until any proposed changes are submitted and meet the approval of the building official;
- (I) The building official shall include in the file any property-specific written statements from community organizations, other interested parties or citizens regarding the history, problems, status or blighting influence of a vacant building;

(J) Vacant building fees:

1. The owner of a vacant building shall pay an annual fee, which shall be set in accordance with Section 31-6(a) of this Code. The fee is imposed to defray the administrative costs for registering and processing the vacant building registration form and for the costs of the city in monitoring the vacant building site;
2. The first annual fee shall be paid no later than 30 days after the building becomes vacant. Subsequent annual fees shall be due on the anniversary date of initial vacancy. The fees shall be paid in full prior to the issuance of any building permits, with the exception of a demolition permit;
3. Unpaid fees shall be levied and collected as a special assessment against the property as provided for under Section 10-3, with interest at the rate set in accordance with Section 31-8 of this Code per annum on the unpaid balance thereof. Upon transfer of ownership, the new owner(s) shall be responsible for all unpaid and subsequent annual fees;
4. The fire chief, or his/her designee, in his/her sole discretion, may waive the first or subsequent annual fees if all past due property taxes are paid and the owner demonstrates compliance with all city-approved building restoration agreement.

(K) A building owner shall provide access to all interior portions of an unoccupied building in order to permit a complete inspection for the purpose of enforcing and assuring compliance with the provisions of this Chapter.

(L) The following are exempt from all provisions of this section 10-3:

1. Buildings owned by the U.S Government or State of Minnesota, and their political subdivisions; and
2. Buildings owned by housing and/or redevelopment authorities of the U.S government or State of Minnesota, and their political subdivisions.

Section 2. That this ordinance shall take effect 30 days after passage and publication.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: This ordinance expands vacant building registration requirements to vacant commercial buildings and vacant buildings in non-residential zoned areas.