

City of Westminster

Vacant Property Ordinance

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What is the Vacant Commercial Properties and Storefronts Registration Program?** The Program is a proposed City policy under consideration to address the impacts of long-term commercial vacancies. If adopted, the program would: (1) Require owners of vacant non-residential properties to register with the City; (2) Set minimum maintenance and safety standards, set standards for landscaping, fencing and signage. The concept is designed as a partnership: property owners would keep sites secure, maintained, and market-ready, while the City would provide resources, contacts, and guidance to help bring spaces back into productive use.
- 2. Why is the City considering this program?** Over the past few years, the City has made progress in blight abatement and beautification through its Strategic Plan. The City Council has identified the next step, as a Strategic Objective, to explore ways to beautify the City. Vacant buildings can lead to property decline, safety concerns, and lost economic opportunity. Programs in other California cities have reported reductions in blight, improved safety, increased leasing, and stronger business climates.
- 3. Why isn't Code Enforcement enough to solve this problem?** Code Enforcement is an important tool to address violations after they occur. The proposed program would take a preventative approach by requiring regular maintenance, landscaping, fencing, signage and security measures, and communication with property owners to reduce the likelihood of issues developing. Vacant properties can generate more calls for service than occupied ones. They can generate repeated calls for services related to trespassing, vandalism, and property damage. The proposed program helps manage those demands more effectively by requiring registration which keeps contact information current and establishes a clear line of communication with property owners.
- 4. What impact could the proposed program have, positive or negative, on commercial real estate and business investment?** Some might wonder whether additional requirements could deter investment. The proposed program is intended to do the opposite, by helping maintain secure, well-kept, and market-ready commercial areas that appeal to investors and tenants. Investors often seek communities where commercial districts are vibrant, safe, and visually appealing. For property owners, the program would aim to help protect property value, reduce nuisance activity, and keep spaces in a condition that is easier to lease or sell. Well-maintained and secure properties may lease faster, achieve stronger lease rates, and attract higher-quality tenants. When neighboring properties are also well maintained, the entire area can become more appealing to customers, tenants, and investors, strengthening the overall business climate.
- 5. In what ways is the proposed program tailored to Westminster's unique conditions?** In developing the proposed program, the City reviewed similar programs in other communities and

identified ways to adapt the approach to fit local needs and priorities. This includes exemptions for recently permitting construction or currently permitted construction and the addition to activate 1st floor windows.

6. **What if it takes a while to find a tenant?** The proposed program would focus on helping properties remain safe, maintained, and secure so they are ready to lease or sell when opportunities arise. Properties in better condition may attract tenants more readily, even during slower market conditions.
7. **What triggers registration?** If adopted, the program would require registration for any property meeting the definition of a vacant commercial property, including those that are: (1) Unoccupied for more than 60 days; (2) Unsecured, or secured by boarding; (3) Unoccupied with multiple code violations; (4) Unoccupied and in foreclosure or subject to a notice of default, trustee's sale, or tax lien sale; (5) Unoccupied after foreclosure or title transfer via deed in lieu; (6) Determined vacant by the Program Administrator.
8. **How will the City know which properties must register?** Owners would be encouraged to self-register. The City may also identify potential vacancies through inspections, public complaints, or reports from other agencies. If a property meets the ordinance's definition of a vacant commercial property and is not registered, the City would send notice outlining the requirement and available support before any enforcement action.
9. **Why are there fees and what are they?** If adopted, fees would be set by City Council resolution and based strictly on the City's actual cost to administer the program and conduct monthly compliance inspections. They would not be intended to generate surplus revenue.
 - Annual Registration Fee: \$500 (non-refundable)
10. **Are there exemptions?** Under the proposed program, properties with active construction or approved re-occupancy permits may be exempt if they:
 - Have a valid building or planning permit.
 - Are making diligent progress to complete work within six months
 - Hotels are exempt.
11. **What will the fees be used for?** The fees are designed to recover the cost of staff time needed to administer the program. Fees collected from the program will help fund additional code enforcement and police resources to support property maintenance.