

Vacant Building Monitoring Program- City of Seattle District 1

Vacant Property Snapshot
By Lance Morgan and Presented by Alex Clardy

How Did We Get Here?

On September 5, 2017 the Council passed CB 118971 which makes it easier for SDCI to require that buildings in disrepair be demolished.

Because Councilmember Herbold felt that the City should do more to insure that vacant buildings do not get to such significant disrepair to require demolition (see below for what occurs after just one year), she worked to amend that legislation requesting that SDCI propose a policy option for implementing an enhanced vacant building monitoring program.



The amendment required that such an enhanced monitoring program should:

- (1) establish triggering events for enrollment;
- (2) strengthen minimum standards for vacant buildings;
- (3) include a penalty structure for failure to comply with standards;
- (4) minimize costs to owners when buildings are well maintained;
- (5) allow owners of vacant buildings to have buildings occupied by caretakers.

Background Information

The number of SDCI complaint cases rose from 265 in 2013 to 434 in 2017, a 64% increase.

Complaint Cases in 2017 by Council District:

District	Properties in VBM
1	95
2	72
3	66
4	57
5	41
6	71
7	32
Total	434

In 2017 there were only 43 buildings in the monitoring program:

District	Properties in VBM
1	2
2	7
3	3
4	5
5	11
6	6
7	9

How does a building get into the VBMP?

- In the report SDCI states: “Under current code, SDCI has authority to enroll vacant properties in the program for violation of any of the minimum maintenance standards for vacant buildings. When SDCI becomes aware of a vacant property (most commonly due to a complaint), an SDCI inspector visits the property. If the vacant building does not meet the minimum maintenance standards, the inspector issues the property owner(s) a “notice of violation” (NOV), which requires the owner to correct the issue. If the problem is relatively minor and quickly corrected after the notice, the SDCI inspector usually will not place the property in the vacant building monitoring program. **Other times, properties have more significant violations that are not corrected right away, or quickly return after being addressed. Such properties are typically enrolled in the program and visited quarterly (and billed accordingly) until they are no longer vacant, or until all violations are corrected and they have not had any additional violations for three consecutive quarters.** About half of the properties currently in the monitoring program have been in the program for several years due to ongoing lower-level violations, as owners are unable or unwilling to make the necessary repairs to bring them into compliance.”
- This description of triggering events for entry into the existing Vacant Building Monitoring Program is at odds with the information that we have about the 95 vacant building complaints in 2017. At the end of 2017, a total of 31 of the 95 properties (32%) had multiple NOV/Eos and 68 of the 95 properties (71%) had SDCI code complaints prior to 2017. Nevertheless, again, only 2 of these properties are in the existing Vacant Building Monitoring Program.

SPD/SFD Monitoring of Vacant Properties

- The report states: “Due to the increase in calls about illegal entry, illegal activity, and fires at vacant buildings in the last few years, SDCI inspections staff coordinate with the police and fire departments to enhance monitoring and enforcement at buildings at the 70 or so most problematic properties.” SDCI reported that **there are 43 buildings in the monitoring program citywide**; yet these 70 “problematic properties” are not currently in the monitoring program? Additionally, SFD and SPD use their resources to monitor the buildings.
 - The monitoring program includes buildings with violations that are chronic but are relatively minor or do not present an immediate threat to public safety. Most vacant building inspector resources are focused instead on those buildings with acute enforcement issues that need attention right away, such as because of being open to entry, a safety hazard to the neighborhood, or other such issues. We are visiting the problem properties several times each month, logging inspections and penalties and actively working to restore them to safety. SDCI chose not to add to the monitoring workload with an extra inspection every three months when these buildings are already receiving significant staff time and attention. Enrolling such properties in the monitoring program is presented as policy option 1.D in the report.

SPD/SFD Monitoring of Vacant Properties Continued

- In 2017, in District 1 alone, SPD dispatched officers to 44 different addresses for a total of 284 times. There are 66 active homes enrolled in SPD's criminal trespass program in West Seattle. SPD is aware of more vacant buildings in that area but some owners have not joined the program.
- Finally, in 2017, in District 1 alone, SFD was dispatched to 15 different addresses for a total of 32 responses.

1227 S Cloverdale Street

This residential property is boarded and seemingly vacant. Refuse throughout; not maintained.

2017- 34 Police Dispatches/ 4 Fire Dispatches



8856 20th Avenue SW

This property is in ruin with no standing structure; refuse throughout; not maintained.

2017- 28 Police Dispatches/ 4 Fire Dispatches



9032 17th Avenue SW

This residential property appears to be occupied, but is not maintained; refuse throughout.

2017- 24 Police Dispatches/ 3 Fire Dispatches



1219 S Cloverdale Street

This residential property is partially boarded. Refuse throughout; not maintained. There are obvious signs of habitation.

2017- 21 Police Dispatches/ 4 Fire Dispatches



9248 17th Avenue SW

This residential property is partially boarded. The exterior in the rear has been altered; basement appears to be occupied; refuse and drug paraphernalia throughout.

2017- 11 Police Dispatches



9457 25th Avenue SW

This residential property is boarded and seemingly vacant. Property appears secure with little refuse.

2017- 10 Police Dispatches



1037 S Cloverdale Street

This residential property is boarded and seemingly vacant. Property appears secure with little refuse.

2017- 3 Fire Dispatches



9029 16th Avenue SW

This residential property is boarded and seemingly vacant. Property appears secure with little refuse.

2017- 2 Fire Dispatches



9222 Delridge Way SW

This residential property is boarded and seemingly vacant. Property appears secure with little refuse. There are clear signs of fire damage.

2017- 2 Fire Dispatches



9242 17th Avenue SW

This residential property is boarded and seemingly vacant; not maintained; refuse throughout.



No Longer Vacant

9246 21st Avenue SW: refurbished & occupied

2017- 43 Police Dispatches/ 3 Fire Dispatches

8022 Fauntleroy Way SW: refurbishment initiated

2017- 4 Fire Dispatches

8856 29th Avenue SW: improved & occupied

2017- 4 Fire Dispatches