

<b>TO:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES JULY 19, 2016</b>
<b>FROM:</b>	<b>G. KOTSIFAS, P. ENG. MANAGING DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND COMPLIANCE SERVICES AND CHIEF BUILDING OFFICIAL</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>VACANT BUILDINGS POLICY</b>

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>
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That on the Recommendation of the Managing Director, Development and Compliance Services and Chief Building Official, that a vacant building proactive enforcement policy **BE ADOPTED** at the Municipal Council meeting of July 26, 2016.

<b>BACKGROUND</b>
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**What are the municipal costs related to vacant buildings?**

Vacant buildings that are abandoned place an inordinate strain on municipal emergency and enforcement services. These buildings tend to attract crime, arson fires and become dumping grounds for rubbish.

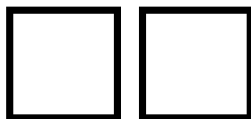
- **Crime** - Vacant buildings often become a breeding ground for crime, tying up an inordinate amount of police resources. Common issues relate to trespass to property, trouble with persons, drug related matters and weapons.
- **Arson and accidental fires** – Fires are very common in vacant buildings. Squatters often burn candles or start small fires for light, heat and drug use purposes. Vacant buildings are a primary target of arsonists. Vacant buildings often contain more open shafts, pits, and holes that can be an invisible threat to firefighters.
- **Neighbourhood nuisances** – Vacant buildings are often used as dumping grounds for debris. The accumulation of this debris within a vacant building creates an additional fuel source, should a fire occur. Fires in vacant buildings could be devastating to the surrounding neighbourhood.

**Why are buildings left vacant?**

Buildings become vacant for several reasons. In some cases, the buildings have sustained fire or other damage which makes the building no longer habitable in its current state. Quite often it is not cost effective to rehabilitate the building to its previous condition. In other situations, the property owners have defaulted on mortgage payments and banks have foreclosed on the mortgage or the owner has stopped paying municipal taxes and has walked away from the property. In other cases, vacant buildings are subject of a development application.

**How has the Vacant Buildings By-law assisted?**

In 2009, City Council approved the Vacant Buildings By-law. The goal of the by-law is to address the public safety and emergency personnel safety aspects of crime, fires and nuisances associated with vacant buildings by removing the opportunities for these negative occurrences to occur.



As per the Vacant Buildings By-law, every owner of a vacant building shall:

- ensure that the vacant building is secured against unauthorized entry
- maintain liability insurance on the vacant building
- protect the vacant building against the risk of fire, accident or other danger

Several Orders have been issued and several buildings have been boarded up by the City to prevent unauthorized entry. Several vacant buildings have also been demolished under the direction of the City.

**What proactive measures are taken with respect to vacant buildings?**

Generally, property standards complaints associated with vacant buildings are addressed in response to neighbourhood complaints. Commonly, doors and windows are secured by City contractors against unauthorized entry; the cost of City actions is invoiced to the property owner. Once the security measures are undertaken, the file is often closed.

In September 2014, Municipal Law Enforcement Services, Fire Prevention and London Police Services identified 92 vacant properties of interest which may present risks to individuals in the neighbourhood and the municipality. This multi-agency enforcement team was established to proactively inspect the condition of vacant buildings throughout the City and determine their compliance with City By-laws and Provincial legislation. A dedicated email address was created ( [vacantbuilding@london.ca](mailto:vacantbuilding@london.ca)) to allow citizens to report confidentially issues related to vacant buildings. The City maintains a registry of vacant buildings. There are 147 buildings currently listed. The Fire Department has a protocol whereby front line fire crews visually inspect the buildings on a monthly basis. This process enables the crews to maintain valuable information about the property that can be used should an emergency occur at one of the vacant building sites. Municipal Law Enforcement Services undertakes proactive inspections as time permits to address issues of building security, illegal dumping, property standards and lot maintenance. If violations are found, MLEOs take action and invoice the property owner for actions taken ( ie boarding, property clean ups, grass cutting) plus inspection fees.

In order to formalize the current MLEO inspection process, the following City Council enforcement policy is recommended for adoption.

That, with regard to vacant buildings which due to their condition are causing demands for City services including but not limited to emergency and Municipal Law Enforcement Services, Civic Administration be given the discretion, to proactively undertake inspections on properties containing vacant buildings, for purposes of nuisance control, public safety and quality of life issues, on at least a quarterly basis to ensure compliance with City of London By-laws

This policy will formalize a process that is currently underway. Vacant buildings which remain in a condition of disrepair will be reported to Council with accompanying recommendations for City initiated demolitions.

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