



City of Saint Paul

15 West Kellogg Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Minutes - Final

Legislative Hearings

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Tuesday, July 29, 2025

9:00 AM

Room 330 City Hall & Court House/Remote

10:00 a.m. Hearings

Special Tax Assessments

- 1 [SR 25-146](#) Review the Ratifying of the Appealed Special Tax Assessment for property at 747 PAYNE AVENUE. (File No. J2510B, Assessment No. 258109)

Sponsors: Yang

Rescheduled to August 5, 2025 at 10 am.

Laid Over to the Legislative Hearings due back on 8/5/2025

Making Finding on Nuisance Abatements

- 2 [RLH RR 25-17](#) First Making finding on the appealed substantial abatement ordered for 887 CHARLES AVENUE in Council File RLH RR 24-17.

Sponsors: Bowie

Rescheduled to August 12, 2025 at 9 am.

Laid Over to the Legislative Hearings due back on 8/12/2025

11:00 a.m. Hearings

Summary & Vehicle Abatement Orders

- 3 [RLH SAO 25-49](#) Appeal of Jennifer Adrian to a Notice to Cut Tall Grass and/or Weeds at 2198 TILSEN AVENUE.

Sponsors: Yang

Rescheduled to August 5, 2025 at 11 am.

Laid Over to the Legislative Hearings due back on 8/5/2025

1:00 p.m. Hearings**Vacant Building Registrations**

- 4 [RLH VBR 25-30](#) Appeal of Gomaa Elzamel to a Vacant Building Registration Requirement at 838 THIRD STREET EAST.

Sponsors: Johnson

Rescheduled to August 5, 2025 at 1 pm.

Laid Over to the Legislative Hearings due back on 8/5/2025

1:30 p.m. Hearings**Orders To Vacate - Fire Certificate of Occupancy**

- 5 **RLH VO 25-17** Appeal of Kristen Sachwitz to a Fire Certificate of Occupancy Revocation and Order to Vacate at 529 ORLEANS STREET.

Sponsors: Noecker

Recommendation forthcoming.

Kristin Sachwitz, neighbor and appellant, appeared via phone

Lori Kustritz, owner, appeared via phone

Melissa Rudolph, neighbor, appeared via phone

Jami Shoemaker, neighbor, appeared via phone

Paul Farrell, neighbor, appeared via phone

[Moermond gives background of appeals process]

Staff report by Fire Manager AJ Neis: this is a revocation of the Fire Certificate of Occupancy and order to REMAIN vacant until inspected and approved by Fire Certificate of Occupancy. Fire safety made previous attempts to inspect interior of home for routine inspections, and subsequently denied access by the tenant. Our normal recourse is sending appointment letters and so forth. Received notification from the owner that the tenant was vacating and they had significantly destroyed the property. In situations like this we do revoke the certificate, there was a lot of heavy content in the home. That's standard practice to revoke and give 90 days to restore the property.

Moermond: that inspection letter was June 30th, and another July 14th, and that's the actual revocation. No order to vacate as unsafe for human sanitation.

Neis: yes, the inspector couldn't gain access for inspection. Still a lot of content and the owner is saying it isn't habitable so we don't need to make entry in that situation and take their word.

Moermond: in a Certificate of Occupancy is revoked, no one can live there until the certificate is reinstated?

Neis: correct. This is revoked unoccupied status. Anyone moving in without our approval would be subject to additional enforcement action.

Sachwitz: I live in the neighborhood and appealed this because we think it is incorrectly designated and should be a Category 2 Vacant Building as designated in chapter 43. As Inspector Neis went through, there have been multiple accounts by inspectors to get into the property and denied. Leading up to the July orders, we observed July 10th the inspector came and didn't even enter house to fully digest the exact interior issues. The exterior noncompliance pieces were mentioned in the order, but we think that with the revocation order it gives the property owner the time to get all of that stuff done on exterior but nothing addressed on the interior. This has been owned by them for 20 years, and they also have multiple properties in St. Paul, including on Summit. I understand minimal code compliance is a D-, which isn't hard to meet. Yet the only reason they've done anything to the property is because of correction notices and complaints put in. We don't have a lot of faith the landlord will invest in the interior as they should. IF it is a Category 2 Vacant Building it will require trade inspectors to go in and do a full inspection of the property. Why would the City not define this as a Category 2 Vacant Building?

Moermond: I want to roll back a couple things. Re-occupancy would mean the entire house has been inspected by Fire Inspection. Mr. Neis, how does that play out in practice?

Neis: the inspector has the discretion on how they categorize the building. The home cannot be reoccupied until fully inspected by one of our certified inspectors. When we have a situation where the owner is actively seeking resolution, a tenant who damaged interior, it is standard practice to give the owner a reasonable time to get it back into a habitable state without going through the full Code Compliance Inspection. If you applied Category 2 threshold to every vacant building in St. Paul, nearly every building may meet that classification.

Kustriz: I just found out about this hearing yesterday. How is it the appeal works? How did this person---I'm just curious. They seem to know a lot about me, but I know nothing about them. These are pre-Covid tenants. I won't even pretend they were great tenants. Government agencies wanted to keep them there. It is a difficult situation to be in. Do I like how they lived? Not necessarily, but they've been there a minute and it's hard. The process to get a tenant out isn't easy in Ramsey County. I've tried to do what I can within my legal right as the owner. She definitely had some SMRLS assistance. Once this chain of events happened we put the heat on and complied with getting the out. As far as getting it back habitable, I know how the inspection process works. I know 100 percent we can't reoccupy and get a new tenant until it is certified. Not one inch of that place isn't getting touched. We're redoing floors, painting the exterior, replanting grass. Again, I don't know anything about that person and it feels personal they went and did their homework on that. You have my assurance it is being handled and we are going to be done within 45 days. Longest 60 days. We told the inspector that was the case and were prepared for that. I have talked to a lot of the neighbors, including the one behind that house, who may have friends interested in renting. That's how you build a good neighborhood. Everyone wants affordable housing but with that comes some character sometimes. I did my best. I worked with the tenants. I worked with the government agencies helping them. In the end we did get them out. It was difficult. We're going to be 100 percent complaint.

Moermond: it is public information, I don't know how it was learned, but for this process it is beside the point. The restoration of relationship will help this in the

fullness of time. Mr. Farrow?

Farrow: I've lived here 40+ years. The neat, well-kept neighborhood except for this house which has been an eyesore for over 20 years. Even before the current owner. We are looking for an opportunity to bring the neighborhood up to a standard we all appreciate. That's why I'm here to register my feelings. The neighborhood feels so much safer with the current tenants out, but now we are trying to get the house to meet the neighborhood standards.

Shoemaker: I lived here for 19 years and have watched the house deteriorate and get worse and worse, and the only time the owner fixes anything is when someone files a complaint. Had they been there recently working, but honestly I can't imagine how they're going to make it habitable in 90 days. You'd have to see it. Ms. Moermond, you said there were photos?

Moermond: yes.

Shoemaker: can we see those?

Moermond: yes they're public record. [explains Legislative Hearing calendar and finding items]

Shoemaker: ok, great. There is a history regarding the tenants who the owner consistently rents to over the years. It is a very real issue and we are very concerns what that will look like going forward. The last tenant lived there 6 years and they were violent, threatened us, vandalized our property. It was a nightmare living here. This can't happen again. This is a nice neighborhood. Most people have lived here decades and own our homes. How has this been allowed to go on year after year and nothing has changed despite numerous complaints and inspections? We're just done, frankly, putting up with this place. This cannot continue. I hope there is real change in the future as Lori is promising us.

Rudolph: I have been inside the property, entryway and first 2 rooms. The upstairs tub leaked into the kitchen. I'm sure the owner new. The house is also infested with fleas. When I went in there were flying fleas and bugs. The whole house smells like urine and feces. The cats had no food or litter boxes. The drug use is also a huge issue. No renter would want to have a chance of exposure to any of the drugs left behind. I know the owner refused entry to the inspector for a reason. We're worried it won't be the proper fixes to the issues. Are we pulling permits to fix the structural issues? Pest control for the fleas? Someone needs to hold them accountable to do the proper fixes. I've called CPS 13 times, 911 20 times in the last year. That's not even the 5 years. One property complaint. The previous tenant was a foster mom and she was wonderful but she left after a month because of the conditions. Is there going to be a rule that if police are called they get kicked out? I know that's a property rule for another property a mile away. I want to make sure moving forward we don't have five years of Lori having a horrible tenant and us having a horrible neighbor making us fearful for our families. I was outside once and got hit in the head by a 2x4. It shouldn't have lasted 5 years. I don't want my kids seeing physical fights and having to run to backyard and call police from our own yard. There is grass growing now, but we're worried about much more than that.

Neis: I hear you loud and clear. I sincerely empathize with everything you've gone through. One of the things that is my understanding from hearing you and the owner, is it sounds like the tenant moved in right before or during Covid. There was a very long

no eviction moratorium during that time. There was no ability to take enforcement action during that time, even for us. Courts weren't hearing evictions; nothing could be filed. If calls are made to our office we go out and respond, and they've been addressed. As far as inspector not going inside, and the owner relayed about fleas, but I would have advised the inspector not go in knowing that. They have to go to others' homes after that. Please understand they weren't not NOT doing they're job. They also have an obligation to protect themselves and any other properties they will visit that day.

Moermond: I'm hearing we have a moment in time where the Certificate was revoked. The neighbors are looking for that to be the catalyst for large change. That could happen a number of ways. You want it to be safer for the tenants, the neighbors. That safety is nuisance property crimes and violent crimes. Those are important things. I do appreciate this is a lovely neighborhood. I like to think we apply the same standards across the City, from Highland to the north end. I take that very seriously. All of you folks seem to have an emotional and financial connection to your neighborhood, which is an indicator to me that your neighborhood will stay vibrant and you are investing in keeping relationships with each other to work this. What we can do as a City may not be exactly what you're looking for but we do have a shared goal in getting this up to par and a safe place. I heard Ms. Kustritz talk about a 60 day plan to get things done. Can you describe what you're working on in the interior?

Kustritz: refinishing the floor, painting top to bottom, repairing drywall. I did not see a lot of mold nor fleas. I saw a lot of flies. Once you remove the items and demolish the things that need to go, it takes away a lot of that. With all respect to the neighbors, we aren't denying they are bad tenants. We couldn't get anyone out. We certainly would have gotten them out. They had access to a lot of agencies that were advocating for them. They were horrible tenants in the entirety. I want you to have a safe neighborhood and people you like next door. Let's talk as neighbors. I'm not someone who runs away. I want everyone on the same page. I don't want you to think I'm a bad person. We can do some amazing things with that house. We have a track record of that, which you don't know due to that house. Sometimes you just don't know your tenant. I do want someone good in there. If I have to have something about police calls in the lease I'm totally willing to do that. I'm willing to put my money where my mouth is to help you guys feel better about the tenant or ability to get someone out that is causing trouble. I just want them to live their lives and be good neighbors. I'm willing to implement that in a lease. We had unbelievable circumstances with Covid where we had to pay taxes despite 18 months of no rent. It was tough across the board. We're just recovering from that. I want to work with you.

Farrow: the purpose of this meeting is to change this to a Category 2?

Moermond: that's what the appeal asked for, yes.

Farrow: would that entail a better inspection and therefore more satisfaction to the neighborhood? She didn't address the leaking bath; you need to do more than paint the walls.

Sachwitz: in terms of the actual property, actual house. Many of the noncompliant issues have been dragging on. Regardless of the tenant. There are issues with the property itself, and those haven't been addressed by owner.

Kustritz: what are those?

Sachwitz: prior to the work happening now, there were broken windows, missing

screens, holes in siding, lack of ground cover, holes in roof. Roofing was replaced but the catalyst was a complaint, not because of adequate management of the property. We have a lack of trust in them doing all the things to make that home safe and habitable based on the track record. The foster mother was mentioned, there were issues back then with her. The leaking tub, how does the revocation address those things? They aren't listed in the orders, and how do we know once it was inspected we don't get trades or electrical inspectors through. That's where this is coming from.

Shoemaker: I would back up what Kris was saying. I know inspector Neis and Ms. Kustritz brought up Covid, which seems like an excuse. This goes back way before Covid. There have been issues the whole 19 years I've been here. It hasn't been maintained this whole time. Unfortunately, we have a lack of trust. We find it hard to believe having witnessed this all those years that this will actually change. Getting a full Code Compliance would possibly give us some peace of mind depending on results.

Neis: I want to be clear I am making no excuses. Simply laying out history. Unfortunately I have no access to history due to the security issues. I've seen brand new apartments that within 30 days of the tenant having been condemned. The Code Compliance isn't going to ensure another tenant isn't going to do the same damage to a property.

Shoemaker: true, a Code Compliance doesn't guarantee future tenants won't trash the place but I do appreciate Lori's comment that she will write something into the lease. Holding tenants to a higher standard with some sort of agreement. That is part of the issues too, the history of the tenants.

Moermond: I have good news and bad news. Right now, I have an appeal of orders issued by Fire Inspections. They are managing it as a property under their purview. They take note and try to have policies in place that do recognize when apartments turn over landlords do need time to basic cosmetic things, which it sounds like Ms. Kustritz is addressing. That act of saying you have 3 months to get this cleaned up and have a revoked Certificate of Occupancy, that is what is what is in front of me now. That 90 days is also in front of me. What is not in front of me is a Vacant Building registration. Fire inspections, for all their power and authority, cannot open a Vacant Building file. they can refer the matter to the Vacant Building team who has their own enforcement areas. They'd take that referral and looking at what Fire inspections did and making their own observations and giving it a category. Based on photos I do think it would meet the designation of a Category 2 Vacant Building. That isn't what is in front of me now. I don't have the authority to issue orders on behalf of the City. I can review what has already happened and act on that. Like I said, the main thing is the Certificate of Occupancy revocation. The second is the initial list of exterior items with a 90-day deadline. It does specify it cannot be reoccupied. It is on the long side; we haven't had an interior inspection at all. I know it is unusual but it does happen when trying to make a Vacant Building determination I ask for a walk through to give an impression of what it would look like. Not a determination of 1 or 2, more whether it will require trades permits from what you can see. I think that would be helpful moving forward. Could you do something along those lines?

Neis: yes. That would be exactly what is done before it could be reoccupied anyway, to be clear. Once the owner contacts us and says they're ready for inspection. Our inspector goes in and looks at it and if it's not ready it would absolutely generate that punch list you're talking about. This tub is leaking, this isn't done properly and needs permits. Our inspections are very comprehensive. Yes, they're minimal code

compliance, but they aren't just checking smoke alarms. They're checking hot water temp, GFCI outlets, things like that.

Moermond: I'd really like to see that. To me, the 90 days imbedded in your order is basically the window for getting things fixed, but I'd like a concrete list much sooner of what exists now so we can assess based on current circumstances. So if there is an obvious leak, is replacing flooring fine or does something deeper need to be done. Then this is more transparent and things have been addressed by the time the Certificate of Occupancy is reinstated. I know Fire Certificate of Occupancy is taxed right now, what is your ability to get this done next week?

Neis: with current staffing next week is slim to none. We're looking week of August 11th at the soonest. I really only have one true residential supervisor working at the moment.

Moermond: so two weeks?

Neis: and that's pushing to make it as quick as possible, yes.

Moermond: Ms. Kustritz, what do you think of this idea?

Kustritz: I'm open to whatever you say.

Moermond: given staffing constraints, plus the current lack of information systems to support daily work slowing everyone down now. Let's get that inspection done by the 14th of August, and I'll have it on the Council agenda August 20th with my recommendation.

Referred to the City Council due back on 8/20/2025