City of Saint Paul

15 West Kellogg Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Minutes - Final

Legislative Hearings

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Tuesday, June 10, 2025 **9:00 AM** **Room 330 City Hall & Court House/Remote**

17 RLH VBR 25-23 Appeal of David Jacobowitch to a Vacant Building Registration Renewal Notice at 839 EDMUND AVENUE.

Sponsors: Bowie

Deny the appeal.

David Jacobowitch, owner, appeared

[Moermond gives background of appeals process]

Staff report by Supervisor Matt Dornfeld: as of June 9, 2022 this was a Category 2 Vacant Building. It remains in the program as a Category 2. The fee is coming due and that's why we're here today. There is a Code Compliance Inspection Report on file but it is my understanding that rehabilitation has stalled and permits may or may not be expired, if there are any.

Jacobowitch: we are now entering the fourth year. The City has already assessed Vacant Building fees on this property and I've already paid several. The current $5,000 fee brings the total since the condemnation to $17,500. Over that period I've invested $60,000 into rehabbing. I intend to continue the rehab until it is code compliant. It is hard. It is expensive. I'm not a rich man. I need relief from these Vacant Building fees. I can't afford to both pay those Vacant Building fees and rehab on my income. I'm just completely stuck. Acting in good faith to the best of my financial ability. I'm basically begging the City for mercy. Is there any way I can have these Vacant Building fees not assessed and use all my financial resources to complete the rehab? I have estimates for the remaining work. I have some financial resources. I can afford to pay Vacant Building fees, but I need assistance to get it done and out of the Vacant Building program. Over the past 3 years I've paid the mortgage and taxes on it. I'm being dragged down by these fees. Any compromise on this matter?

Moermond: the City charges this annual fee and the conditions haven't changed since the last time we spoke. No building permits pulled or action there. Recalling our previous conversations about out holding onto the property and doing it yourself versus perhaps by someone else. This is your calculation to made.

Jacobowitch: I have tried to sell the property. I had an offer for $150,000 and the person talked to Department of Safety & Inspections and they talked about the Code Compliance report and after that the buyer withdrew his offer. Basically, I'm not sure I can sell this for an amount of money that would allow me to walk away financially even. I'm not going to walk away still owning money on what I've invested in trying to save it.

So, I'm stuck. I don't really think the City needs to add another building to its collection of boarded up and derelict buildings. That's the way its headed. I don't want to be financially ruined. I put everything I could into saving this building. The City is charging me $5,000 a year for nothing. Renovation costs are really high. I don't see a way to get it done.

Moermond: when I've talked to people in the past situated like you are—

Jacobowitch: I'm sure you have a lot of experience ma'am, I'm aware of your evil reputation.

Moermond: no, what I'm trying to say is I REALLY earnestly think you need to do an assessment of the long-term financial choice that's best for you.

Jacobowitch: I'd love to walk away if I could do so without owing money.

Moermond: the financial calculus you are talking about is breaking even versus mitigating losses. At what point are you better walking now, minimizing damages—

Jacobowitch: if it will cause financial ruin why the hell would I want to walk for less than its worth?

Moermond: I want you to really consider at what point the taxes and Vacant Building fee are heavier than making a different choice. I can't tell you what to do.

Jacobowitch: I'm well aware, but what can the City to do to assist?

Moermond: all I can do is refer you to Planning and Economic Development.

Jacobowitch: I applied and they said they could approve me but they were concerned I couldn't afford both their rehab loan AND the Vacant Building fee. That's what every commercial lender has told me. That's the cost of servicing a $50,000 over 15 years, I'd pay approximately $5,000 on that loan. That's the same as the Vacant Building registration fee. That fee prohibits me from having the financial ability to take a loan. It is just that simple.

Moermond: I know, I know. Taking any action on your assessment with the sole purpose of assisting you with rehab is not using the assessment tool correctly. It is saying the whole City subsidized---

Jacobowitch: it is more important than people are. That's what you just told me!

Moermond: no, I'm saying the balance between what is your responsibility as a private owner versus the rest of the taxpayer's subsizing your responsibility is the calculus you are asking me to do.

Jacobowitch: you're not subsidizing it. I'm not getting a damn thing from the City. For that $5,000 I'm not getting a damn thing, not one damn thing.

Moermond: we've talked about the program in the past and—

Jacobowitch: I'm not getting a damn thing from the City for that $5,000. I've got nothing from the City. I appreciate they've left me alone for year. I've got nothing from them.

Moermond: I do know that Vacant Building inspections do occur. Mr. Dornfeld?

Jacobowitch: let's keep it specific to 839 Edmund.

Dornfeld: 839 Edmund is in the Vacant Building program as a condemned property. These homes generate problems throughout the City that range from tall grass and weeds to snow and ice to illegal dumping to illegal trespass to graffiti to drug sales to prostitution. All sort of criminal activity. We have a staff of 3 people who monitor close to 500 Vacant Buildings. That Vacant Building fee the appellant wants to know about covers all that goes into the City attempting to keep up with the pace of our condemned vacant structures.

Jacobowitch: none of that has occurred at 839 Edmund over the past year. I've provided 24/7 security over the last year. No police calls. Shoveled. Mowed. I'm sure Mr. Dornfeld is well aware that is the case.

Dornfeld: as we speak there are 8 tires outside your garage and the garage is literally falling over.

Jacobowitch: someone dumped them there a couple of days ago. I haven't taken care of them yet.

Dornfeld: yeah, a couple days ago---that was 3 weeks ago. That's what we do. Thank you.

Jacobowitch: I know exactly what has happened. Maybe the City is the one that dumped them. We get dumping all the time sir, I usually take care of it. You know this damn well—whenever you put up a placard on a property that seems to give people a license to dump. That's happened a lot.

Moermond: I have a photo taken May 30 of your garage with clearly broken doors and pile of 7 tires of different sizes. Is that right?

Jacobowitch: sure. I suppose I'll pay to get those damn tires removed. I always pay. It is enough to make a guy want to destroy the City government. It isn't within my power but I feel like it sometimes.

Moermond: you've talked about that before. We've talked about you looking for rehab money in the past.

Jacobowitch: I can get rehab money. $5,000 is nearly 10% of my income.

Moermond: if you could tell me you would be done or likely done within a few months I would definitely waive the fee.

Jacobowitch: I have no idea. They tell me the property still needs about $50,000 worth of work. What the hell am I supposed to do? I have $20,000 to spend at best. Spend that on the property and then be $30,000 short? Then we'll be here again next year.

Moermond: that's a question for yourself, not me. We've been spinning our wheels—

Jacobowitch: I like the wheel spinning. It actually works in my favor.

Moermond: well you're getting bills, so maybe not.

Jacobowitch: very expensive wheel spinning. I concede that point.

Moermond: the registration requirement for a Vacant Building remains the same. This is confirming the conditions haven't changed. If this is unpaid, we'll be talking about a tax assessment for recovering those costs.

Jacobowitch: this whole thing is about seizing the building. They want to create a tax assessment so they can seize the building. That's what this has been about from the very beginning.

Moermond: I assure you, no one wants to take the property.

*Jacobowitch: THAT'S A LIE. That's a bold face lie ma'am. *claps* You're quite good at it. That's a lie, a bold faced lie.*

Moermond: ok. I wish you a good rest of your day.

Jacobowitch: I expecting nothing from you Marcia and that's exactly what I got. I'll continue to act in my best interest. That's all I can do.

Moermond: I encourage you to do so.

Jacobowitch: the City gives me nothing but hell. And that's what I wish upon them. Go to hell. You deserve the City you're going to get Marcia and unfortunately you won't get it fast enough. But, I'll dance on your grave nonetheless.

Referred to the City Council due back on 6/25/2025