



Long-Term Commercial Vacancies: *City of Saint Paul*



Project Team

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Focus

Long-Term Commercial Vacancies in Saint Paul

- Where are they?
- How do they affect neighborhoods?
- What factors drive them?
- What are other cities doing about them?



(Long-Term
> 1 Year)



Approach

Scope & Process

Approach:

- Observation
- Diagnosis
- Prescription

Each phase builds from previous analysis to develop final recommendations





Phase 1: Observations

DATA COLLECTION



Very little quantitative data available

Observation – driving and walking tours

- West Side – smaller, street-facing, 1-2 stories
- West 7th – very few vacancies, similar to West Side properties
- Summit Hill – not a visible issue
- Downtown – concentrated, street-front and skyway, large properties and multiple spaces



Phase 2: Diagnosis

NARROW THE FOCUS



25 stakeholder interviews

Key findings:

- Info is hard to find
- Navigating official processes in Saint Paul is complex & difficult
- Decisions appear arbitrary & inconsistent
- You have to know the right people
- Grants may not be worth the transaction costs
- Some spaces are not worth the investment
- Downtown population is too small to support to support retail investment
- Historic preservation requirements can be a barrier to business development
- Empty spaces affect the surrounding community



Phase 3: Prescriptions

SOLUTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES



What other cities are addressing long-term commercial vacancies?

Buffalo, NY

Fort Worth, TX

Roanoke, VA

Hamilton, ON

- and more



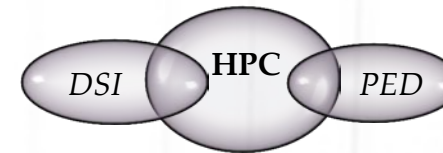
Recommendations

1: IMPROVE CITY PROCESSES

A. Create and maintain a comprehensive list of commercial vacancies



B. Better align HPC with other City departments



C. Reduce restrictions on signage to activate spaces



D. Expand online permitting



Recommendations

2: INCENTIVIZE BEHAVIORS

A. Strengthen taxes and/or fees on long-term commercial vacancies



B. Use new tax revenues to attract start-up businesses to empty spaces

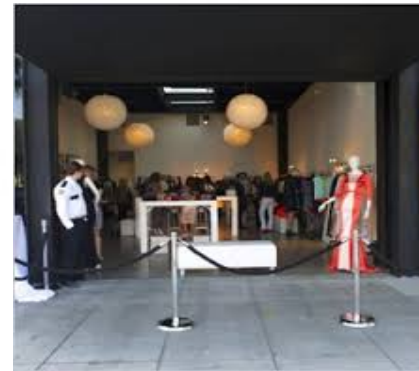




Recommendations

3: ACTIVATE SPACES

A. Create a business pop-up/incubator program





Conclusions

- Vacant commercial spaces are a public problem that Saint Paul can and should address
- Saint Paul can impact the problem by:
 - Improving city processes to increase Saint Paul's competitive position
 - Creating incentives for property owners and for new business start-ups
 - Developing creative programs to activate spaces and demonstrate vitality



SPECIAL THANKS

- Councilmember Rebecca Noecker
- Taina Maki, Legislative Aide to Councilmember Rebecca Noecker
- Interview participants
- Visiting Assistant Professor Daniel Milz, Humphrey School of Public Affairs



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Appendices



Appendix A: Interview Design

Question categories included:

- Space characteristics - the physical characteristics of commercial spaces, including size, condition, freestanding or part of a larger building, zoning, historic designation, etc.
- Zoning & inspections - the experiences of participants with the zoning and inspections processes in Saint Paul.
- Business characteristics - the characteristics of businesses and how those affect their experiences.
- Customer impacts - how the customers of a business affect the businesses use or choice of a commercial space.
- Area demographics - how the demographics of the immediate area affect the use of commercial spaces.
- Experience - the interviewee's personal experience working with commercial spaces and the city of Saint Paul.



Appendix B: Option Scoring Summary

	Scoring Criteria:					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
	Costs St. Paul	Improves bus/prop owner experience	Increases St Paul's competitive position	Who benefits?	Who is disadvantaged?	Total
Option:						
Improve Processes						
Create/maintain list of commercial vacancies	3	5	3	4	5	20
Better align HPC with licensing departments	5	3	3	4	4	19
Promote signage to activate spaces	5	4	4	4	3	20
Expand online permitting	4	4	2	3	5	18
Designate liaisons for disadvantaged start-ups	3	3	3	2	4	15
One-stop shop for business assistance	1	2	2	1	4	10
Incentivize Behaviors						
Tax on long-term commercial vacancy	5	3	3	3	4	18
Use tax revenues to provide tax incentives to new businesses	5	2	4	2	4	17
Better promote city of St. Paul	2	3	3	3	4	15
Expand grant programs for TI investment	1	2	2	2	4	11
Activate Spaces						
Create pop-up business incubator program	4	3	5	5	5	22
Activate the public realm with art/activities	4	2	2	2	5	15
Status Quo						
Do nothing	5	1	1	1	3	11



Appendix C: Not Recommended

The options below were considered by the project team but, are not recommended as priorities at this time based on scoring criteria.

- **Improve Processes**
 - *Designate liaisons for disadvantaged start-ups.*
 - *One-stop shop for business assistance for new business owners.*
- **Incentivize Behaviors**
 - *Better promote city identity, programs, and benefits.*
 - *Expand grant programs for Technical Investment (TI) for start-up businesses entering long-term commercial vacancy spaces.*
- **Activate Spaces**
 - *Activate spaces with art installations and activities in the public realm in partnership with communities.*
- **Status Quo**
 - *Do nothing.*



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Appendix D: Fort Worth Planning & Development Website

Planning & Development

The Planning and Development Department seeks to make Fort Worth the most livable city in Texas by promoting orderly growth and development, safe construction and neighborhood vitality.



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News

- [Permits no longer required for garage sales](#)

Current Wait Times

Schedule an appointment
Get a spot in line before you arrive.

Enter online permitting

Service	Wait Time
Building Permits 7 people in line now.	43 min
Non-Structural Permits 1 person in line now.	8 min
Plans Exam 2 people in line now.	14 min
Plans Exam Consultations 0 people in line now.	5 min
Traffic Control 0 people in line now.	20 min
Water Development 3 people in line now.	14 min

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Hours

Monday-Friday: 8 a.m.-5 p.m.