



STPAUL.GOV

SAINT PAUL CITY COUNCIL – POLICY COMMITTEE

Vacant Building Policy & Practice

July 23, 2025



Introductions

Angie Wiese, Department of Safety & Inspections (DSI) Director

David Hoban, DSI Deputy Director

Steve Magner, DSI Vacant Building Program Manager

Tim Greenfield, Chief Policy Officer

Marcia Moermond, Council Legislative Hearing Officer



Agenda

- Lifecycle of a building
- Benefits of a vacant building program
- Stakeholders
- Statistics
- Governing ordinances
- Financial information
- Path to re-occupancy
- Successes
- Challenges
- Coming with PAULIE
- Goals of reform
- Questions and discussion

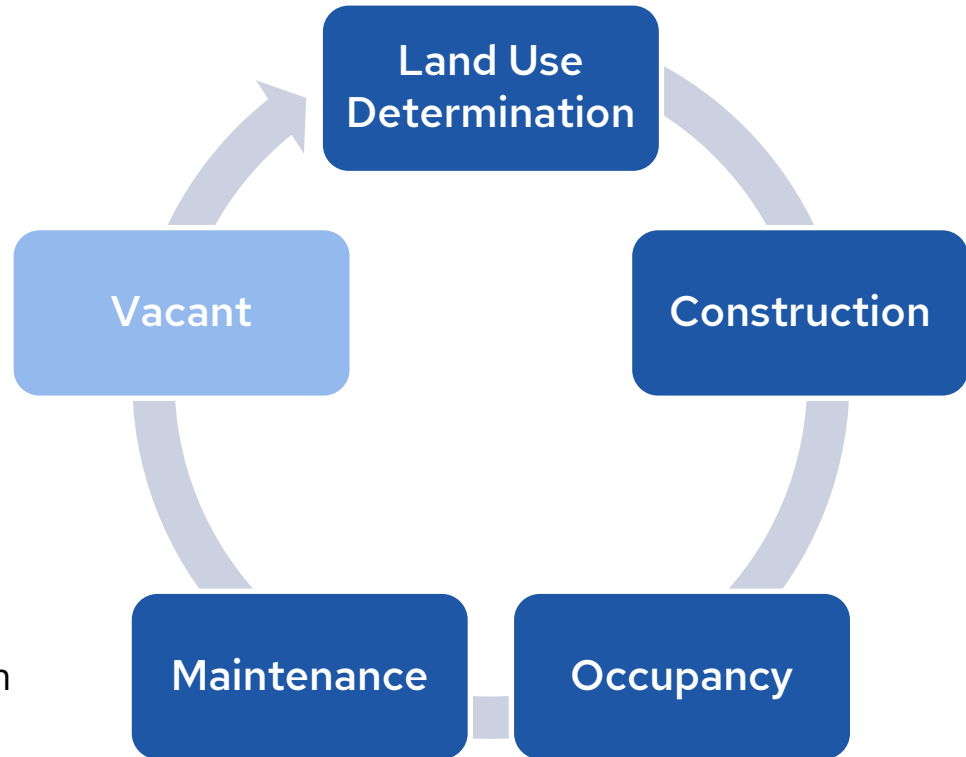




Lifecycle of a building

A Vacant Building is:

- 1.Unsecured, or
- 2.Secured by other than normal means, or
- 3.A dangerous structure, or
- 4.Condemned, or
- 5.Has multiple housing or Building Code violations, or
- 6.Is condemned and illegally occupied, or
- 7.Is unoccupied for a period of time longer than one year during which time the Enforcement Officer has issued an order to correct nuisance conditions.





Benefits of a Vacant Building Program

Protect Public Safety

- Regulations help prevent crime, fires, and structural hazards associated with abandoned buildings

Preserve Property Values

- Nearby properties lose value when vacant buildings are neglected; regulation helps maintain neighborhood stability

Prevent Blight and Urban Decay

- Enforcing upkeep and occupancy standards helps stop the spread of visual and physical deterioration

Reduce Municipal Costs

- Proactive regulation lessens the burden on city services like police, fire, and code enforcement

Encourage Redevelopment

- Clear rules and accountability can motivate owners to repair, sell, or repurpose their properties

Improve Public Health

- Regulated properties are less likely to harbor pests, mold, or illegal dumping that endanger residents' health

Support Community Wellbeing

- Active management of vacant buildings sends a message that neighborhoods are valued and cared for



Stakeholders

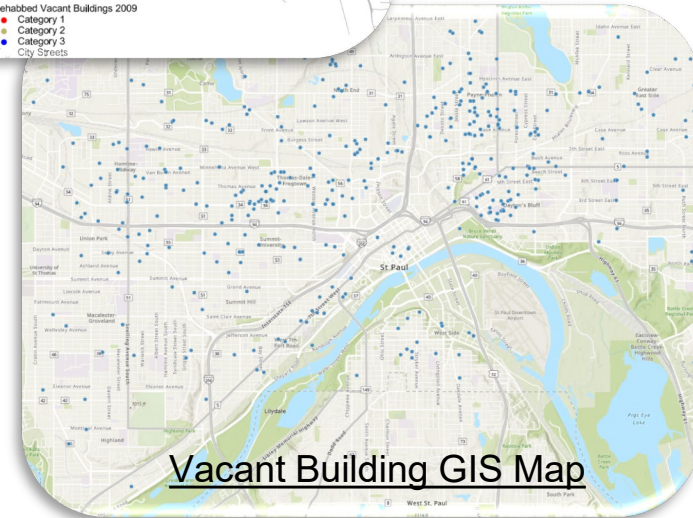
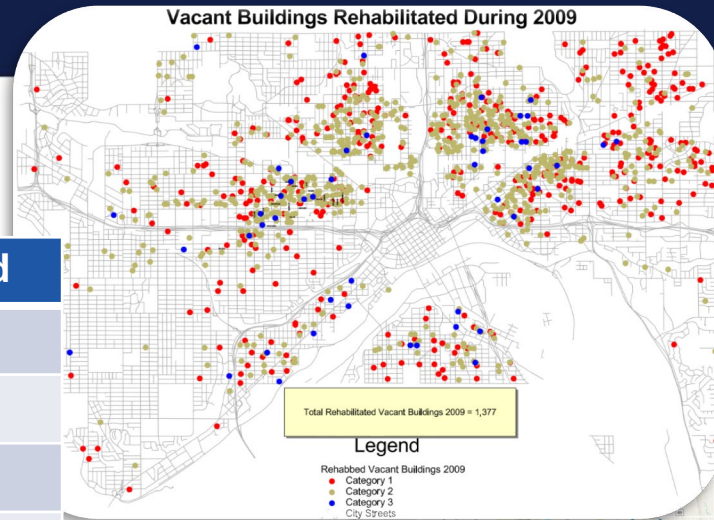
- Building owners, residents, businesses, investors
- Neighbors; residential and commercial
- District Councils, Neighborhood Organizations
- City team
 - Safety & Inspections
 - Police
 - Fire
 - City Attorney's Office
 - Planning and Economic Development
 - City Council
- Realtors
- Building contractors





Then and Now

Year	Max VB Count	Razed	Reoccupied
2005	724		
2006	1041	41	282
2007	1681	51	436
2008	2047	130	820
2009	2009	91	1,377
2020	542	15	265
2021	449	16	184
2022	431	11	176
2023	453	6	175
2024	464	14	188





Water Damage

Structural



Fire Damage



Tale of Two Buildings

Category 1 VB folder opened July of 2024 referred by mortgage lender
VB folders closed February of 2025 as property was reoccupied

1822 Chelton Ave





Tale of Two Buildings

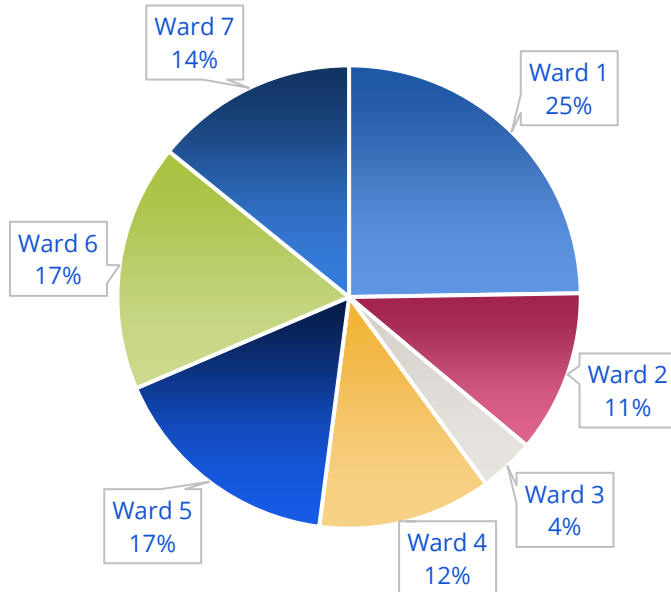
Category 1 VB folders opened February of 2019 referred by Fire C of O; had a fire in June 2021 & changed to a Category 2, moved to a Category 3 VB and Council ordered demolition of building 692 6th St E



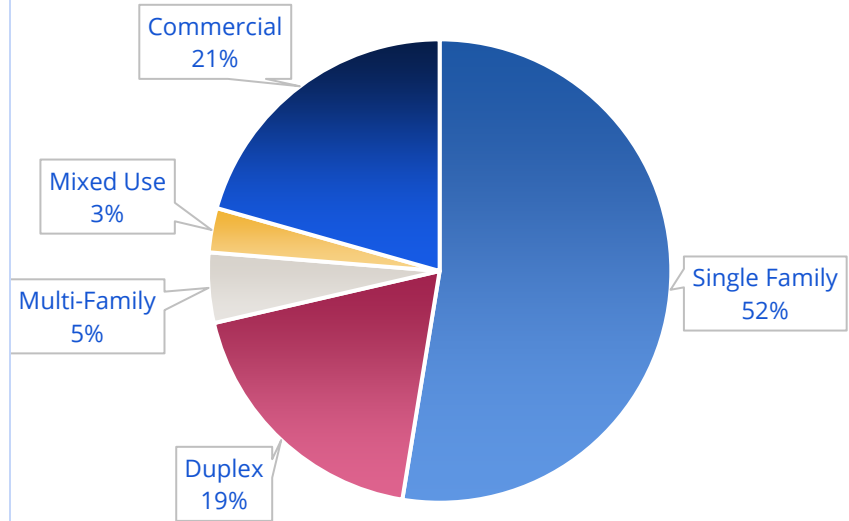


Basic Statistics

VB by Ward



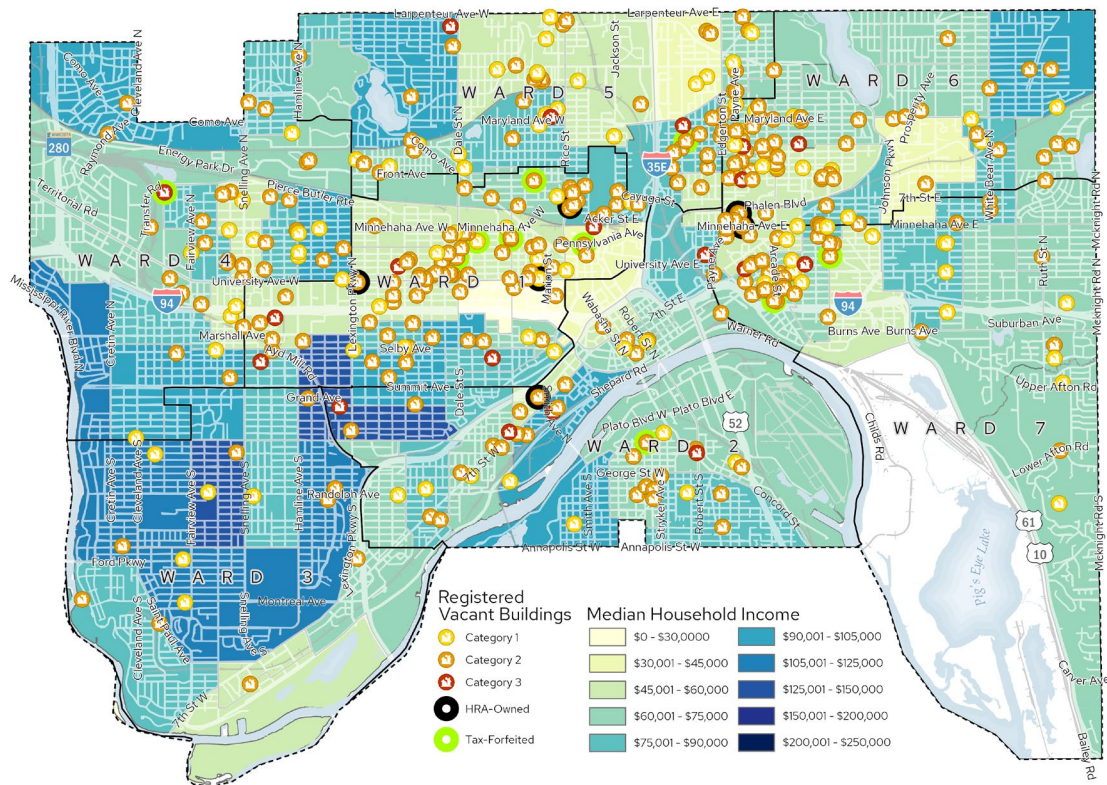
VB by Property Type





Registered Vacant Buildings and Median Household Income by Tract

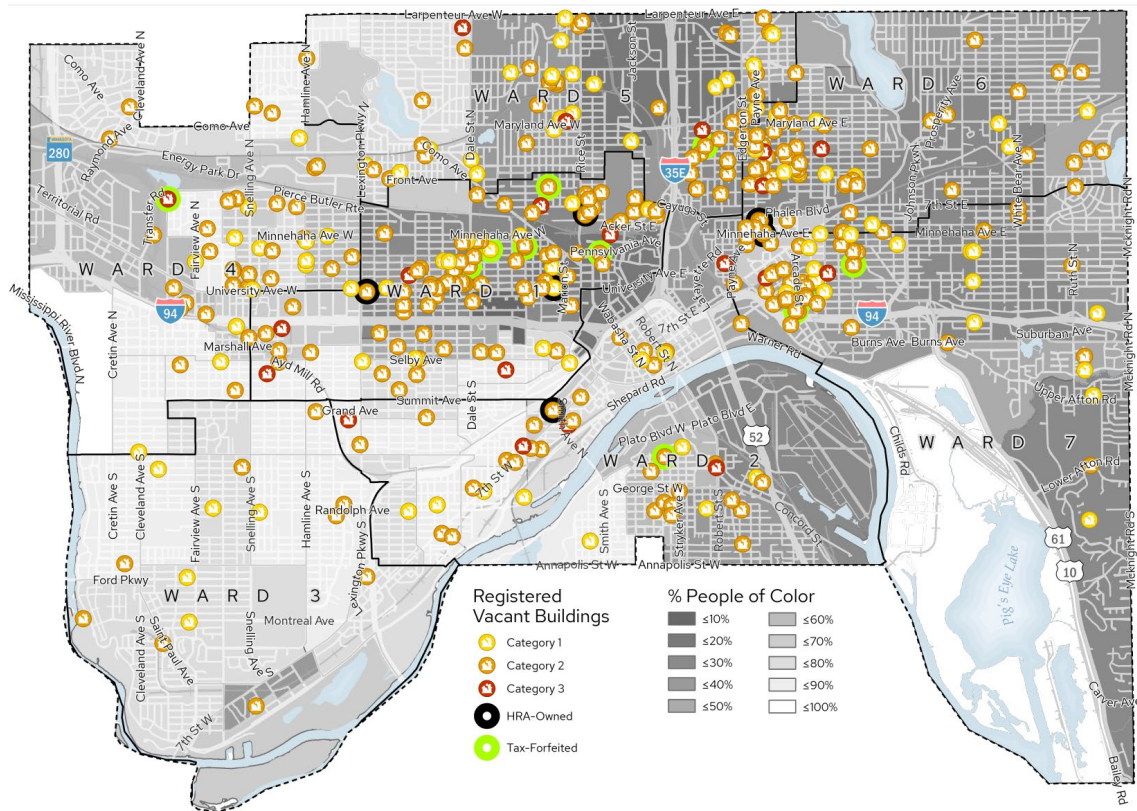
July 2025





Registered Vacant Buildings and % People of Color by Tract

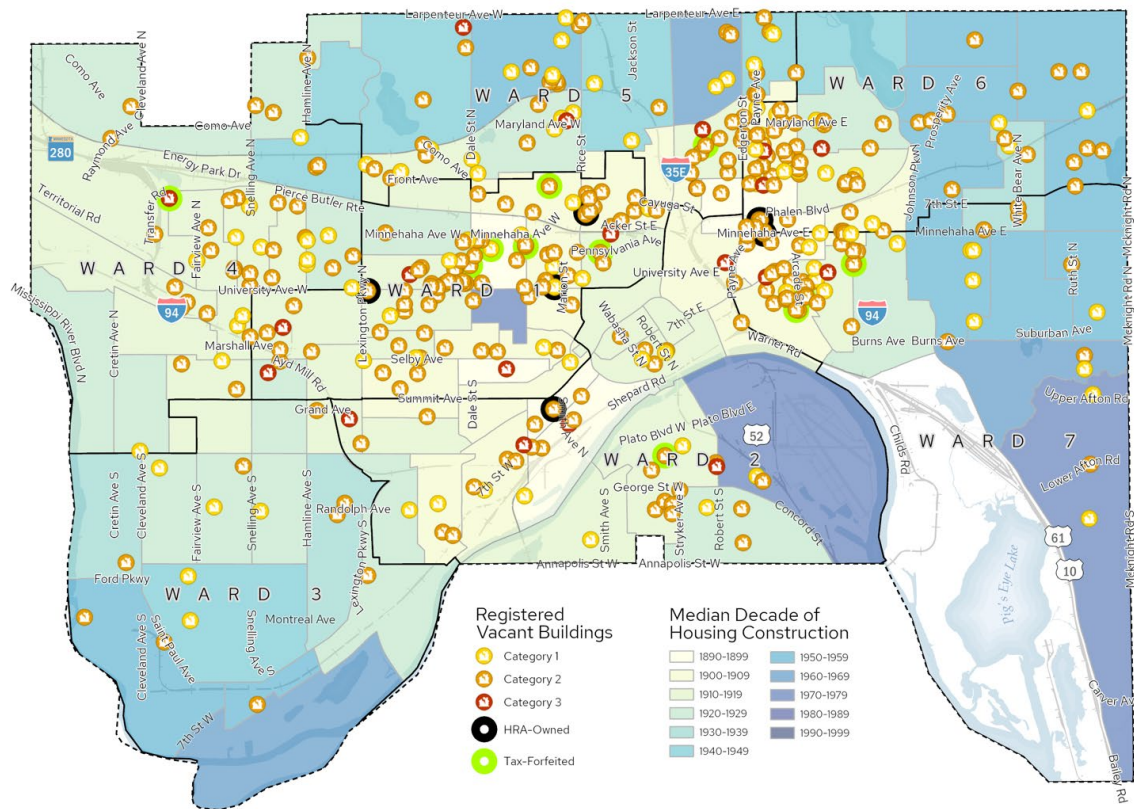
June 2025





Registered Vacant Buildings and Median Decade of Housing Construction by Tract

July 2025





Saint Paul Legislative Code Related to Vacant Buildings

SPLC 43: Vacant Buildings

definitions, registration
requirements & fees
(& exemptions from fees)

SPLC 45: Nuisance Abatement

defines nuisances, gives authority to abate & assess
for costs – including boarding & securing.
Cat 3 nuisance & dangerous building abatement

SPLC 34: Property Maintenance basic
upkeep expectations – for VB's – exterior
maintenance is key

SPLC 33: Building Code & Inspection
minimum code compliance for reoccupation
& ownership transfer pending compliance

CHARTER & ADMINISTRATIVE CODE

*Authority to assess for
costs incurred*

SPLC 18: Legislative Hearing Officer

Appeals & Recommendations to Council:
orders, decisions & determinations of department, special
assessments. Preliminary hearing on substantial nuisance abatements
***RECORDS, RECORDS, RECORDS !!! Answers for Council & bullet proof for
litigation.***



Other Laws Related to Vacant Buildings

Federal Law & Constitution

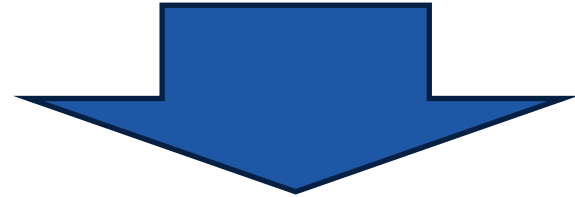
Property rights, due process

Federal & State Courts Case Law

Published & Unpublished opinions

Minnesota Statutes

Property rights, nuisances, taxation, special assessments



**Minnesota State
Building, Fire & Maintenance Codes**

AFFIRMATION OR REVISION

ORDINANCES, POLICIES, PRACTICES

Vacant Building Categories

Category I

- \$2,705 annual fee (ordinance waives for 90 days for a fire if DSI receives the registration form)

Category II

- \$2,705 initial fee for first year, \$5,410 renewal fee

Category III

- \$5,410 annual and renewal fee

*Fees are *not* a penalty but are required for the continual monitoring of the building.

REGISTERED VACANT BUILDING

CITY OF SAINT PAUL, DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND INSPECTIONS, DIVISION OF CODE ENFORCEMENT HAS REGISTERED THE PREMISES LOCATED AT:

THIS BUILDING IN ACCORDANCE WITH SAINT PAUL LEGISLATIVE CODE, CHAPTER 43,
THIS BUILDING SHALL NOT BE SOLD OR OCCUPIED WITHOUT FIRST RECEIVING WRITTEN
PERMISSION FROM THE CITY OF SAINT PAUL, DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY AND INSPECTIONS.
ANY PERSON HAVING OWNERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY OR FINANCIAL INTEREST IN THIS PREMISES
SHOULD CALL THE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER.

CITY OF SAINT PAUL
CODE ENFORCEMENT
100 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 220
SAINT PAUL, MN 55101-1806
PHONE: (651) 266-8989

THIS NOTICE SHALL NOT BE REMOVED WITHOUT
AUTHORIZATION FROM THE DIVISION OF CODE
ENFORCEMENT



Vacant Building Categories

Category I

- Not occupied
- One maintenance violation, typically lack of utilities
- Minimum monitoring of once per month

The longer a building is in this condition, the more likely it is to have increased violations

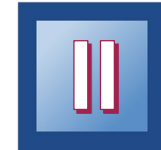
Category II

- Not occupied
- More than one maintenance violation
- Minimum monitoring of once per month

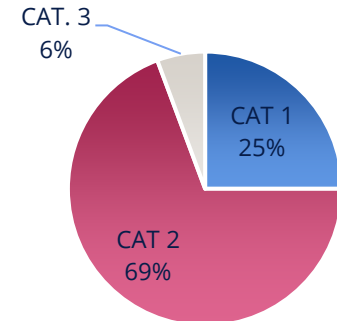
Any evidence of illegal occupancy increases monitoring, including night checks if necessary

Category III

- Not occupied
- Severe dilapidation
- Minimum monitoring of once per month



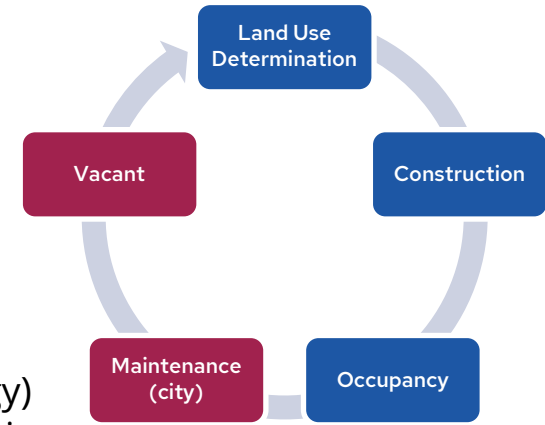
VB by Category





Regulation & Enforcement

- Identification
 - Neighborhood complaints
 - Mortgage lender notification
 - Natural or human-made disasters
 - Utility shut-off notifications (SPRWS, Xcel Energy, District Energy)
 - Interior Code Enforcement inspections resulting in condemnation
 - Fire Certificate of Occupancy referrals; condemned or revoked
- Managing
 - Monitoring identifies maintenance issue and safety hazards
 - Routine neighborhood and ownership engagement
 - Night monitoring performed on a case-by-case basis when evening occupancy is suspected





Vacant Building Fees

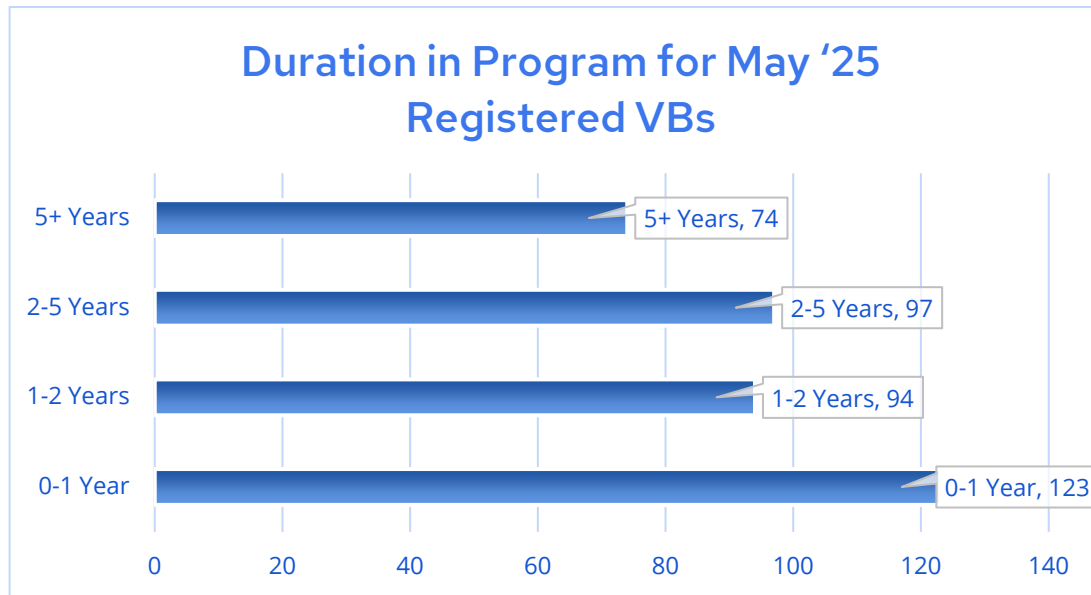
Fee Levels for May '25 Sample:

\$2,459

- Category 1 = 97
- Category 2 < 1 year = 67

\$4,918

- Category 2 > 1 year = 202
- Category 3 = 22





Fiscal Overview

- VB Team- Inspectors, Sale Review Coordinator, Manager
- Costs
 - All fees are considered cost recovery
 - Abatement expenses via vendor contracts, recovery through Council-approved tax assessments
 - Emergency demolitions come from general fund
- CDBG cannot be used unless the property has been vacant for more than one year
- “Free” Vacant Buildings
 - HRA
 - Ramsey County
- Notifications and Invoicing
- Contracts
- Council Costs/Financing

DSI Budget Summary

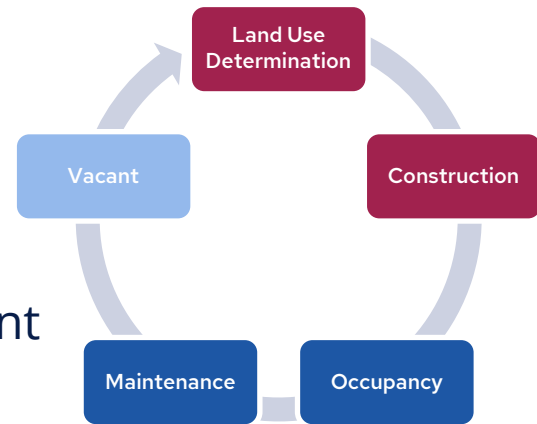
Year	VB Program Expenses	VB Program Revenue
2024	\$836,880	\$489,919
2023	\$803,396	\$386,905
2022	\$456,622	\$290,628



Path to Re-occupancy

Category I

- Up to date on registration fees
 - Ordinance waives fees for 90 days when the vacant building is the result of a fire
- Notify the city if there is new ownership
- Restore utilities and comply with orders for legal occupancy
- Obtain a Truth-in-Sale of Housing Report for sale
- Apply for a Provisional Fire Certificate of Occupancy, if renting





Path to Re-occupancy

Category II

- **Vacant Building Registration Form** and payment of fee
- **Sale Review** Process (residential only): Application of new ownership \$324 fee
 - Conformance with zoning requirements- If a building is vacant for more than one year, it loses its legal non-conforming status
 - Code Compliance Report
 - Cost estimate from licensed contractor for all repairs to be done in accordance with the Code Compliance Report. *Exception: if a homeowner's affidavit of residency is filled out, all permits other than plumbing may be pulled by the homeowner.*
 - A timeline for completing all repairs
 - Proof of financial capability to complete all repairs

While sale review is required prior to issuance of any permits, many properties **close without a sale review**. Worst case scenario - someone buys a property with a TISH and is then informed of the process.



Path to Re-occupancy

Category III

- **Order to Abate** nuisance issued to all interested parties
 - Orders the demolition of the building with **public hearing notification**
 - Notification lists dates of legislative and council public hearings; personally served on PO, also mailed USPS; sent certified mail to all interested parties; posted on GovDelivery; posted twice in Pioneer Press; notice posted on building
 - **City Council** may approve Legislative Hearing Officer's recommendation to allow time to rehabilitate the property or raze the building
- No sale without a **Certificate of Code Compliance or Certificate of Occupancy**
 - In many cases, a purchaser will have an agreement where title will transfer upon completion of the code compliance repairs
- Agreement to rehab requires a **\$5,000 six-month performance deposit**
- Sometimes, this process is preceded by a full inspection of the building and HPC review



Program Successes

- Remove occupants and materials from unsafe buildings
- Low recidivism
- Tragic events are non-existent (deaths, gas explosion, etc.)
- Incredibly low portion of structures in the city are vacant (~0.6%)
- Framework and record-keeping competency
- Monitoring methods reduce blight
 - Sidewalks are shoveled
 - Boarded openings are painted to blend in
 - Dumped materials are removed





Challenges with the Program

Slow and Resource-Intensive

- Hearings can delay urgent action and stretch over months
- Not all hearings lead to meaningful policy change
- Hearings demand time, staff, and money

Posturing without Action

- Nuisance buildings may become platforms for politics rather than solutions
- Dollars are better spent going into re-occupancy than giving updates

Access to Information and Services

- Marginalized communities may struggle to participate
- Fire damaged property owners can be re-victimized

Consistency

- Testimony may favor anecdote over data
- 90-day fire waiver is short given current insurance practices
- Documenting construction progress and forecast

Does not achieve cost recovery

Some of these elements are on purpose. Due process takes time.



Coming with PAULIE

- All applications available online
 - Initial registration
 - New owner registration
 - Code compliance inspection request
 - Sale review
 - Construction permits
- Efficiencies in code compliance inspection report by removing manual processes and formatting
- All fees are available to be paid online
- All permits are linked together





Goals for Refinement



- Raze only buildings in the worst shape
- Continue to prevent buildings from cycling back to a vacant building
- Increase consistency in documenting construction progress and forecasting
- Clear expectations for future penalty tool with administrative citations
- Increase equity in services provided to get back to occupancy
- Increase neighborhood development corporation participation

Questions & Open Discussion

