Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title:	Recommendation to request City Attorney to draft an ordinance amending Long Beach Municipal Code Chapter 18.21, Maintenance of Long-Term Boarded and Vacated Buildings, to include vacant lots. (Citywide)				
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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
6/13/2017	1	City Council	approve recommendation	Pass

Recommendation to request City Attorney to draft an ordinance amending Long Beach Municipal Code Chapter 18.21, Maintenance of Long-Term Boarded and Vacated Buildings, to include vacant lots. (Citywide)

On May 24, 2016, the City Council requested the City Manager to explore the feasibility of a citywide Vacant Lot Registry Ordinance that would address the negative impacts of vacant lots throughout Long Beach. This City Council request followed the successful implementation of a revised Foreclosure Registration Program in October 2011 and the ongoing success of the Vacant Building Monitoring Program.

The intent of a Vacant Lot Registry is to complement the Foreclosure Registry and the Vacant Building Monitoring Program in protecting neighborhoods from negative impacts associated with vacant buildings and lots. Vacant lots, particularly those that are not well kept, are associated with decreased perceptions of neighborhood safety and decreased property values. Vacant lot registration, enhanced maintenance and upkeep standards, and proactive inspections can help mitigate the negative impacts associated with vacant lots while creating opportunities for community members and potential developers to activate such lots for community-serving uses and potential development opportunities.

Staff secured a list of 2,100 potentially vacant lots based upon property ownership records provided by the Los Angeles County Office of the Assessor (Assessor). Using GIS tools, aerial photography, and City records, staff analyzed each of the 2,100 lots to determine whether it would be eligible for the Vacant Lot Registry (Registry). Over 70 percent of the lots originally identified through the Assessor were deemed ineligible for the Registry by staff. Upon completion of the computer-based analysis, a random sample of lots from the original list of 2,100 was selected and field-checked for eligibility and accuracy. Through this blind

random sample, staff verified a 98 percent accuracy rate; 49 of the 50 lots visited were confirmed to have the same vacant/non-vacant status as found through GIS verification. Staff conducted site visits to additional lots for which vacancy status was unclear to confirm eligibility for the Registry. This field work was completed in April 2017.
Through the verification process, staff excluded 1,482 lots from the original list of 2,100 for several reasons. Some of the listed parcels were found to be built out, some are private streets or private open space, some are submerged parcels in the Los Angeles or San Gabriel River, and some are in the Port of Long Beach. It is possible that lots classified by the Assessor as vacant, that were verified as having improvements (such as with buildings, commercial uses, parking uses, or as yard area for an adjacent parcel), may not be properly assessed. These lots will be excluded from the Registry but will be reported back to the Assessor to ensure proper tax assessment and collection is taking place.

Concurrent with data collection and analysis, staff researched vacant lot registry and monitoring programs in other cities in California and across the country, including the cities of Pasadena, Torrance, Monterey Park, Baldwin Park, San Francisco, Oakland, and Jersey City, NJ. Based on these examples, staff compiled a draft set of development standards and requirements for the Registry.   Development Services staff met with the City Attorney's Office to explore model Ordinances and how a Registry could be established.

Staff proposes creating a proactive Vacant Lot Registry by expanding the Vacant Building Monitoring Program in Chapter 18.21 of the Long Beach Municipal Code to include vacant lots in addition to vacant buildings. Adding the Registry to the Vacant Building Monitoring Program will allow staff to leverage existing programmatic infrastructure, including notification to owners, monthly fees billed to owners on a quarterly basis, inspections, and abatement by the City in the case of negligent or non-responsive owners. Staff recommends that development standards for vacant lots include a white vinyl split rail fence, upkeep standards and weed abatement, and curb painting of the address. Staff recommends authorizing the Director of Development Services with the discretion to grant case-specific, temporary fee exemptions for vacant lot owners who agree to allow a lot to be used for specific community-serving uses, which may include urban agriculture, community programming or events, or pop-up businesses allowed by the subject zoning district.

Finally, staff proposes that the Registry be made publicly available through DataLB, the City's open data platform. This would allow neighbors, community members, and potential developers alike to access information on where vacant land opportunity sites exist throughout Long Beach. Once the Registry is implemented, staff recommends conducting an annual review of demolition permits to identify new vacant lots, and staff will work with the community to verify any additional vacant lots not identified through the initial data scan and analysis.

This matter was reviewed by Assistant City Attorney Michael J. Mais on May 1, 2017 and by Budget Management Officer Rhutu Amin Gharib on May 4, 2017.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Vacant Lot Registry is expected to increase sustainability in Long Beach by providing opportunity sites for urban greening and community-serving uses while decreasing the negative impacts of illegal dumping. Staff recommends allowing case-specific fee exemptions for vacant lot owners who agree to allow temporary urban agriculture, other urban greening (such as pocket parks and community gardens) or specific community-serving uses.

In particular, with the expected adoption of a local Urban Agricultural Incentive Zone (AB 551) Implementation Ordinance in Long Beach, there will be tax incentives available for property owners to allow urban agriculture on vacant lots for a minimum of five years. A publicly available vacant lot database and map will provide the community with access to information on available lots for such uses. On average, produce purchased in Los Angeles County travels 1,500 miles before consumption, so localizing food sources can help reduce vehicle miles traveled while increasing community resilience to climate impacts. As an example, local food sources increase community resilience to major weather events such as an earthquake or storm that could hinder transportation networks currently relied upon for food supply. More generally, activating vacant lots with community-serving destinations such as mini-parks, community gardens or community programming in local neighborhoods increases perceptions of neighborhood safety, helping residents feel comfortable walking or biking, while providing new local destinations accessible by non-motorized transportation.

City Council action on this matter is not time critical.

There is no fiscal impact associated with preparing the Ordinance amendment. Staff is analyzing the costs associated with implementing the Registry program to propose fees sufficient to cover costs. These costs will be provided when the Ordinance is brought to the City Council and the cost recovery fees will be proposed as part of the City's Master Fee and Charges Schedule during the annual budget process.

Approve recommendation.

AMY J. BODEK, AICP
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

APPROVED:

PATRICK H. WEST
CITY MANAGER