

STAFF REPORT

City of Lancaster

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6/10/2025
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Date: June 10, 2025

To: Mayor Parris and City Council Members

From: Patti Garibay, Director - Community Development
Rod Armalin, Chief of Police – Lancaster Police Department
Sam McNutt, Manager - Community Preservation

Subject: Introduction of Ordinance x adding Chapter 9.55 to the Lancaster Municipal Code
Relating to Vacant Residential Properties

Recommendation:

1. Introduce Ordinance No. , adding Chapter 9.55 to the Lancaster Municipal Code relating to Vacant Residential Properties.
2. Authorize the City Manager to approve the Vacant Property Registration Application in substantially the form attached, and to amend the same from time to time as the City Manager determines to be necessary or appropriate.

G.C. Section 84308: No

Fiscal Impact:

No anticipated financial impact.

Background:

The City has received reports of vacant residential properties that are not being maintained, are unsafe to enter or occupy, or pose significant health and safety risks, causing disturbances to the community. The Municipal Code defines a vacant residential property as a property that is substantially vacant, unoccupied, or abandoned for more than forty-five (45) days, and where construction, pursuant to an active building permit, is not taking place or where an inspection by Building and Safety, pursuant to an active building permit, has not been conducted within the previous ninety (90) days.

Vacant properties have the potential to be a significant source of blight in residential neighborhoods, particularly when property owners neglect their maintenance and management. When this happens, unkept properties have the potential to depreciate property values and create other neighborhood issues, including trespassing and unsightly vegetation.

Many jurisdictions have enacted ordinances to mitigate the disturbances of these vacant properties in their community. The adoption of Chapter 9.55 to the Lancaster Municipal Code will provide Lancaster's Community Preservation team and Police Department with greater oversight of vacant properties. This Chapter will require all vacant properties to be registered by their owner with the City so that homes can be easily located and issues such as blight or trespassing can be resolved quickly.

Chapter 9.55 will require property owners to maintain and secure their property in accordance with all provisions in Chapter 8.28 and additionally require the filing of a Vacant Property Registration (VPR) form with the City. The VPR will gather information including a description of the methods by which the person who owns, possesses or is in control of vacant property has or will secure the vacant property against unauthorized entry, a contact phone number for the property owner and individual responsible for the maintenance and security of the vacant property, the most recent legal use of the vacant property, the square footage of the vacant property and any future plans for the vacant property. The property owner will also provide the City with details regarding the fire and liability insurance coverage available for the property and will provide a Letter of Agency (LOA) authorizing the City to remove all unauthorized trespassing persons.

The ordinance will require property owners to meet maintenance requirements, including keeping their property clean, watered and weeded, removing dead or dying plants, ensuring that groundcover vegetation does not grow taller than six inches and maintaining bushes and shrubs no higher than thirty-six (36) inches to allow for a clear view from the public right-of-way. Irrigation adequate for the health and growth of groundcover plants will also be required. Property owners will need to ensure that trash, debris, rubbish, discarded furniture or defective or discarded equipment or appliances or items of similar nature are removed from the property and "No Trespassing" signs will be installed at locations on the property as required by the Chief of Police. Violations that are not cleared in compliance with Chapter 9.55 will be subject to the administrative penalty provisions of Municipal Code Section 1.16.

Community Preservation and LPD staff are already aware of many of the homes in the community that are vacant. The approval of this ordinance will allow for better oversight and provide staff with the ability to proactively handle these cases and hold property owners accountable if they are not managing their property responsibly. Having an LOA on file will allow the City to act quickly when we become aware of trespassing issues.

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Attachment:
Ordinance No. XXXX