



Department Source: Community Development - NS

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: December 18, 2023

Re: Report from Vacant Property Leadership Institute

Executive Summary

Columbia was one of ten jurisdictions selected to participate in the Vacant Property Leadership Institute (VPLI) hosted by Center for Community Progress, Nov. 7-10 in Austin, Texas. This report shares possible action items as a result of participating.

Discussion

The City of Columbia was selected through a competitive process to participate in the 2023 VPLI as one of 10 jurisdictions from three states. Missouri was also represented by St. Louis City, St. Louis County and Springfield. Columbia's delegation included Randy Cole, CEO of the Columbia Housing Authority; Conrad Hake, Program Director with Love Columbia; First Ward Councilperson Nick Knoth; Leigh Kottwitz, Neighborhood Services Manager; and Robert Rinck, City Prosecutor. The goal of VPLI is to help communities tackle vacant, abandoned and deteriorated properties.

Columbia's delegation left the Institute with these ideas that may be most effective to address the needs of our community:

- **Property condition mapping:** This would include an assessment of all properties in the City giving each a score based on condition and also noting the status of the property (occupied, vacant, vacant lot, etc.). This data can provide information on properties, where resources are needed, where disparities exist, and how properties have changed over time. Data for this project could be collected by City staff and resident volunteers and ideally would be refreshed every few years. Several other communities have participated in this work.
- **Strategic Code Enforcement:** The City's municipal prosecutor has requested that a special code enforcement docket be added to the municipal court to focus work on problem properties and owners with the most significant violations.
- **Abatement tax bill collection:** Fees for nuisance abatements and demolitions are often unpaid. Structures that are demolished by the City lead to vacant lots with little hope of redevelopment. The City may want to explore asking Boone County to help with collecting these fees with property tax as Springfield does in Greene County. The City may also explore foreclosing on properties to move them into productive use.
- **Estate Planning:** Columbia has a number of vacant properties that have "tangled titles" with no person having responsibility for the property. We may want to explore resources to help families with title issues and increase community education and resources around this issue. The Boone County Upward Mobility project and the Affordable Housing Coalition are also discussing this topic.



- **Amendments to the Unified Development Code (UDC)** to empower development on infill lots to consider setbacks, lot size and other current restrictions. The City’s recent UDC changes to facilitate the use of lots less than the conventional minimum width or lot area is a move in this direction; and the City has begun work on central neighborhood overlay standards and design guidelines to facilitate compatible infill development.
- **Vacant Property Registry (VPR):** A VPR would require owners of properties to register the address with the City after being vacant for a specified period of time. Fees collected from the program would offset public expense for monitoring the property and to incentivize occupancy. Exceptions could be allowed for properties actively for sale or under renovation.
- **Supporting statewide efforts related to land banks:** There is an effort from St. Louis to support state legislation that would allow any Missouri local government to establish their own land bank and help clear title issues on properties sold for delinquent property taxes. While a land bank may not make an immediate impact on Columbia, we believe this may be a useful tool in the future and this legislation should be supported.

Possible next steps may include receiving direction from the City Manager and City Council. We may want to share details on these ideas with the community for additional feedback and actions may coincide with the introduction of the Housing & Neighborhood Services Department. Many of these ideas can be accomplished without legislative action in cooperation with community partners.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: n/a
 Long-Term Impact: n/a

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Safe Community, Secondary Impact: Resilient Economy, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Livable & Sustainable Communities, Secondary Impact: Land Use & Growth Management, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
n/a	n/a

Suggested Council Action

Acceptance of this report; guidance on next steps related to vacant properties.