



PROFILE | City of Springfield

Springfield has taken a collaborative approach involving multiple city departments in their battle against the ill-effects of vacant and abandoned properties. This effort includes several city departments including the Housing Office, Inspectional Services, Fire, and Police departments. Working together, these departments have developed a comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing the challenges of disinvestment in city neighborhoods.

Operation Clean Sweep

Several times a year, the city brings more than 100 cases before the Western District Housing Court on a single day to crack down on exterior code violations such as litter, broken windows, unregistered motor vehicles, and overgrowth. If the owners do not show up, the city seeks court orders to allow the city to enter the properties, correct the violations and lien the property for costs. A city ordinance, Title 7, chapter 7.16, Health and Safety, is the authorizing regulation for enforcing compliance.

Advance research is conducted by Western New England College School of Law interns with City of Springfield law clerks to prepare petitions and motions, present the cases and enter into agreements with property owners.

Vacant Property Ordinance

In 2009 the city adopted a Vacant Property Ordinance to regulate the maintenance of foreclosed and/or vacant properties in Springfield and requires that a property be registered as soon as a foreclosing process commences.

Under the ordinance, the maintenance of vacant or foreclosed residential properties would require the owners to:

- Submit a completed registration form and a \$100 registration fee
- If the property is vacant, identify a local property manager (within 30 miles of the property) who will be responsible for maintenance of the property.
- Properly board and secure a vacant property.
- Maintain the property in accordance with all applicable codes, including keeping the property clean of rubbish, trash, overgrowth, and debris.
- Inspect and maintain the property on a weekly basis.
- If the property is vacant, post on the property, in a manner visible from the street, the 24-hour contact information of the property manager.
- Owners and foreclosing institutions who fail to register properties subject to this ordinance may be fined up to \$300 per week until a registration is received or the property is no longer vacant or foreclosing.
- Over the past year, the city's law interns have researched and identified over 235 properties that have had Notices of Intent to Foreclose filed to help the City implement its Vacant and Foreclosing Property Registration Ordinance.

Board and Secure

The City Law Department also prepares motions and petitions for the city to board and secure identified properties. After the city boards and secures the property, the property owner is responsible for paying the expense. The city has the right to board and secure under the State Sanitary Code, if the property is open and subject to the elements. They have the right to board and secure under the State Building Code if the building is open and dangerous. Under the city's Anti-Blight Ordinance, they can also board and secure if the building meets the definition of a blighted property.

Receivership

The City of Springfield has successfully used receivership as a strategy to bring neglected properties into compliance with the State Sanitary Code and under responsible management. The city's law, housing and inspectional services departments work together to identify properties that are candidates for receivership and then bring these before the Western District Housing court. The city's highest priority is occupied properties and the city's cases have ranged from small to very large multi-family properties.

The threat of receivership has occasionally resulted in the property owners appearing in court and entering into an agreement to bring the property into code compliance, avoiding receivership altogether.

CitiStat & NeighborhoodStat

The City of Springfield is also using CitiStat, a data-tracking and management tool, to make data-driven decisions. This information at both the citywide and neighborhood level is analyzed with the assistance of geographic mapping to zero in on problem areas and to understand how some problems may relate to one another. Representatives from city departments then meet on a regular basis to identify problems then quickly react by figuring out both long and short term tactics and strategies.

CitiStat has been used on the neighborhood level to focus on certain areas in Springfield to track and map metrics in the areas of public safety, quality of life, civic engagement, basic service delivery and real property.

[Sample NeighborhoodStat PDF](#)

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