

The stated meeting of the Vacant Property Review Board of the Township of Abington was held on Thursday, January 23, 2025 via webinar.

CALL TO ORDER: 5:03 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Commissioner Spiegelman, Yoni Hirt, Richard Goldstone

Excused: Michael Schlaghauser

Also Present: Chris Platz, Fire Marshal

PRESENTATION: None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Reorganization of the Vacant Property Review Board –

Commissioner Spiegelman said this is the reorganization of the VPRB that was created by the adoption of Ordinance No. 2098 on July 9, 2015, and at that time, this body was formed along with a registry of vacant properties. The ordinance mandates that commercial property owners must report when their properties become vacant and there is a vacancy registry and vacancy fee they must pay until their property is occupied again.

The purpose of the ordinance and the creation of this body was to create a mechanism to disincentivize commercial properties from sitting unoccupied for a long time and property owners need to pay a fee until it becomes occupied. Property owners can request a waiver from paying the fee and appeal to the Vacant Property Review Board for an evaluation.

Fire Marshal Platz said we have a substantial number of commercial properties that need attention, and the ordinance applies to commercial or mixed-use properties only. When 60% or more of the property becomes vacant, it needs to be registered within 45 days, and if not, there is a \$500 fee, which increases to \$1,000, and after a year, it increases to \$1,500. Every six months after it is a \$500 fee. The property owner can request a waiver from paying the fee if they are in the process of renovating or it is up for sale, and this is to encourage property owners to maintain and keep it occupied.

VPRB also determines whether a property meets the definition of blight and then makes a recommendation to the Redevelopment Authority and any other relevant entities to certify it as blight.

In bringing back the VPRB, proposed are new measures and a new process to be more proactive. There is a list of 44 properties that are vacant, partially vacant, some we are keeping an eye on, and one or two that have been vacant but recently became occupied. There is approximately 130,000 sq. ft. of viable space within these properties that could be rented out.

The plan is to notify commercial property owners with a letter stating their property is vacant and must be registered, or if it is on the watchlist, inform them that if the property becomes 60% vacant, they will need to register. Registering properties can be done online, and when they are registered, the property will need to go through an initial inspection from our Building Inspector, Property Maintenance Inspector and Fire Inspector. The team will assess the property as to the scope of work to make sure the building is in safe condition and able to be utilized, and that assessment will be done annually.

The property maintenance team will do general status updates on the exterior of the property to make sure the property is not becoming an eyesore and generally in good condition. An internal inspection will not be done unless the property owner requests it.

This process is to be more proactive. We understand properties become vacant; however, if we encourage the property owners and find ways to help them be successful, it will ultimately make the Township more successful.

Commissioner Spiegelman said providing information online that is easily accessible is a service that could provide a great opportunity for those who may be looking for a more affordable or adaptable space for their small businesses.

Kate Collins, resident, commented that she lives in Ward 13, and the beer distributor has always been an eyesore as well as a few properties in Keswick Village.

Commissioner Spiegelman replied that he attended the recently held Economic Development Corporation meeting and Keswick Village is one of the first projects they are undertaking.

Mr. Goldstone asked about the past process in helping to get property occupied. Also, he asked for a copy of the ordinance to review.

Fire Marshal Platz said the ordinance has existed since 2015 and it is online under the Abington Township e-code. In the past, properties were handled on a case-by-case basis, and our Fire Inspectors inspect vacant properties annually. This new process and the unification of entities will help put these properties on the forefront.

NEW BUSINESS:

Re-organization of Chair –

Commissioner Spiegelman made a MOTION, seconded by Mr. Goldstone to nominate Mr. Yoni Hirt as Chairman of the Vacant Property Review Board.

Mr. Yoni Hirt was appointed as Chairman of the VPRB by unanimous vote of 3-0.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Hirt made a MOTION, seconded by Commissioner Spiegelman to approve the minutes from Vacant Property Review Board Meeting of September 22, 2022.

MOTION was ADOPTED 3-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

ADJOURNMENT: 5:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Vile, Recording Secretary