

Saskatoon Fire Department - Boarded Buildings - Update

ISSUE

Information in this report provides an update on the effectiveness of designating boarded buildings as a Priority 1 concern.

BACKGROUND

At the January 14, 2020 public meeting of the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, the Department provided a presentation to highlight how the prevalence of boarded buildings can be controlled. Committee endorsed:

“Option 1 outlined in the January 14, 2020 report of the Fire Chief and that the Department adjust the existing inspection model to designate boarded buildings a Priority 1 concern”.

CURRENT STATUS

The Saskatoon Fire Department’s (the Department) Public Relations & Community Risk Reduction Division (the Division) utilizes a priority system for complaints and inspections. Property maintenance complaints are classed as Priority 1, 2, or 3 with a Priority 1 designation being addressed as soon as practical.

In May of 2020, a master tracking list for vacant/boarded buildings was created. This list is continually monitored and updated allowing Fire Inspectors to remain focused and apprised of the conditions and timelines surrounding the buildings and provides real-time reporting to City Councillors, and the community.

The Division tracks concerns, enforcement, and inspections with the intention of moving towards repairs or demolitions of buildings where warranted. Fire Inspectors report any building that has been identified and/or initiate the board-up process if the building is vacant, fire damaged, or entered by unauthorized personnel.

During COVID-19, in-person community consultations have not been possible. A list of civic addresses for buildings of concern was reported to the Department by community associations, and all of these locations have been inspected. This list is dynamic as the community associations, the public, City Councillors, and Fire Inspectors continue to report newly- identified vacant/boarded buildings.

There are buildings that are vacant and boarded which do not have structure deficiencies under the *Property Maintenance and Nuisance Abatement Bylaw 8175*. Contact has been made with the owners of these properties to inquire about their intentions. The Department cannot enforce on these properties, but does advise owners that it would be in the best interest of themselves and the surrounding community to have the properties occupied.

The Department has tracked and monitored the vacant/boarded building locations, fires that have occurred, and the neighborhoods where these conditions exist. Appendix 1 Vacant/Boarded Buildings by Neighbourhood-July 2, 2019 – September 2, 2020 shows an established list of properties and their current status.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Addressing concerns of vacant/boarded buildings as a Priority 1 within the complaint system has proven to be effective.

The Department has received 139 complaints of boarded-up structures. Additionally, there have been:

- 125 inspections
- 110 re-inspections
- 75 enforcement actions (orders or tickets)
- 56 properties met the definition of vacant/boarded buildings as per *Bylaw No. 7990 The Fire and Protective Services Bylaw*
- 32 buildings were occupied needing repairs
- 39 of the vacant/boarded buildings had a fire since July of 2019
- 34 buildings required a warned order, repair order, or demolition order
- 14 buildings demolished
- 20 buildings met the vacant/boarded status were repaired/occupied and the file is now closed
- 64 concerns have been complied/completed in total

From July 2019 to May 2020, the average amount of days to inspect the vacant/boarded buildings was 46.4 days. During COVID-19, in the month of May 2020, the Department made operational changes including ensuring all Priority 1 complaints were prioritized throughout the City as opposed to within a district. Complaints received since May 2020 has shown the average amount of days to inspect the vacant/boarded building concern is within 2.5 days.

The vacant/boarded buildings are in various stages of the order process within the Department. Some have been repaired and removed from the list while some are still in the repair stage and/or demolition process. Others have been demolished depending on their structural integrity from the time of the Department's engagement with the properties. Examples are a structure beyond repair or non-compliance at the repair stage which moves the enforcement towards demolition.

During the COVID-19 response, the Department took the opportunity to streamline the demolition process by initiating remediation and demolition internally. The City has this authority under the Demolition and Property Remediation Process (DPR) of *the Cities Act*. This has provided an opportunity to answer to the community more efficiently on the condition, process, and remediation timelines for the properties.

A cost recovery system has been created for carrying out the requirements of the Order to Remedy connected to non-compliance by the property owner. This is accomplished through the Department's ability to place costs onto the property tax roll via authority by *the Cities Act*.

The Department will continue to evaluate the process for Vacant/ Boarded buildings and Priority 1 designation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Cost recovery is a newly-implemented process where Department staff time is recovered, from owners of vacant/boarded buildings subject to enforcement, by tabulating time spent to enact the compliance process. This began in the middle of July 2020. It is too early to determine, with any accuracy, the amount of cost recovery that will occur in a given year. The Administration will include updated information and estimates to Council in December 2020.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy, legal, social, or environmental implications identified at this time.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will continue to:

- have vacant/boarded buildings addressed as a Priority 1 concern in order to inspect, track, and enforce on vacant/boarded properties
- collaborate with community associations and other stakeholders
- analyze data and report back in 2021 on the financial implications of possible budget implications to facilitate pro-active property maintenance inspection

APPENDICES

1. Vacant/Boarded Buildings by Neighbourhood-July 2, 2019 – September 2, 2020

Report Approval

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