How Neighborhoods Can Deal with Vacant and Blighted Properties

Neighborhood Services Division
Department of Public Works
Prince William County
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Today’s Agenda

- What is Blight?
- The Right Fix
- Community Impacts
- Community Response
What is Blight?

“Blighted Property” shall be defined by Virginia Code § 36-3, as may be amended. The Virginia Code currently defines “blighted property” as any individual commercial, industrial, or residential structure or improvement that endangers the public’s health, safety or welfare because the structure or improvement upon the property is dilapidated, deteriorated, or violates minimum health and safety standards, or any structure previously designated as blighted pursuant to §36-49.1:1, under the process for determination of “spot blight.”
What is a Public Nuisance?

“A nuisance is any act, omission or use of property which is hurtful to health, tranquility or morals of the community. *Ritholz v. Commonwealth*, 184 Va. 339, 350, 35 S.E.2d 210 (1945). A public nuisance is a condition that affects or has the potential to affect the health, safety or welfare of the general public rather than just one individual or a small number of individuals.”
What’s the Right Fix?

- Least Drastic Alternative
  - Repair
  - Replace
  - Demolish
For Blight - What’s the Least Drastic Alternative?

- Dilapidation and Deterioration
  - Lack of maintenance/upkeep
  - Peeling paint
  - Broken windows
  - Graffiti

- Violates Minimum Health and Safety Standards
  - Open and unsecured
  - Trash and debris
For Public Nuisance - What’s the Least Drastic Alternative?

Health-Safety Considerations/Life Threatening Effects

- Use
  - Excessive light, noise, dust, pollution, noxious odor

- Act or Omission (invitation or trespassing)
  - Criminal Activity (vandalism, theft, prostitution)
  - Gang Activity (graffiti)
  - Drug Activity
  - Arson
  - Hazardous Substances (toxic chemicals, etc.)
  - Danger of Structural Collapse
  - Danger of Injury (open well, basement, swimming pool)
Blight Fighting Techniques

- Property Maintenance
  - Uniform Statewide Building Code, Part III
    (Virginia Maintenance Code)

- Nuisance Abatement Generally
  - Public Nuisance Abatement § 15.2-900 & § 15.2-1115
  - Special Grand Juries §§ 48-1 through 48-6
  - Repair or Removal of Unsafe Structures § 15.2-906

- “Self-Help” Measures
  - Removal of trash
  - Cutting of weeds
  - Removal of graffiti
Neighborhood Impacts

- Public Safety
  - Unsecured Structures
  - Unsecured Pools
  - Attractive Nuisance
    - Tall Grass / Boarded Windows
  - Trespassers
  - Vandalism / Graffiti
- Property Values
  - Unable to Sell/Increased Rentals
Community Impacts

- Decreasing property values
- Declining tax revenues
- Potential decline in public school quality
- Increasing rentals/investor properties
- Increased Need for Services
  - Code Enforcement
  - Police
  - Fire
  - Human Services
So What Can You Do?

- Be a good neighbor
- Start or join a community group
- Neighborhood Watch
- Be a graffiti spotter
- Report unsafe conditions to Police and Neighborhood staff
- Maintain and create social ties within community
Get Educated

- Prince William County
  - Neighborhood Services/Coordinator
  - Neighborhood Leaders Group
  - Neighborhood University

- City of Manassas
  - Neighborhood Coordinator

- City of Manassas Park
  - Code Enforcement – Police Department
Questions?

Thank you

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