

**City of Port Colborne
Council Meeting Addendum**

Date: Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Time: 6:30 pm
Location: Council Chambers, 3rd Floor, City Hall
66 Charlotte Street, Port Colborne

Pages

8. Staff Reports

8.1 Property Standards and Vacant Building Registry By-laws, 2024-24

***a. Written Delegation from Steve Celestini, Property Owner**

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FW: Vacant building bylaw

Saima Tufail <Saima.Tufail@portcolborne.ca>

Mon 2/26/2024 9:26 AM

To: Diana Vasu <Diana.Vasu@portcolborne.ca>



PORT COLBORNE



www.portcolborne.ca

Saima Tufail
Acting City Clerk
City of Port Colborne

66 Charlotte Street
Port Colborne, ON L3K 3C8

Phone 905-228-8031

Email Saima.Tufail@portcolborne.ca

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From: Steve Celestini [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, February 26, 2024 9:23 AM

To: Saima Tufail <Saima.Tufail@portcolborne.ca>

Cc: Madison Cassar <Madison.Cassar@portcolborne.ca>; Sherry Hanson <Sherry.Hanson@portcolborne.ca>

Subject: RE: Vacant building bylaw

You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hello Saima,

Here is my letter:

Dear councillors,

I write to you as property owner of a currently, sadly vacant building. I hope that this bylaw can work towards rejuvenating the use of vacant properties and not a punishment for owning one.

I have a few points for you to consider but I am hoping that this bylaw can move vacant properties to newer practical uses.

I understand the City's desire to improve the overall safety and aesthetics of the community by addressing vacant buildings. However, I believe the proposed Vacant Building Registry By-law places an unfair and unnecessary burden on responsible property owners like myself.

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Unfair Cost:

The registration fee of \$1,250 to \$3,000 is substantial, especially for smaller commercial properties. This fee unfairly penalizes responsible owners like myself who already dedicate time and resources to maintaining the security and integrity of our vacant buildings.

Furthermore, while the property remains vacant, it is already subject to full commercial taxes. Additionally, I am also still being charged commercial storm sewer charges despite the property not being in use. This double taxation seems unjust, as the City is essentially collecting fees as if the property is fully operational while simultaneously demanding additional fees for its vacancy.

Duplication of Effort:

The proposed by-law requires property owners to conduct bi-weekly inspections, duplicating the City's existing monthly checks. This is inefficient and creates an unnecessary burden on responsible owners who are already proactively addressing issues.

Punishment for Existing Properties:

My situation highlights the flaw in assuming all vacant buildings are neglected. I actively maintain my property, yet I am still subject to the fee and inspection burden despite not contributing to the problems the by-law aims to address.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Targeted incentives:

Offer incentives like tax breaks or rebates for owners who proactively improve their vacant buildings or expedite redevelopment plans.

Collaborate with community organizations:

Partner with community organizations to identify and address problems associated with specific neglected buildings, rather than casting a wide net that captures responsible owners.

Revisit the vacancy rebate program:

Explore the re-establishment of a vacancy rebate program to offset the burden of full commercial taxes for responsible owners maintaining vacant properties.

Promote mixed-use zoning:

Explore the possibility of allowing for mixed-use zoning at my property and others. Many commercial zones permit the creation of small dwelling units, which could address the current housing crisis and offer additional security benefits. By allowing for a resident caretaker unit, the city can encourage the revival of vacant properties like mine. This concession would go a long way towards alleviating the negative impacts associated with long-term vacancy.

CONCLUSION

The proposed Vacant Building Registry By-law seems like a disproportionate and unfair response to the challenge of neglected vacant buildings. It places an unnecessary financial and practical burden on responsible owners like myself who are already contributing to the community's well-being. I urge the City Council to consider alternative solutions that address the actual problems without penalizing individuals who are already actively maintaining their properties. By exploring options like revising the existing vacancy rebate program, exploring mixed-use zoning opportunities, and collaborating with residents, the City can demonstrate a commitment to fairness and collaboration while still achieving the desired goals of improving community safety and aesthetics."

Yours truly,
Steve Celestini, P.Eng.