

proceeds through the planning, rezoning and development and building permit processes.

Unoccupied residential structures generally fall into two categories:

1. Vacant. A house temporarily unoccupied but in fairly good repair could easily become occupied.
2. Abandoned. An unoccupied house that has fallen into a state of disrepair (i.e., windows removed, no source of heat, etc.) that has had the electricity disconnected and is attractive to squatters who resort to other dangerous methods in order to utilize these properties for shelter.

By-Law and Licensing Section staff work with the owners of such properties to ensure that the buildings are secured and the property is maintained clear of debris and garbage. In some cases dwellings are beyond repair and the owners are unable to properly secure them from the dumping of garbage and occupancy by squatters. In these cases By-Law and Licensing staff works with the owner to have the dwelling demolished and the property cleaned and secured. In most cases, a request is also made to the owner to have the property fenced or a berm constructed around the perimeter to prevent further dumping or trespassing on the property. In the majority of cases, the property owners are cooperative. The By-Law Officers will assist the owner by facilitating the expedient issuance of a demolition permit through the Building Division and will also attend the property during the actual demolition of these dwellings, to assist in ensuring the City's By-Laws are being adhered to during the process.

In cases, where the dwelling can be properly secured while ensuring the appearance of the dwelling is maintained, the By-law officer inspects the site on a regular basis to ensure that the necessary security and maintenance is continued by the owner.

In cases where the property owner is unable or refuses to comply with the City's requests to secure the abandoned residence and the dwelling is deemed to be a hazard to the public safety, Surrey Fire Services staff are called upon to assist under Section 26(a) of the Surrey Fire Prevention By-Law 10771. This section reads:

26(a). Where the Fire Chief or member in charge secures a vacant building against unauthorized entry pursuant to Section 2.4.6.1 of the Code, the property shall be liable to the City for all costs and expenses incurred in securing the building.

In other cases, abandoned houses are addressed utilizing the Surrey Community Improvement and Unsightly Property By-Law, 1997 No. 13150, which provides authority to the City to demand that the owner take action to address the unsightly nature of the house and property.

In some cases, the Surrey Fire Services staff has used Provincial authority to acquire a timely demolition or repair of an abandoned house. In these circumstances the owner is issued an order by Surrey Fire Services pursuant to the Fire Services Act of

British Columbia. If a property owner does not comply with such an order, the Fire Chief may in the interest of public safety carry out demolition of the abandoned house at the expense of the property owner and recover any associated costs in accordance with Section 26(b) of the Surrey Fire Prevention By-Law. In these situations when an order has been issued with a cost recovery estimate provided, the owner normally quickly takes action to demolish the house.

Surrey By-Law and Licensing Department has identified and are continuing to work with the owners of each of approximately 66 properties throughout the City that contain a vacant dwelling. Using the above identified alternative courses of action, By-law and Licensing staff will work toward having these abandoned houses either properly secured and maintained or, alternatively, demolished.

CONCLUSION

During the first quarter of 2007, using current processes, staff has been successful in having the owners demolish many vacant and abandoned dwellings throughout Surrey. Council is requested to endorse the current thrust that is focussed on the removal of abandoned dwellings throughout the City, which supports the recommendations of the City's Crime Reduction Strategy and is consistent with the City's Beautification initiative.

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City Solicitor