

April 15, 2019

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Planning, Land Use and Zoning Committee  
**From:** Ketil Freeman, Council Central Staff  
**Subject:** Council Bill 119497 – Modifications to the Vacant Building Monitoring Program

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On April 17, the Planning, Land Use and Zoning Committee will discuss Council Bill (CB) 119497, which amends fees and makes technical and clarifying amendments to the Vacant Building Monitoring (VBM) Program.

The memo: (1) provides background on the VBM Program and (2) describes changes proposed through CB 119497.

### **VBM Program Background**

The Housing and Building Maintenance Code (HBMC), Chapter 22.200 of the Seattle Municipal Code, establishes minimum standards for securing and maintaining vacant buildings.<sup>1</sup> The HBMC also provides the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections' (SDCI) code enforcement staff with the discretion to inspect vacant buildings for compliance with code standards. Since 2013 complaints related to the condition of vacant buildings have increased by 55%.<sup>2</sup> In 2017 there were 434 vacant building complaints citywide.<sup>3</sup>

In 2018 the Council passed [Ordinance 125727](#), which amended the VBM Program. Ordinance 125727 makes inspections mandatory for vacant buildings, which (1) have received three notices for violating the requirements for securing vacant buildings, (2) are located on a lot for which a master use permit or building permit application has been filed, or (3) are included on a list maintained by the police or fire departments of vacant buildings that have generated calls for dispatch. Buildings in the VBM Program are not subject to monitoring after they: (1) have been repaired and reoccupied, (2) have been inspected four consecutive times (one initial inspection plus three subsequent inspections) and been found to have no violations, or (3) have been demolished.

The Council also amended the 2019 budget to appropriate \$457,000 and provided position authority for three new inspector positions to provide additional staffing for vacant building monitoring and inspections. The budget also appropriates \$105,000 for vehicle purchases and other start-up costs. These appropriations should be recoverable by inspection fees.

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<sup>1</sup> [Seattle Municipal Code Section 22.206.200](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Vacant Building Monitoring Report - Presentation, SDCI September 5, 2019](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Enhancing SDCI's Vacant Building Monitoring Program, p.11. SDCI, April 2018](#).

Changes to the VBM Program made through Ordinance 125727 become effective on June 1, 2019 to allow SDCI time to prepare to administer the new requirements.

**CB 119497**

CB 119497 would modify the changes made last year to facilitate administration of the VBM Program by SDCI. The changes would:

- Modify fees for inspections of buildings found to meet the requirements of the code to better reflect the cost to SDCI; fees would change from \$171 to \$261;
- Enroll buildings after only one violation if the violation is not remedied by the compliance date established in the notice of violation, or, if the first violation is remedied within the compliance period but a second violation occurs within one year from the date of the first violation;
- Allow buildings to no longer be enrolled in the program when there have been three, as opposed to four, consecutive inspections without violation; and
- Make other clarifying amendments to facilitate administration by SDCI.

**Next Steps**

On April 17, the Committee will discuss and may make a recommendation on CB 119497. In order for the provisions of CB 119497 to be effective by June 1, the Council should act on the bill no later than April 22.

cc: Kirstan Arestad, Central Staff Director  
Aly Pennucci, Supervising Analyst