

Distributed at the Planning and Development Council Meeting of June 10, 2019
Re: Item 3 – Maintenance of Vacant Properties By-law 2019-034

The JCRA Board supports the intent and purpose of the proposed Maintenance of Vacant Properties by-law, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the by-law.

Our specific comments are:

1. Concerns about the condition of vacant properties in our neighbourhoods have been raised by JCRA residents at our past AGM's and in communication to board members, for both safety and aesthetic reasons. These concerns have increased as the number of vacant homes increases.
2. Implementing this by-law sends a message that the Town of Oakville is committed to ensuring vacant properties do not have a negative impact on the safety and appearance of our neighbourhoods; both of which can occur when vacant homes are not monitored and are left to deteriorate.
3. The coordination of this by-law with the existing property standards by-law can help ensure that basic maintenance and care of vacant properties meets the property standards expected of all property owners in Oakville.
4. Establishing a vacant building registry will facilitate the town's ability to inspect vacant homes and ensure there is compliance with requirements of the by-law.

However, given the establishment of a registry, we suggest removing the requirement to post contact information on the property itself. A sign on the property will indicate that it is a vacant property which can make the property a target for vandalism or criminal activities such as break-in.

As well, consideration of the fact a home may be vacant because the owners spend their winters in a warm climate should be addressed. Our board would not want this by-law to penalize property owners who spend winters in another location, and who take responsibility for the maintenance of their properties during their absence. One suggestion to address this is to ask for proof of maintenance contracts to reduce or remove the registration fee. Alternatively, how have the other municipalities with a similar by-law referenced in this report managed this situation? Are there any best practices from those communities that can be included in Oakville's by-law?

5. We are pleased to see additional fees for inspections required if a vacant property owner does not comply with the by-law, including higher fees for repeated violations that can also serve as a deterrent to non-compliance.
6. We hope the by-law requirements and the financial costs of keeping a property vacant may serve as a deterrent to the issue of long term vacant properties, and suggest that the fees for non-compliance be increased if analysis of the number of violations supports doing so.

7. Finally, robust and consistent enforcement of this by-law is needed to ensure it addresses the concerns and issues presented by vacant properties.
8. With respect to the report's comments that implementation of a vacant property tax is subject to provincial permission, our board welcomes the town conducting analysis and research of such a tax at this time. This way the Town has the information to make a decision on implementing the tax within the earliest possible time frame if and when the Ministry of Finance designates Oakville with the ability to levy the tax.

Thank you

Elizabeth Chalmers

On behalf of the

JCRA Board of Directors