

Date: August 5, 2025

To: **Standing Committee on Public Safety**

Name and title: Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

Subject: Vacant Premise and Related Subjects

Attachment(s):

1. Knights Inn Purchase – Press Release
2. Previous staff report to Committee dated January 9, 2025 titled “Discussion on Vacant Buildings” (received on the February 18, 2025 committee meeting agenda)

## Recommendation(s):

That the Standing Committee on Public Safety RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated August 5, 2025 from the Director of Administrative Services titled, “Vacant Premise and Related Subjects.”

## Purpose:

For Council information in relation to two committee resolutions further described below.

## Background:

At previous meetings of the committee the following two motions were passed:

*That the Standing Committee on Public Safety DIRECTS Administration to return a report to the Committee outlining options to enhance beautification efforts regarding vacant buildings and property, including the possibility of allocating a percentage of proceeds from the Development Permit application process to support beautification projects.*

And second:

*That the Standing Committee on Public Safety DIRECTS Administration to return a report to the Committee outlining options to strengthen regulations for vacant buildings, including the potential requirement for installing monitored security alarm systems.*

As a starting point, staff would suggest engaging in further conversation to help determine the best path forward. This may include:

1. The identification and analysis of the problem.

Greater clarity regarding the problem statement the committee is aiming to address would assist in developing further options. Essentially, what is the problem the committee is looking to address. For example, is it:

*“We believe the physical appearance of the downtown, including the number of vacant buildings, is causing a reduction in foot traffic and an increase in problematic behaviors thereby deteriorating general public safety”*

Or: *“The property maintenance bylaw does not meet our expectations for the upkeep and management of vacant buildings, and this is contributing to a decrease in public safety and therefore the bylaw should be revisited”.*

Or: *“We believe there is a need to incentivize owners of vacant buildings to ensure their active use or to pay a fee to let their buildings remain vacant,”.*

Or whatever the case may be. Each of these examples may lead to different recommendations hence the need to very specifically name the issue core to the committee’s interest.

With the problem clearly identified, staff and the committee could try and identify root causes, which would bring us to the second step.

## 2. The development of options for solutions to the problem.

With a clear picture of the problem, and educated guesses at the root causes, we could then produce a more refined list of options for the committee to discuss and make recommendations to Council on. With Council direction these options could then undergo a third step.

## 3. Translation of conceptual options into a plan that can be executed.

Attempting to apply this framework to the existing direction, staff are of the understanding that the first motion is primarily aimed at enhancing beautification initiatives, staff would respectfully suggest that this is only tangentially tied to the mandate of the committee. However, comments on options are provided below on the two parts of this motion.

Regarding funding, *“including the possibility of allocating a percentage of proceeds from the Development Permit application process to support beautification projects”*, staff would recommend not prescribing a specific funding source to this effort, rather if the committee wishes to recommend to Council that further beautification investments occur, the committee could communicate this to Council via a motion and include comments on the scale and scope of what improvements the committee would suggest may enhance public safety. From here, if supported by Council, staff may be directed to determine the most appropriate source of funding.

To the remainder of the first motion, *“outlining options to enhance beautification efforts regarding vacant buildings and property”*. Some options may include:

- Engaging with external funders to understand the limitations of their façade improvement programs and whether this, or a separate tool, could help interested businesses with the installation of security shutters, and similar upgrades to prevent damage. These opportunities may be able to be promoted by the City.

- A request for information on the performance of the graffiti removal program could be extended to determine if this program is adequately resourced and meeting expectations. Gaining clarity on how this program is performing in instances where a building is vacant or owned by those not regularly observing its condition may help identify process gaps.
- A recommendation on the advancement of previously discussed street lighting enhancements could be developed by the committee. Depending on location this may improve conditions immediately surrounding vacant structures.
- Relevant to both motions, the committee could study the Prince George Property Maintenance Bylaw against comparable municipalities to determine what if any amendments may be suggested.

Regarding the second motion, *options to strengthen regulations for vacant building*. The specific example stated in the motion is not an action that staff would recommend exploring, “*the potential requirement for installing monitored security alarm systems*”. Mandating this specific action is assessed as problematic.

Rather, options that have been observed else where in British Columbia are the City of Penticton Vacant Building Registration (VBR) permit system and the City of Vancouver’s vacant building task force as examples. These programs may be able to provide inspiration; however, staff would suggest further clarity on what the committee is aiming to accomplish be garnered before any next steps take place.

As additional comment, a good deal of work goes into managing vacant buildings, when buildings are found to be in contravention of the property maintenance bylaw, action is taken to correct these instances. When the City owns land that becomes vacant, we are also active in managing these occurrences. As one example, it is understood that the former Knights Inn is expected to become vacant in 2026. Staff’s understanding of this building is that it is likely well suited for demolition when it becomes vacant and staff intend to include this as part of the 2026 budget deliberations.

### Strategic Priorities:

Addressing the security and use of currently vacant buildings may be viewed in relation to the strategic pillars of Social Health and Wellbeing and Economic Diversity and Growth.

### Summary and conclusion:

This report provides commentary and options in relation to two motions of the Standing Committee on Public Safety.

### Respectfully submitted:

Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

### Approved:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2025/08/19