

CITY OF SOMERVILLE
ORDINANCE NO. 2018-_____
IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN: _____

**REGISTRATION AND MAINTENANCE OF VACANT COMMERCIAL
AND INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS**

Be it ordained by the Board of Aldermen, in session assembled, that Chapter ____ of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Somerville, is hereby amended by inserting the following Section _____ and by amending Section 1-11(b) to provide for a fine for violation of said Section _____.

Section _____. Registration and Maintenance of Vacant Commercial and Industrial Buildings.

A. Purpose.

The purposes of this ordinance are to protect the welfare and economic vitality of the residents of the City of Somerville by protecting property values, maintaining neighborhood integrity and accessibility, safeguarding against economic property blight, protecting City resources, and ensuring the safe and sanitary maintenance of commercial and industrial vacant properties. Among other things, vacant commercial and industrial properties can degrade the vitality of Somerville's business districts, frustrate local planning and development efforts, create increased specific risks of fire damage, vandalism and unlawful entry or uses, and give rise to other public health and safety hazards. This ordinance is intended to promote the City's public welfare and economic health by requiring all property owners to register and properly maintain vacant commercial and industrial properties.

B. Definitions.

As used in this article, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated:

- (a) "Building Inspector"- The Building Inspector of the City of Somerville or his or her designee.
- (b) "Legally occupied" - Occupied in accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts Building Code.
- (c) "Owner" -A person or entity who, alone or severally with others:
 - 1) Has legal or equitable title to any building or has care, charge or control of any building in any capacity including but not limited to agent, executor, executrix, administrator, administratrix, trustee, or guardian of the estate of the holder of legal title; or

- 2) Is a tenant with a legal right to possess an entire building; or
 - 3) Is a mortgagee in possession of any building; or
 - 4) Is an agent, trustee, receiver or other person appointed by the courts and vested with possession or control of a building; or
 - 5) Is an officer or trustee of an association of unit owners of a condominium or cooperative which contains a vacant property.
- (d) "Public Art"-Works of art for public benefit and viewing, approved by the Planning Department, for which owners have agreed to the temporary display inside storefront windows or upon other safe, visible exterior surfaces of vacant properties for agreed upon time periods and other material terms.
- (e) "Vacant Building" -Any unoccupied nonresidential commercial or industrial real property which:
- 1) Is not legally occupied, is abandoned, or is not used for a period of at least twenty-one {21} consecutive days or longer by occupants having custody or legal right of entry to such property; or
 - 2) Which is intermittently occupied by persons with legal right of entry, but exhibits in the opinion of the Building Inspector dilapidated walls, roof or doors which fail to prevent the entry of a trespasser for a period of more than seven (7 days).

C. Registration.

- (a) Prior to, or not more than seven (7) days after a unit or any portion of a property becomes vacant, as defined herein, the owner(s) must register the vacancy with the Planning Department and the Building Inspector on forms agreed upon and provided by such departments. All registrations must state the owner's name, phone number, and mailing address as well as an emergency contact, if not the same. None of the required addresses shall be a post office box. This registration must state if the property is vacant at the time of filing. The registration shall also state the owner's efforts to regain occupancy. Once the building is no longer vacant or is sold, the owner must provide proof of sale or written notice and proof of lawful occupancy to the Planning Department or Inspectional Services Department pursuant to the process outlined by such Departments. The Building Inspector will notify Police, Fire, Water and Sewer, and Health Departments of the submitted registration of vacant building as well as the re-occupancy of the building.
- (b) The Planning Director and the Building Inspector may jointly exempt a property owner from the provisions of this ordinance upon the presentation of evidence, in such form as may be convincing to them, that the failure to use or occupy a building for a period in excess of 21 days does not violate the purpose or intent of this ordinance.

D. Annual Registration Fee, Failure to Pay, Waiver.

- (a) On or before October 15 of each calendar year, the City shall send a billing statement, setting forth the annual registration fee, to the owner of the vacant property. The annual

registration fee shall be set by the Board of Aldermen pursuant to G. L. c. 40, § 22F.

(b) On or before November 15 of each calendar year, the owner of any vacant property shall pay to the City an annual registration fee to cover the administrative cost of monitoring and ensuring the security and proper maintenance of such building, as identified in said billing statement. Failure to pay the annual registration fee shall be a violation of this ordinance, and the full fee shall be deemed an assessment resulting from a violation of this bylaw. Such fee, and any fines issued for violations of this bylaw, shall constitute a "municipal charges lien" on the property, to be collected in accordance with G. L. c. 40, §58.

(c) Owners may apply for a waiver of the annual registration fee on or before October 1 of each calendar year, requesting waiver of some, or the entire fee on grounds of demonstrable financial hardship, or by agreeing in writing to display public art as defined herein for the term of a vacancy. Waivers for public art display will be granted only as sufficient public art is available, appropriate to the location for display, and the Town, artist, owner agree to terms of exhibition as set forth by the Planning Department.

E. Maintenance Requirements.

(a) The owner of a vacant building must maintain the vacant building in accordance with all applicable local and state Sanitary Codes, Building Codes and Fire Codes, pertaining to the external/visible maintenance of the building and major system maintenance of the property.

(b) The owner of a vacant building must promptly repair all broken windows, doors, other openings and any unsafe conditions at a vacant building. Boarding up of open or broken windows and doors is prohibited except as a temporary measure allowed by Title V, Article Seven of these ordinances, unless the Building Inspector determines that, due to vandalism or security reasons and due to circumstances out of the owner's control, the proper boarding of windows and doors is necessary for a determined period of time. Boards or coverings must be fitted to the opening size and colored to blend with the existing building color scheme.

(c) The owner must maintain the building and property for the duration of the vacancy or abandonment. The owner shall maintain the condition of the building and property so as to appear not to be vacant. Upon notice by the Building Inspector, any accumulated trash and/or graffiti shall be removed from the property by the owner within seven (7) days. The Building Inspector and/or his designee will document violations. The owner of any building vacant for a period exceeding six months, whose utilities have been shut off, shall have those utilities removed or cut and capped to prevent accidents.

(d) The owner may include advertising materials in the vacant space or displayed in the vacant property's street-facing windows. Such advertising materials must be approved by the Planning Director.

(e) Compliance with this ordinance shall not relieve the owner of any obligations set forth in any other applicable bylaw, regulation, codes, covenant conditions or restrictions and/or association rules and regulations. In case of a conflict with these rules and regulations, the stricter of the rules and regulations shall apply.

F. Inspections.

(a) The Building Inspector, Police Chief, Fire Chief and the Health Director, or their designees, shall have the authority to periodically inspect the exterior and interior of any building subject to this ordinance for compliance, as authorized under the terms of registration form filed with the Building Inspector and Planning Department. The Building Inspector shall have the discretionary authority to disconnect utilities immediately if a potential hazard that may be dangerous to life and limb is present.

G. Violations and penalties; enforcement.

(a) Violations of any portions of this Ordinance shall be punishable by a fine as set forth in Section 1-11 of the Somerville Code of Ordinances.

(b) The Building Inspector or his designee shall enforce all provisions of this ordinance and shall institute all necessary administrative or legal action to assure compliance. Any owner found to be in violation of this ordinance shall receive a written warning and a minimum of seven (7) days to remedy all violations prior to the institution of any enforcement action by the Inspector. The Building Inspector, acting on behalf of the City of Somerville, may also bring a civil action in a court of competent jurisdiction seeking equitable relief to enforce this ordinance. This bylaw may also be enforced through non-criminal disposition in accordance with the provisions of the City ordinances.

H. Unsafe buildings.

(a) If the Building Inspector determines the building to be unsafe, the Inspector may act immediately in accordance with the Massachusetts State Building Code to protect public safety. Furthermore, nothing in this bylaw shall abrogate the powers and/or duties of municipal officials to act pursuant to any general statutory authority including, without limitation, G. L. c.139, § 1 et seq. and G. L. c.143, § 6 et seq.

I. Severability.

(a) If any provision of this ordinance is held to be invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, such provision shall be considered separate and apart from the remaining provisions, which shall remain in full force and effect.

Be it further ordained by the Board of Aldermen, that Section 1-11(b) of the Code of Ordinances is amended by adding the following language providing for penalties for violation of Section ____ :

Offense	Fine	Enforcing Personnel
Registration and maintenance of commercial and industrial property (Sec. ____).	1 st offense: \$____ 2 nd offense: \$____ 3 rd and subsequent offense: \$____	Inspectional Services Division

APPROVED:

President
Board of Aldermen