

Chapter 233

VACANT RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURES

§233-1. Purpose.

The purpose of this chapter is to promote and assure public safety, health and welfare, to prevent deterioration of Vacant Residential Structures in the City of Hagerstown, to support property values, and to encourage responsible management and use of vacant residential structures through licensing and inspections.

§233-2. Definitions.

- A. **ACTIVE WORK** – Regularly ongoing modifications to bring a structure up to code and which involve two or more systems, including but not limited to constructing, enlarging, altering, moving, demolishing, erecting, installing, removing, converting or replacing any electrical, plumbing, or mechanical system. Active Work also includes modifications to the structure itself.
- B. **BLIGHTED CONDITION** - A condition is blighted when it exhibits objectively determinable signs of deterioration sufficient to constitute a threat to human health, safety, and public welfare.
- C. **CITY** – City of Hagerstown, Maryland.
- D. **DEPARTMENT** – The Community and Economic Development Department of the City.
- E. **OWNER** – Any person, partnership, association, company, corporation or other entity having a legal or equitable interest in, or control of real property. Owner shall also mean any person who, alone, jointly or severally, shall have the charge, care or control of any premises as executor, administrator, trustee or guardian of the estate of the owner. Owner shall also mean any person having any interest in a partnership, association, company, corporation or other entity which owns or has any ownership interest or control of the premises. Any person, firm, partnership, association, company, corporation or other entity whose name appears on the deed or property tax bill for the premises shall be deemed to be the owner of the premises.
- F. **PREMISES** – Any single parcel or lot of real property in the City, including the land and all improvements or structures, upon which a Vacant Residential Structure or Vacant Blighted Residential Structure is located.
- G. **VACANT** – Not occupied as a domicile or residence.
- H. **VACANT BLIGHTED RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE** – Any residential structure, single or multi-unit, that is vacant with a pending action to foreclose a mortgage or deed of trust; or is vacant with blighted conditions; or has been placarded by the City as uninhabitable. For properties with multiple structures, such as apartment complexes, if any individual structure meets this definition, that structure shall be subject to the terms of this chapter.
- I. **VACANT RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE** – Any residential structure, single or multi-unit, that has been vacant for a continuous six (6) month period. For properties with multiple structures, such as apartment complexes, if any individual structure is vacant for a continuous six (6) month period, that structure shall be subject to the terms of this chapter. For calculation of the continuous six (6) month period required to satisfy the

definition of Vacant Residential Structure, the following periods of time shall not be included: (i) the one (1) year period immediately following the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy permit for new construction; (ii) any period of time during which active work is being legally performed pursuant to a valid permit issued by the City; (iii) the six (6) month period immediately following the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy permit for existing construction; or (iv) the first year of vacancy of a non-blighted structure while being marketed via a currently licensed real estate agent through Maryland's Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulation. A vacant residential structure shall not include a structure that falls within the definition of a Non-Residential Structure pursuant to Chapter 232 of the City Code.

§233-3. Vacant Residential Structure License Required.

It shall be unlawful for the owner(s) of any Vacant Residential Structure or Vacant Blighted Residential Structure to fail to apply for and obtain a Vacant Residential Structure License and abide by the inspection requirements contained in this Chapter.

§233-4. Application; License Fee.

In addition to the inspection requirements of Section 233-5 of this Chapter, an applicant for a Vacant Residential Structure License shall provide the following information for each Vacant Residential Structure or Vacant Blighted Residential Structure on the appropriate application form provided by the Department.

- A. The address of the vacant structure;
- B. The number of dwelling units contained in the structure;
- C. The name, street, address, and telephone number of all owners of the vacant structure;
- D. If the owner of the vacant residential structure is not an individual, the applicant shall provide the name, street address, resident agent, resident agent address and telephone number;
- E. The name, street address and telephone number of a designated contact person for the owner(s);
- F. A certificate of property insurance in the amount equivalent to or greater than the assessed tax value; and
- G. A non-refundable annual license fee pursuant to the following schedule for each:

Vacant Blighted Residential Structure

Five hundred dollars (\$500.00) at initial application and at each annual renewal;

Vacant Residential Structure

One hundred dollars (\$100.00) at initial application and at each annual renewal.

- H. Payment for said license shall be due in full from the owner within thirty (30) days from the application mailing. Failure to remit payment in full may result in collection pursuant to Article III, Tax Liens, § 223-11 of the City Code, or by other civil proceeding.
- I. When a Vacant Blighted Residential Structure is purchased by a *bona fide* purchaser for value who promptly registers the structure in the Vacant Structures program in accordance with the requirements of this Chapter, the license fee may be refunded if the

owner is issued building permits for comprehensive renovation of the structure within six (6) months of purchase.

§233-5. Inspection.

In connection with the application requirements contained in Section 233-4 of this Chapter, the exterior of the vacant structure shall be inspected at the time of initial application and on an annual basis thereafter. Required re-inspections for noted conditions shall be as directed by the Department.

Interior inspections shall be conducted in accordance with the following schedule:

Vacant Blighted Residential Structures – At initial application and on annual basis thereafter.

Vacant Residential Structures – At first renewal and annually thereafter.

All inspections conducted hereunder shall be conducted by the Department and shall be performed to ensure compliance with all applicable property maintenance, fire and other City codes for vacant, unoccupied structures and Section 233-6 of this Chapter.

In the event that any noted violations are not corrected at the time of the re-inspection requested by the owner or his agent or the premises is not safely accessible, the Code Official may impose a re-inspection fee as established by the City of Hagerstown's fee schedule for each additional visit for the same violation.

§233-6. Vacant Residential Structure Neighborhood Standards

In addition to the inspection requirements of Section 233-5 of this Chapter, an owner of a Vacant Residential Structure or Vacant Blighted Residential Structure shall maintain the structure to the following neighborhood standards, which are based on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

- A. Exterior lighting at all entry doors
 - 1. Shall be illuminated from dusk to dawn.
 - 2. Shall be directed downward and away from adjoining premises.
 - 3. Shall maintain 1 footcandle of light measured at 1 foot above the ground to a minimum distance of twenty (20) feet from the center of each entry door.
 - i. Exterior lighting is not required at any entry door where street lighting meets the minimum illumination level required by this section.
- B. All entry doors shall have engaged deadbolt locks.
 - 1. Doors not capable of deadbolt locks shall be secured in an approved manner.
- C. All exterior sliding doors shall have lift and slide protection.
- D. All windows shall have lift and slide protection.
- E. All shrubbery, hedges, trees, or similar vegetation shall be maintained so that a clear view of the entry doors from the public sidewalk or street is not impeded.

§233-7. Issuance of license; renewal.

Upon receipt of a completed application form and full payment of the appropriate fee, the Department shall, within 30 days, issue a license for the subject Vacant Residential Structure or Vacant Blighted Residential Structure, unless such license is or was denied, suspended or revoked pursuant to § 233-8 hereof. Said license shall expire on its anniversary date, and shall be renewable annually, with application for said renewal being made at least 60 days prior to the expiration date of the then-current license. License renewal shall be made on the form provided by the Department.

§233-8. Denial; Revocation or Suspension.

A Vacant Residential Structure license may be denied, revoked or suspended at any time by the Department if, after receipt of a notice of violation, the owner fails to eliminate violations of the applicable code sections (including Section 232-6) identified during any inspection within the time ordered in the notice. Denial, revocation or suspension of a vacant residential structure license shall be in addition to, and not in substitution of the penalties provided for in Section 233-10 of this Chapter. Said denial, revocation or suspension may be appealed within 20 days pursuant to Chapter 10 of the Code to the Board of Technical Appeals.

233-9. Severability.

The provisions of this Chapter are severable. If any provision of this Chapter or its application to any person or circumstance is held to be invalid, such invalidity shall not effect the other provisions or applications of this Chapter which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application.

§233-10. Violations and Penalties.

In addition to the sanctions outlined in §233-8 hereof, any owner violating the provisions of this Chapter shall be guilty of a municipal infraction and subject to a fine of up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00). Each day a structure is not in compliance with this Chapter shall be deemed a separate and distinct violation.