

**Supporting the Long-Term Sustainability of
Housing and Neighborhoods in Grand Rapids**

**Recommendations for
Protecting Residents and
Property Values From the
Effects of the Foreclosure Crisis**

December 2010

Overview

At the request of community stakeholders concerned about the impact of the foreclosure crisis and substandard housing conditions upon the Grand Rapids community, Grand Rapids City Manager, Greg Sundstrom, agreed to a working group of City staff and community members to develop policy recommendations with regard to these issues. The recommendations detailed in the following report are based on best practices and data. They address the need for a developing a minimum standard of quality for all rental units and dealing effectively with the vacant property issues impacting city neighborhoods.

The work group seeks the following outcomes:

1. Extend the rental certification program to include single-family rental units and improve the rental registry to require an annual registration with a local point of contact.
2. Enhance the current Vacant Property Registration Ordinance to include an annual registration; require a local point of contact; incorporate a “No Trespassing” order; and utilize staff to seek unregistered properties and perform exterior/nuisance code compliance.

The specific recommendations in this report were developed from a platform endorsed by the following organizations and presented to the City Commission on July 27, 2010:

- Baxter Neighborhood Association
- Bazzani Associates, Inc.
- Creston Neighborhood Association
- Disability Advocates of Kent County
- Eastown Community Association
- Garfield Park Neighborhood Association
- Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism
- Grand Rapids Urban League
- Greater Grand Rapids Children's Environmental Health Initiative
- Habitat for Humanity of Kent County
- Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan
- John Ball Park Community Association
- Lee Kitson Builders, Inc.
- Lighthouse Communities, Inc.
- Midtown Neighborhood Association
- Neighbors of Belknap Lookout
- New Development Corporation
- Oakdale Neighbors
- The Salvation Army Booth Family Services
- South East Community Association
- South West Area Neighbors
- Steepletown Neighborhood Services
- United Growth for Kent County
- Urban Pharm, LLC
- West Michigan Environmental Action Council

Table of Contents

I. Introduction	4
II. Single Family Rental Inspection and Certification Pilot Program	5
III. Enhancing the Vacant Property Registration Ordinance	8
IV. Improving the Current Demolition Process	10
V. Education and Outreach	10
VI. Evaluating the Proposed Pilot Projects	11
VII. Conclusion	11
VIII. Acknowledgements	12
IX. Work Group Members	12
Appendix A: Map of Single-Family Rental Unit Concentrations	13
Appendix B: Map of Single-Family Rental Unit Complaints	14
Appendix C: Outline of Current Housing Code Policies and Practices	15
Appendix D: Map of Single-Family Rental Unit Certification Pilot Project Implementation	16
Appendix E: Detailed Numbers for Single-Family Rental Certification Pilot Project	17
Appendix F: Single-Family Rental Unit Certification Pilot Project Budget	18
Appendix G: Best Practice Rental Inspection Programs	19
Appendix H: Map of USPS Reported Vacant Property Concentrations by Census Tract	22
Appendix I: Map of Residential Foreclosures Concentrations	23
Appendix J: Grand Rapids Foreclosure Data	24
Appendix K: Vacant Property Registration Ordinance Enhancements Budget	25
Appendix L: Intermediary Work Group Progress Reports	26

I. Introduction

The City of Grand Rapids and many community organizations have been active in addressing the foreclosure crisis. Funding from state and federal agencies as well as local foundations, including \$22 million from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, provides opportunities for the City of Grand Rapids and community partners to take active steps towards stopping foreclosures, maintaining affordable housing, and stabilizing neighborhoods. However, more work is needed to update city ordinances to promote future sustainability. Based on community concerns and advocacy efforts that took hold in May 2009, this report presents recommendations to improve local housing ordinances and promote sustainable neighborhoods.

The residential foreclosure crisis has increased both the number of and demand for single-family rental units. According to the 2005 Community Development Consolidated Department Plan, more than 40% of Grand Rapids residents live in rental units. Currently, the City of Grand Rapids rental registry lists 8,000 single-family rental units¹, many of which are located in economically challenged neighborhoods with an older housing stock built before 1950. These properties are not currently required to systematically demonstrate a minimum standard of quality. Vacant properties are also proving to be detrimental to neighborhood sustainability. Grand Rapids has had more than 8,000 homes go into foreclosure since 2004², increasing the number of vacant parcels which lower property values and creates instability in the community. In some cases, demolition may be a viable alternative to mitigate the negative impact of a severely blighted property on the surrounding neighborhood and to promote redevelopment. These combined issues necessitate enhancements to local ordinances to meet the current needs of the community and provide an opportunity for positive change.

In July 2010, a work group was formed to make policy recommendations to sustain Grand Rapids' housing and neighborhoods. The work group met every two weeks from July to October with representatives from City staff, the City Commission, housing advocates, neighborhood organizers, developers, and service providers. Data was utilized from the City of Grand Rapids Code Compliance Department, United States Postal Service, City Assessor's Office, the Census Bureau, and other reputable sources, along with best practices from other cities, to understand current housing trends. During the course of seven meetings, the work group developed recommendations addressing single-family rental units and vacant properties that are contained in this report.

The work group recommends the following actions with the goal of improving housing quality and neighborhood sustainability:

1. Modernize the rental registration and certification program to include single-family rental units in a budget neutral pilot project
2. Enhance the vacant property registration ordinance to provide the City and other entities accurate data on vacant properties, provide relevant parties a local contact number for properties, and strengthen exterior/nuisance code compliance on vacant properties

¹ As reported by the City on August 11, 2010

² Reported by the Community Research Institute in the *Residential Foreclosures in Grand Rapids' Neighborhoods* dataset published on June 30, 2010

3. Deliberately evaluate the effects of the proposed pilot projects to ensure the long-term sustainability of Grand Rapids' housing stock and neighborhoods

II. Single-Family Rental Inspection and Certification Pilot Project

One in seven residential properties in Grand Rapids – 8,000 homes - have been foreclosed since 2004³. This has caused many previous homeowners to seek rental housing and more single-family units to be converted from owner-occupied homes to rental units. From 2006 to 2009 the number of families living in single-family rental units has jumped from 4,568 to 7,771 in Grand Rapids, *a 70% increase during the course of three years*⁴. With these changing housing dynamics, rental units are having a greater impact on neighborhood quality of life, requiring an adjustment to the gap in policy regarding single-family rental units.

The current system fails to provide assurance of safe and healthy single-family rental housing, as these properties are only inspected upon complaint, thereby leaving many units unchecked. Neighborhoods with a significant number of single-family rentals are also often those with the oldest housing stock and severe economic challenges (see Appendices A and B). Due to age, older housing requires regular upkeep and can quickly deteriorate when maintenance lags. Older housing with deferred repairs is prone to water leaks (e.g. roofing, plumbing, and foundation), lead poisoning, fires hazards, unsafe heating systems, pest infestation, the absence of smoke alarms, and other code violations that affect the safety of the occupants and surrounding properties. A proactive inspection and certification system will correct unsafe conditions and ensure that vulnerable populations are not disproportionately affected by hazardous housing.

According to the 2000 Census, single-family rental units comprise 23% of all rentals and house one-third (33%) of the total tenant population. As mentioned above, this portion of the market is growing exponentially. Families with young children often utilize single-family rental units because they provide highly desired amenities such as private yards and larger units. Additionally, recent metropolitan trends highlight the important future of urban centers with access to transportation, walkability, and quality rental housing becoming important assets for many neighborhoods. Current City ordinance exempts single-family rental units from the requirement of certification, thus potentially exposing families to substandard housing and jeopardizing the future economic sustainability of neighborhoods.

Incorporating single-family rental units into the existing inspection and certification program will:

- Ensure that substandard housing will not disproportionately impact families with children and along racial, ethnic, and economic lines
- Increase market equity for all investment property owners by promoting consistent compliance

³ Reported by the Community Research Institute in the *Residential Foreclosures in Grand Rapids' Neighborhoods* dataset published on June 30, 2010

⁴ American Community Survey (2010). State & county Quickfacts: Grand Rapids city, MI. Retrieved November 1, 2010 from <http://factfinder.census.gov>

- Promote a standard of quality and affordability for all rental units, particularly in the central city where access to employment, education, transportation, and other services can combine to make urban neighborhoods an attractive lifestyle choice

Overview of Current Code Compliance Policies and Practices (Details Located in Appendix C)⁵

Currently, the City requires the registration of all rental units (at no cost), which is to be renewed every four years. The Housing Code states that two-family and multi-family units must receive a two, four, or six-year certificate of compliance before being inhabited. However in practice, these code requirements have resulted in less than 30% of two-family units being certified as of August 2010. Single-family rentals are only inspected upon complaint and are not systematically required to have a Certificate of Compliance. Since 2005, the City has received 5,600 complaints on more than 2,500 single-family units.

Phase In Strategy for Inspections and Certifications

A three-phase implementation strategy targeting the most problematic areas first provides the opportunity to spread the initial cost over time and allow for formative evaluation. Target areas will be selected by identifying the Census Block Groups with the greatest number of single-family rental units and complaints (see Appendix D). Adjustments to the priority block groups may be needed to ensure that each ward of the city will have no less than 30% and no more than 40% of the inspections initiated (see Appendix E).

Phase I – Year 1: The first phase of the program would target approximately 2,700 units in the Census Block Groups with the highest concentration of single-family rental units and complaints. According to the Code Compliance Department, the program will require the work of six code compliance officers to inspect and certify units. The program would issue two and four-year certifications as currently described in the Housing Code (owners will be eligible for six-year certification when they seek re-certification).

Phase II – Year 2: The second phase of the program will target 2,700 units in the Census Block Groups with the second highest concentration of single-family rental units and complaints.

Phase III – Year 3: The third phase of the program will target the remaining 2,700 single-family rental units and would begin re-inspecting those rental units receiving 2-year certifications in Year 1 of the program. At the end of Phase III, all registered single-family rental units in the City will be certified.

Rental Registry

It is recommended that an annual online registration with a \$50 per parcel fee be established for single-family rental units to support the maintenance of the rental registry and cost of the inspection program. Property owners will provide the current information required in addition to the name and address of a local property manager (if applicable). In an effort to incentivize early registration, a 120-day grace period after the ordinances are enacted will allow for free first-year registration. This not only provides an incentive for owners to quickly comply, but also jump-starts the development of a comprehensive database of key property information. After the grace period, the

⁵ The following paragraph's information is derived from reports given by the City on August 11, 2010

fee will be applied to support program operation. Compliance with the annual registration will be a prerequisite for obtaining and keeping a four or six-year certification.

A Budget Neutral Approach to Funding Single-Family Rental Certifications (Budget in Appendix D)

The work group utilized financial figures provided by City staff and based upon current performance levels. The total cost of the three year pilot project is \$2.4 million and can be funded as a budget neutral program by the proposed rental registration fee and existing program revenue structures. The attached budget includes the start up and operating costs of the certification program; education and outreach to landlords, tenants, and the community at large on the changes to the code; and evaluation. To find an efficient cost and revenue structure that supports a sustainable program, this report recommends that the attached financial projection (see Appendix F) be fully analyzed by City staff, along with inclusion of the entire rental inspections program. Additionally, gains in efficiency with new technologies and strategic planning are not factored into these costs and will lead to enhanced performance. With the changes resulting in a net cost of \$85 a year per parcel⁶, the recommendations are careful to ensure single-family rental unit landlords and tenants would not be overburdened.

Increasing Efficiencies and Reducing Costs

Ensuring quality housing requires an effective and efficient Code Compliance Department. To overcome possible budgetary hurdles and accomplish program sustainability, the Code Compliance Department could take steps to maximize current staff efficiency and possible revenue streams:

- **Take Advantage of Improved Technologies and Efficiencies:** The budget figures reflect the current work environment of the Code Compliance Department, however the department is currently transitioning to use new mobile work spaces to increase efficiency. Although the work group is unable to project the efficiencies gained by the new technologies adopted, other communities have shown great strides in improving their productivity. If these technological enhancements prove to be successful, fewer staff may be required. With technologies that allow Code Compliance Officers to spend more time in the field and take advantage of strategic inspection routes, an increase in the amount of certifications completed per year may reduce staffing needs and lower program costs. Additionally, a systemic approach that divides labor and focuses on geographic target areas will allow for more inspections to be completed per year. The Department is encouraged to continue to look for technological and strategic advances that help make their work more efficient, reduce staff costs, and enhance productivity.
- **Create a Sustainable Cost and Revenue Structure:** In the long term, the City is encouraged to adopt a sustainable business model in which program costs are supported. The City should adjust the revenue structure to meet the costs of inspections so that service levels are not reliant upon the availability of general operating funds. Additional needed revenue could subsidize the start up costs for single-family rental certifications, add additional inspectors to certify two-family and multi-family units, hire additional support staff, and improve current technologies. Moreover, the work group maintains that the most important goal of creating an effective, accountable single-family rental unit inspection program be paramount if the City chooses to explore different ways to provide services, such as contractual work.

⁶ As outlined in the Housing Code and Fee Schedule: \$140 for a four-year Certification on a single-family rental (assuming no extenuating circumstances) plus a \$50 per yearly registration fee. The total cost over four years is \$340, which equates to \$85 a year.

- **Utilize Federal Grant Funding:** The proposed pilot project is budget neutral over the course of three years, but due to start up costs there is a first year deficit. In order to fill the first year deficit of the single-family rental inspection and certification pilot program, the City could utilize one-time federal funding such as Community Development Block Grant money or other possible resources.

III. Enhancing the Vacant Property Registration Ordinance

Since 2004, more than 1 in 7 homes have been foreclosed in Grand Rapids⁷. This has caused many previously occupied homes to become vacant, significantly changing the social and structural fabric of many neighborhoods, lowering property values, and adding stress to City systems. Different data sets vary in their description of vacant properties ranging from the 3,000 parcels⁸ accounted for by the Code Compliance Division to over 6,600 units⁹ reported by the United States Postal Service. It is important that Grand Rapids develop an accurate data-driven understanding of the vacant property issues in neighborhoods. A local preliminary study conducted by Dr. Paul Isely at Grand Valley State University found, for example, that a \$100,000 home that has eight unoccupied, bank-owned properties within 500 yards in any direction, sells for approximately \$8,000 less than it would otherwise¹⁰. It is imperative that the City enhance the Vacant Property Registration Ordinance (VPRO) to gain a better understanding of the vacant property issues negatively affecting the community.

As the work group sought to design a more comprehensive vacant property policy reform, it became clear that additional, more accurate data is needed. Grand Rapids has been a leader in registering vacant properties to better understand changing neighborhood dynamics, but to adequately address the impact of the foreclosure crisis enhancements are necessary. Accurate parcel information will help promote the successful launch and development of the Kent County Land Bank Authority (KCLBA) and allow the City of Grand Rapids to develop policy strategies aligned towards a productive reuse of vacant properties. Utilizing best practice models from other communities, the work group proposes the following practical enhancements to the VPRO to inform future vacant property policy development.

A Vacant Property Registration Ordinance is a best practice and a necessary first step in creating a comprehensive vacant property policy by:

- Providing accurate parcel data to assist in future policy development
- Providing a local contact for properties
- Engaging in future Land Bank policy development

⁷ Reported by the Community Research Institute in the *Residential Foreclosures in Grand Rapids' Neighborhoods* dataset published on June 30, 2010

⁸ As reported by the City on August 11, 2010

⁹ Compiled by the Community Research Institute from the United States Postal Service and HUD Vacancy list using 2nd Quarter 2010 data. Units were reported vacant after 90 days before being added to the USPS Vacancy List.

¹⁰ The study examined 400 homes in ten neighborhoods (nine in Grand Rapids and one in East Grand Rapids) during the first quarter of 2010, which were all sold for at least \$50,000. Only bank-owned vacant properties were included in this study, therefore the reduction in property values could be greater if all types of vacant homes were incorporated.

Proposed Enhancements to the Current Vacant Property Registration Ordinance

- Online vacant property registration that is renewable every year
 - **Exception: a Building Permit has been pulled and is active**
 - Two-Family and Multi-unit parcels will be exempt unless they reach an 80% or higher vacancy rate
- Institute a yearly \$45 per parcel fee for registration to support the cost of maintaining the registry and other code compliance activities related to vacant properties
- Require local contact/property management information
- Local contact and weatherization information must be clearly posted on the property
- Automatically include a “No Trespassing Order” upon registration

Staffing Descriptions (Budget in Appendix J)

The registration fee will support 1.5 full-time employees (FTE) with the primary goal of providing a dedicated effort to mitigating the detrimental effects that vacant properties have on neighborhoods.

1 FTE (Code Compliance Officer 1) will:

1. Utilize best practice models, latest research, utility shut-offs, as well as community and neighborhood association contacts to research and find unregistered properties to add them to the registry
2. Perform windshield surveys to find unregistered parcels of neighborhoods with the highest concentration of vacancies as identified by USPS data
3. Conduct exterior/nuisance code compliance inspections on vacant properties

.5 FTE Clerical Staff will:

1. Maintain the vacant property registry to ensure that accurate data is entered and renewal notices are sent
2. Use research and administrative means to find unregistered vacant and rental properties (utilizing water shut-offs, change in utilities, etc.)

These enhancements to the Vacant Property Registration Ordinance are viewed as a practical, important first step in creating a comprehensive vacant property policy. A posted local contact for vacant properties provides neighborhood associations, interested residents, emergency personnel, and the Code Compliance Department with the ability to contact an organization/owner, including financial institutions, to address concerns. Using a data-driven understanding of current housing trends, the City will be able to create a plan to encourage quick reuse of vacant properties for the community’s benefit.

IV. Improving the Demolition Process

In the advocacy efforts leading up to the creation of the work group, some stakeholders shared concerns regarding the City's demolition process. The work group seeks not to change the current demolition policy - as addressing this issue was not in the platform endorsed by the stakeholders - but to recognize the need for additional efficiencies in the administrative process. The work group investigated these issues with the help of Code Compliance staff and Planning Department Director, Suzanne Schulz, along with reviewing relevant ordinances and processes. City staff reported that recent changes have been made to the Order to Repair or Demolish process that incorporates lean principles, such as reducing the need to verify owners at every step of the process. After careful review of this process, it is clear that improvement in the administrative process can be made without changing the demolition policy. Administrative process should be continuously analyzed for consolidation and new efficiencies to shorten the time it takes after the structure receives an Order to Repair or Demolish to undergo demolition, along with recognizing the importance of neighborhood approval and preservation of housing stock.

Due to the rise in the number of vacant properties, lower property values, and a challenging redevelopment environment, the work group explored the use of careful, strategic demolition as an option for creating needed community assets. The goal of the demolition policy should be to improve neighborhoods by eliminating poor quality housing in a manner that positively contributes to the health of residential and commercial districts. Along with consciously refining the process for more efficiency, this report also recommends the City work with the Kent County Land Bank Authority to create a demolition practice that best serves the neighborhoods of the central city. It is vital that neighborhood input be gathered on demolitions and reuse of property to ensure resident need is a factor in the decision making process. Finally, whenever possible, the appropriate redevelopment of demolished structures could be expanded to consider various potential uses of a site, including the creation of green space, provided that such uses are consistent with neighborhood needs and goals.

V. Education and Outreach

A professional education and media campaign is recommended to provide information to the property owners, tenants, and community members about changes to the rental and vacant property registrations and inspection programs. The City will update their website, ordinances, and other public information; conduct public service announcements; and send press releases to make property owners aware of the new regulations. Additionally, partnering with the Rental Property Owners Association and organizations working with tenants should occur so that they may utilize their membership, contacts, and consumers to educate them on the changes to the Housing Code.

VI. Evaluating the Proposed Pilot Projects

The City will allocate a portion of the revenue to evaluate the single-family rental inspection program and enhancements to the Vacant Property Registration Ordinance to promote continuous quality improvement. This will ensure that City policies and Code Compliance Department actions are positively affecting the rental market and community as a whole, along with addressing the neighborhood vacancy issues. Both qualitative and quantitative measures, along with the establishment of program goals and baseline matrices, should be utilized to assess the effectiveness of the program and inform revisions.

Factors to evaluate could include:

- Changes in housing quality
- Impact on tax base and resulting revenues
- Impact on Fair Market Rent prices and housing affordability for all income levels
- Housing quality related to health indicators (e.g. asthma, lead, fires, etc.)
- Performance of Code Compliance staff
- Landlord satisfaction with the program, including inspector efficiency and economic impact
- Utilize data to further develop a fee structure that promotes early and efficient compliance
- Measure possible disproportionate impact on specific populations, neighborhoods, etc.
- Changes in criminal activity regarding property related offenses
- Effect on neighborhood quality of life and economic development
- Utilizing the Neighborhood Indicators Project and measuring the total community investment related to improving housing conditions
- Utilizing data from the VPRO to influence future property re-use and land banking

This critical evaluation will be conducted and published annually to ensure that the project is efficiently benefiting all relevant sectors of the community. A professional consultant in addition to a committee of City staff, developers, neighborhood representatives, housing advocates, tenants, and landlords will be utilized to supervise the study.

VII. Conclusion

These recommendations are respectfully submitted with the goal of improving housing quality and neighborhood sustainability. Due to the foreclosure crisis and changing neighborhood dynamics, the City is urged to update their policies to meet the community's current needs. The work group and its community stakeholders look forward to the next steps in enacting these policy recommendations and are eager to assist the City in the implementation of these changes.

VIII. Acknowledgements

The work group acknowledges and thanks 2nd Ward Commissioner, Ruth Kelly, for her devoted attention to housing and neighborhood concerns; City Manager, Greg Sundstrom, for his leadership in addressing these critical issues; City staff for their hard work in providing input and data to inform the policy development; and the community stakeholders that have contributed their experience and expertise to strengthen these recommendations.

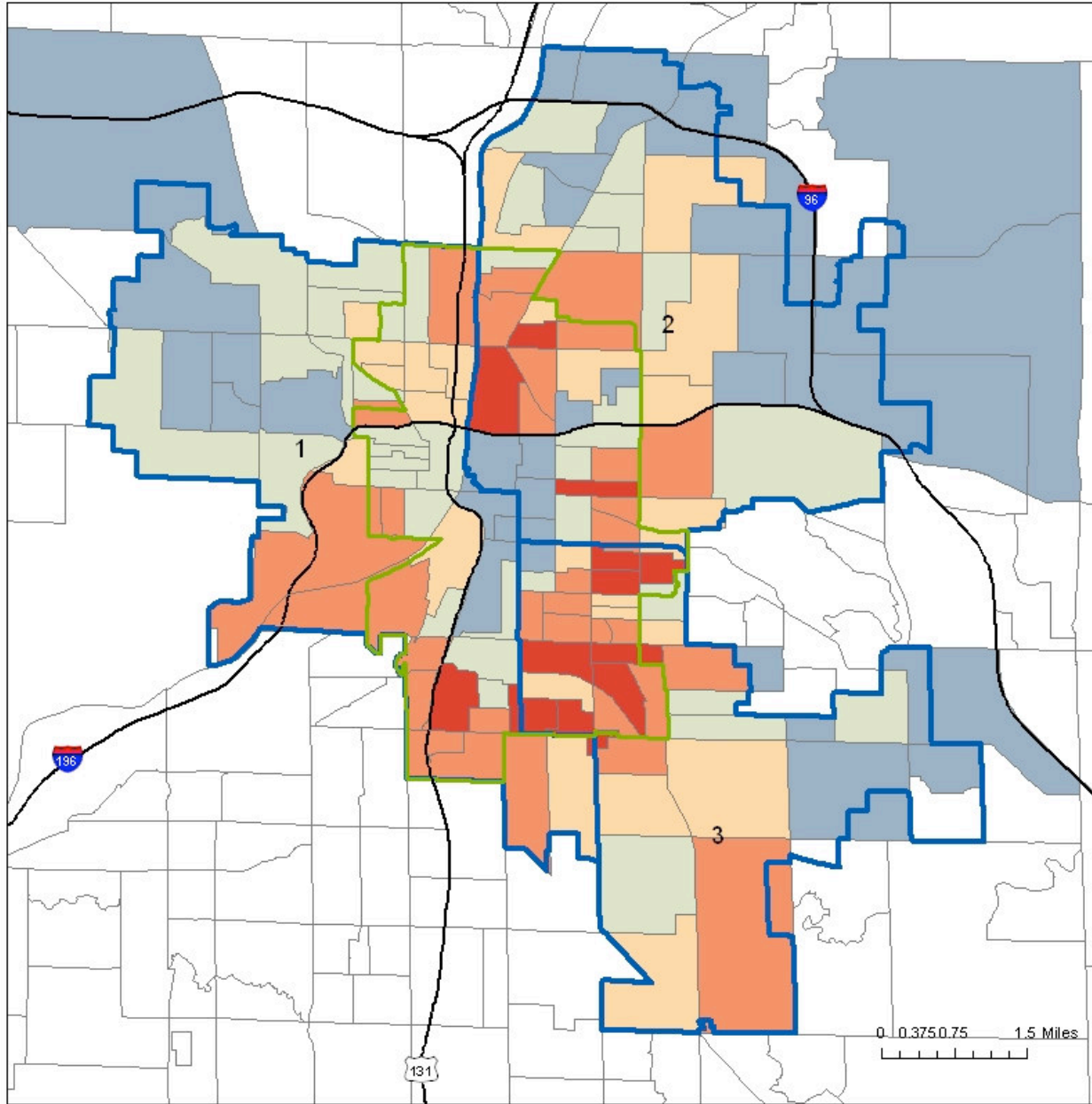
IX. Work Group Members

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Jamie Zamora, Grand Rapids Urban League

Appendix A: Map of Single-Family Rental Unit Concentrations

Single Family Rental Units, 2010

Formula: Number of single-family rental units as identified through the registration database per census block groups



Maps provided by:



Legend

- General Target Area
 - City of Grand Rapids Ward
 - Highways
 - Single Family Rental Units
- | | |
|--|-----------|
| | 0 |
| | 1 - 25 |
| | 26 - 50 |
| | 51 - 75 |
| | 76 - 116 |
| | 116 - 193 |

Geography: 2000 Census Block Groups- Grand Rapids, MI

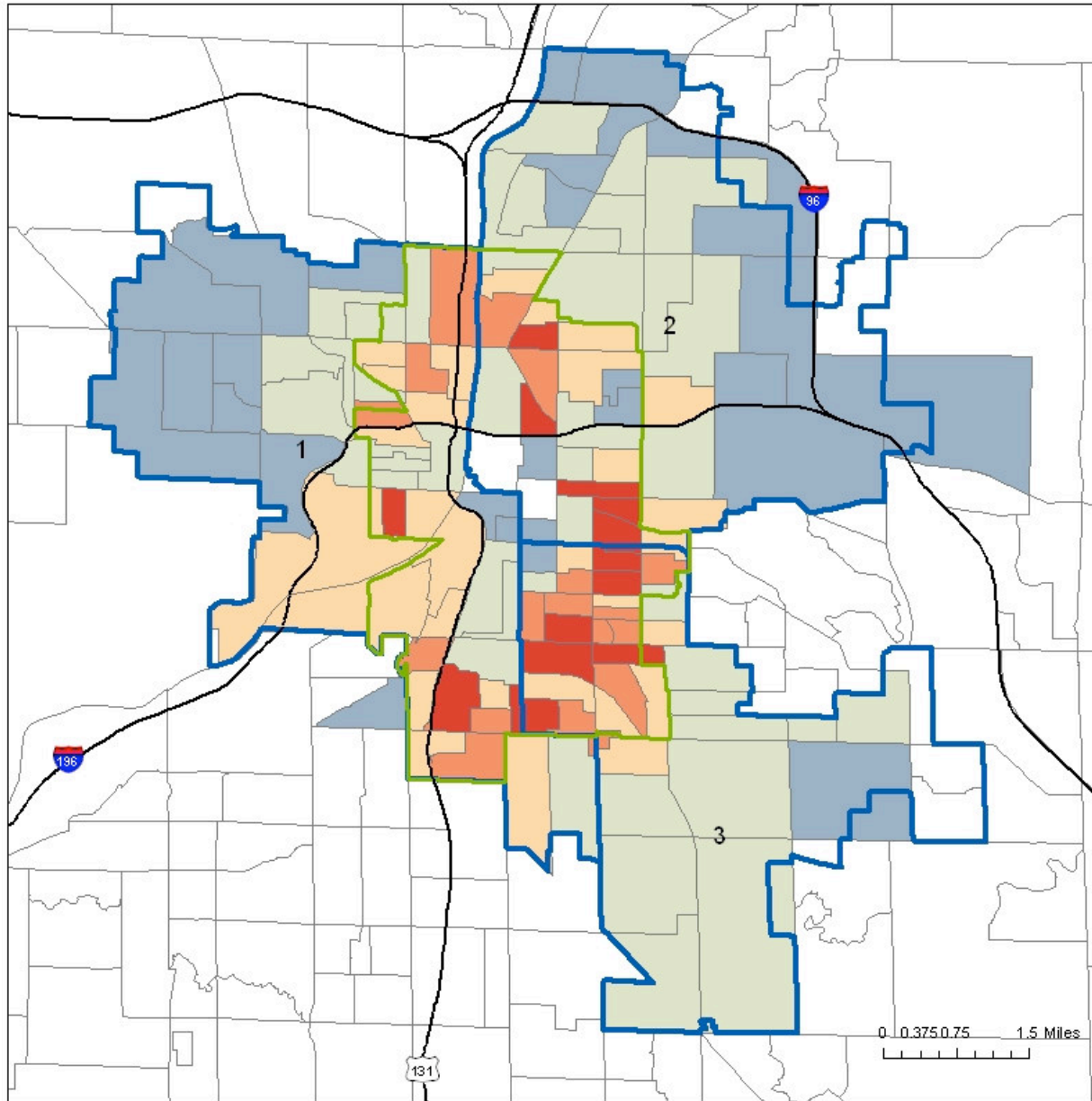
Source:
 2010 City of Grand Rapids
 2000 U.S. Census Bureau
 2010 County of Kent-IT Department

Created on:
 September 7, 2010
 Projection: State Plane South NAD83 Intl. Feet.

Appendix B: Map of Single-Family Rental Unit Complaints

Single Family Rental Properties with a Substantiated Complaint, 2005-2010

Formula: Number of parcels with substantial complaints per census block group



Maps provided by:

Geography: 2000 Census Block Groups-Grand Rapids, MI



Legend

- General Target Area
- City of Grand Rapids Wards
- Highways

Complaints



Source:

2010 City of Grand Rapids
 2000 U.S. Census Bureau
 2010 County of Kent-IT Department

Created on:

September 7, 2010
 Projection: State Plane South NAD83 Intl. Feet.

Appendix C: Outline of Current Housing Code Policies and Practices

The Code Compliance Department administers several programs, including rental inspections, to maintain and improve housing quality and neighborhood vitality. In addition to recently changing offenses from criminal to civil court and making fees lienable, current policies and procedures include¹¹:

Registration of Rental Units

- The City of Grand Rapids requires the free registration of all rental properties, which is renewable every four years. Failure to register a rental property within 30 days of assuming ownership or the issuance of a Use and Occupancy Permit has a fee of \$90.

Routine Rental Inspections

- City of Grand Rapids statute requires rental dwellings containing more than one unit to obtain a Certificate of Compliance prior to being occupied.
- Of the 7,031 two-family units, 2,109 have been inspected and certified (30%). Current practice is that two-family units are only certified upon complaint or request of property owner.
- A Certificate of Compliance is issued by the Department after a full inspection of the property assures compliance with the housing code.
- A property may qualify for a two, four, or six-year certificate.
- A two-year Certificate of Compliance is issued for all rental properties in compliance with the Housing Code.
- A four-year Certificate of Compliance is issued if the property meets the following criteria:
 - Property owner has an active registration and the property inspected within 90 days of the expiration of the current certificate.
 - Property is brought into compliance before the certificate expiration date or within the time frame of the Notice of Violation.
- A six-year Certificate of Compliance is issued if the property meets the following criteria:
 - Has been owned by the same owner since the last certification.
 - Have no recorded or verified violations since the last certification.
 - No outstanding fees, taxes, or assessments are assessed against the property.
 - Owner contacts the City for a rental certificate 90 days prior to the expiration of the current certificate.
 - The property is registered prior to the expiration of the certificate.

Complaint Based Inspections

- Code Compliance Officers respond to housing and nuisance complaints as they are received.
- Currently, single-family rental units are neither required nor eligible to have a routine inspection and Certificate of Compliance.
- Inspections of single-family rental units occur on the basis of a complaint being received by the City. If a complaint is concerning the interior of the unit, a full inspection of the unit will occur. If a complaint is received for the exterior of the unit, only an inspection of the exterior is conducted.
- Since 2005, the City has received 5,600 complaints on more than 2,500 registered single-family rentals.

Current Vacant Property Registration Ordinances

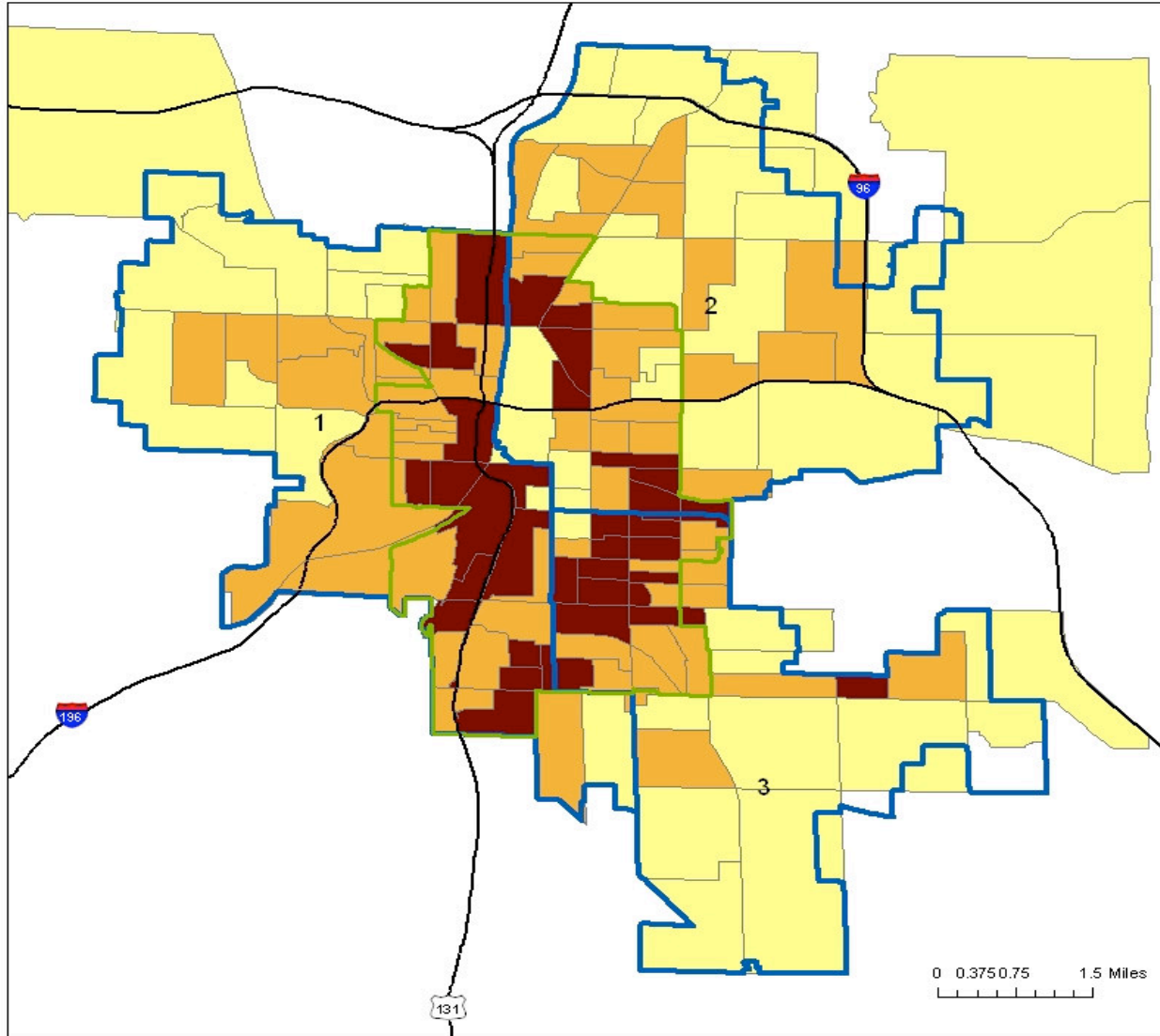
- Properties must register (free) with the City 30 days after becoming vacant and renewed every four years

¹¹ As reported by the City on August 11, 2010

Appendix D: Map of Single-Family Rental Unit Certification Pilot Program Implementation¹²

Proposed Single Family Rental Inspection Program, 2010

Formula: Number of parcels with substantial complaints per single family rental units as identified through the registration database



Maps provided by:



Geography: 2000 Census Block Groups-Grand Rapids, MI

Source:
2010 City of Grand Rapids
2000 U.S. Census Bureau
2010 County of Kent-IT Department

Created on:
September 7, 2010
Projection: State Plane South NAD83 Intl. Feet.

¹² The map shows the location of the different phases for the proposed Single-Family Rental Unit Inspection and Certification Pilot Project. The first phase is show in brown. The second phase is shown in orange. Third phase show in yellow.

Appendix E: Detailed Numbers for Single-Family Rental Certification Pilot Project¹³

Inspections of Single-Family Rental Units Per Year By Ward						
	Year 1	% of Year 1	Year 2	% of Year 2	Year 3	% of Year 3
Ward 1	856	31.9%	870	32.2%	855	32.6%
Ward 2	875	32.6%	848	31.3%	794	30.3%
Ward 3	955	35.5%	988	36.5%	971	37.1%
Total	2,686	100%	2,706	100%	2,620	100%

¹³ Data utilized from the City of Grand Rapids Rental Registry as of August 11, 2010.

Appendix F: Single-Family Rental Certification Pilot Project Budget

Single-Family Rental Certification Pilot Project Budget					
	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total	Assumptions
REVENUE					
Grant income to support start-up (placeholder)	-	-	-	-	One-time CDBG or other support
Assessed Inspection Revenue	355,500	474,000	474,000	1,303,500	\$79,000/year per inspector, 25% less in year 1
Rental Registration	403,650	403,650	403,650	1,210,950	8,073 parcel at \$50 each
Total Estimated Revenue	759,150	877,650	877,650	2,514,450	
EXPENDITURES					
<i>Staffing and Overhead:</i>					
Inspector Salaries (6 FTEs)	318,000	324,000	330,000	972,000	
Clerical Salary (.5 FTE)	20,000	20,500	21,000	61,500	
Fringe Benefits	203,249	211,777	220,799	635,824	38% of salaries, plus health insurance
Overhead (office space, IT, phones, supervision, etc)	135,200	137,800	140,400	413,400	40% of salary cost
Central Services (exec, attorneys, fiscal services, etc)	54,080	55,120	56,160	165,360	16% of salaries
New Computers (6)	21,000	-	-	21,000	
New Automobiles (3)	39,000	-	-	39,000	
Annual Automobile Fleet Cost	25,272	25,272	25,272	75,816	\$4,212 per auto (6)
Total Staffing and Overhead	815,801	774,469	793,631	2,383,900	
<i>Evaluation</i>	-	25,000	25,000	50,000	
<i>Education and Outreach:</i>					
Printing	800	-	-	800	40,000 at \$.02 a piece
Postage	6,400	-	-	6,400	40,000 @ \$.16 each
Public Releases and Public Service Announcements	4,000	-	-	4,000	contracted targeted marketing services
Total Education and Outreach	11,200	-	-	11,200	
Total Estimated Expenditures	827,001	799,469	818,631	2,445,100	
Total Estimated Revenue over Expenditures	(67,851)	78,182	59,020	69,351	0 check - s/b zero

Appendix G: Best Practices in Rental Inspection Programs

Model Rental Inspection Programs

Presented September 8, 2010

Introduction

In an effort to maintain housing stock and protect the health of their residents, many cities around the country have instituted rental inspection programs which routinely inspect all rental properties and ensure these properties maintain a standard of quality established through the City code. Although each municipality has a unique way of approaching rental certifications, *all of the examples below and the many others researched did not distinguish the different types of units for inspection, such as Grand Rapids*. This overview looks at several programs and their unique approaches. The programs were selected based on the city size and geography and known best practices in the code compliance industry.

Local Examples

Several cities close to Grand Rapids also implement rental registry and inspection programs. Kentwood, Wyoming, and Holland have all implemented rental registry and inspection programs that include single-family rentals. Kalamazoo also has recently started to inspect single-family rental units and adding a rental registry of \$100 for the first unit and \$1 for each additional unit¹⁴.

Kentwood requires a certificate of compliance for all their rental units. Multi-unit dwellings with three or more units are required to renew their certificate of compliance every two years. Single family and two unit dwellings are eligible for three or four year certificates. Kentwood also requires all rental properties to be registered. In addition to property information and owner information, the owner is required to provide the City with the name and contact information for a local property manager if the owner does not live in Kent County or any adjoining county. There is no cost to register the property as a rental, but Kentwood charges \$50 for a two-year certification of a single-family unit, \$75 for a duplex, and \$25 per unit in multi-unit buildings.¹⁵

Wyoming, similarly, requires every rental property to be registered and inspected for compliance with city code. All certificates are for two years. Wyoming began including 1-4 unit rental properties in their rental inspection program in 2009. The first two-years of the program focused on safety issues, and now the department will also inspect and address cosmetic concerns. There is no cost to register the property, but Wyoming charges \$98 per unit for 2 year certifications (all units are inspected if there are 20 units or less, 10 units are inspected in 20-100 unit buildings, in 100 units and above buildings 10% are inspected)¹⁶

¹⁴ City of Kalamazoo, Michigan Housing Code, 2010

¹⁵ City of Kentwood, Michigan Housing Code, 2010

¹⁶ City of Wyoming, Michigan Housing Code, 2010

The City of Holland also has a rental registry and inspection program which started in 1986 that includes single-family rentals. The City allows for six-year rental certifications.¹⁷ Holland charges \$40 for the first unit and \$22 for each additional unit for both registration and inspection.

Minneapolis, Minnesota¹⁸ (Population: 385,378)

The City of Minneapolis passed an ordinance in 1991 requiring licensing of all rental properties. The City has developed twenty-two standards for rental property code compliance and takes a tiered approach to address the most problematic properties. Minneapolis is currently on a five-year cycle of inspecting all rental properties in the city. Property owners pay an annual fee of \$65 and those who convert owner-occupied single-family homes into rental units are charged a one-time fee of \$1,000. There is also a \$450 fee for inspection at change of ownership. The program currently has 50 staff and 22 inspectors. The city typically draws money from the general fund to maintain the programs, but last year the program was revenue neutral for the first time. Each rental property is required to have a property contact that lives in the city. The department very actively identifies rental properties by monitoring “for rent” signs, reviewing water billing, and educating tenants. Unlicensed properties are charged a \$500 fine for renting without a license. The fine can increase to \$5,000 with continued non-compliance. Property owners have to be current with fees to acquire a license to rent their property.

St. Louis, Missouri¹⁹ (Population: 356,587)

The St. Louis Housing Conservation Program inspects all units, both rental and owner-occupied, at change of occupancy in order to maintain safe and healthy housing. The city is informed of change of occupancy by utility companies (electric and gas) that are required to provide the city with changes to billing information. The city then contacts property owners to verify a change of occupancy and the need for an inspection. The program has 80 inspectors who work part-time for building inspections and part-time for code compliance. Each inspector is responsible for particular geographic areas. The cost per inspection is \$70. The program started with a pilot program in three wards within the city. After seeing the success of the pilot, the program grew to include 28 wards in the city. Two wards still do not participate as the aldermen were not supportive of the program. The Housing Conservation Program does not have a registration program; therefore the City has difficulty monitoring those rental units where utilities are paid by the property owner.

Sacramento, California²⁰ (Population: 486,200)

Sacramento, California requires all rental properties to have a certificate of occupancy. This ordinance was adopted in March 2008. Properties are inspected on a five-year rotation. Property owners are assessed an annual fee of \$28 per unit to cover the \$140 cost of inspection. Rental properties with no cited violations are eligible for self-certification in which owners do a self-inspection annually and at a change of occupancy, random inspections are performed on 5% of the self-certification properties per year. For each property, local contact information for someone who lives within 35 miles of Sacramento City Hall is required.

¹⁷ City of Holland, Michigan Housing Code, 2010

¹⁸ Interview with Joann K. Velde, Director of Housing Inspection Services for the City of Minneapolis on August 30, 2010.

¹⁹ Interview with Jerry Wessels, Manger of the City of St. Louis Building Division. 2010 City of St. Louis Housing Code

²⁰ City of Sacramento Housing Code, 2010

Burlington, Vermont²¹ (Population: 38,889)

The City of Burlington, Vermont requires annual registration and renewal of Certificate of Occupancy for their rental properties. Each property owner pays an annual fee of \$75, new property owners pay a one-time fee of \$50, and additional fees are assessed for re-inspections. When property owners renew their annual Certificate of Compliance, they sign-off that the property is in accordance with the Building Code. Burlington issues a three-year Certificate of Occupancy for properties with no more than five violations and no life-threatening violations on the first inspection, others are issued a two-year certification. The City also specifies the responsibility of landlords to provide compensation to tenants if the Certificate of Occupancy is revoked.

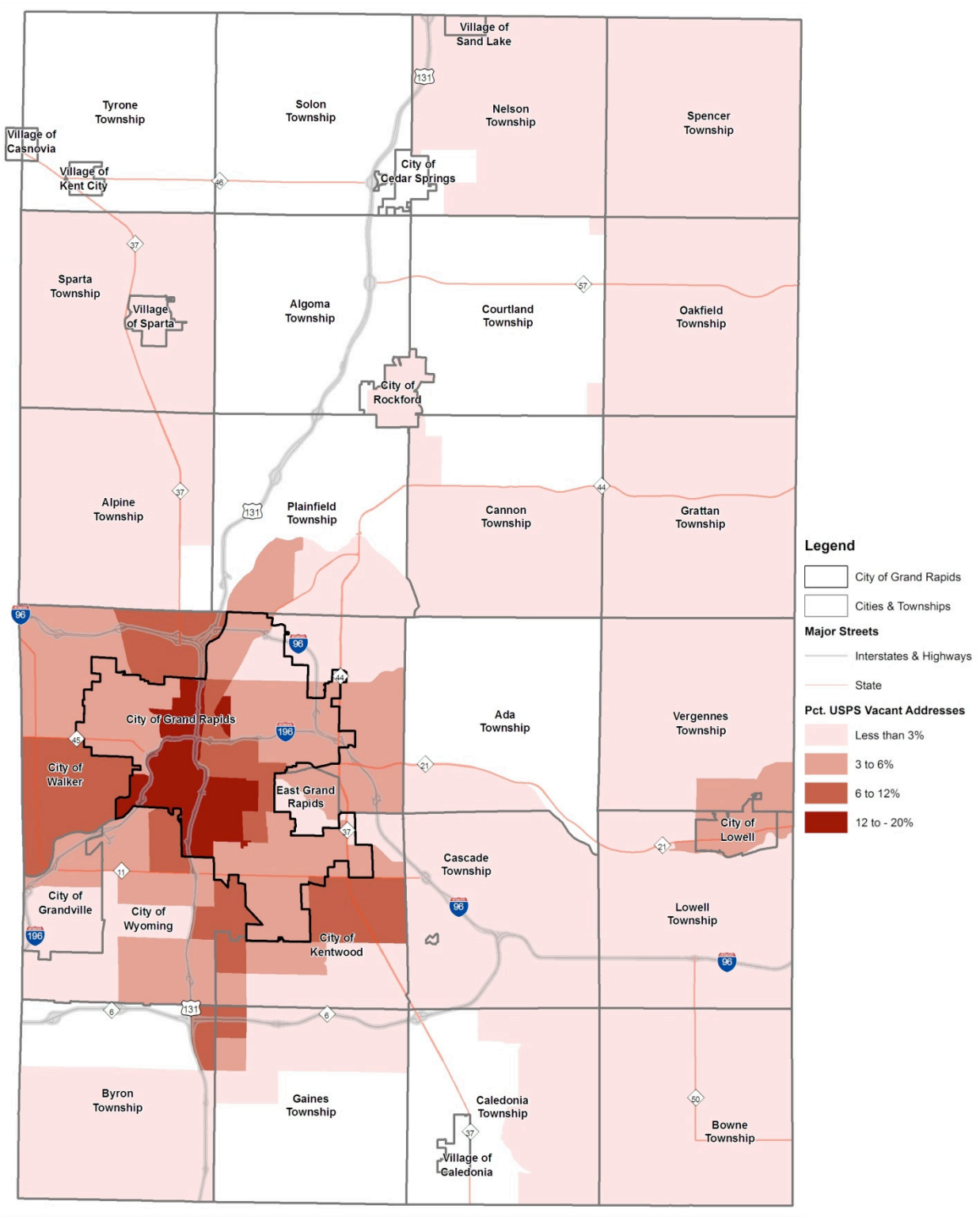
Milwaukee, Wisconsin²²(Population: 605,013)

In January of this year, Milwaukee implemented a five-year pilot rental inspection program in two areas of the city with the highest percentage of code violations and illegal units. Property owners are notified of the date of inspection 30 days prior to inspection, with the option to reschedule within 30 days of that date. The fee for inspections is \$85 and after approval, the owner will receive a Residential Rental Inspection Certificate. Four-year certifications are issued for properties without disqualifying violations; all other units will be issued a one-year certificate after the violations have been addressed.

²¹ City of Burlington, VT Code Enforcement Website, available at <http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/codeenforcement/>, City of Burlington, VT Housing Code <http://library4.municode.com/>

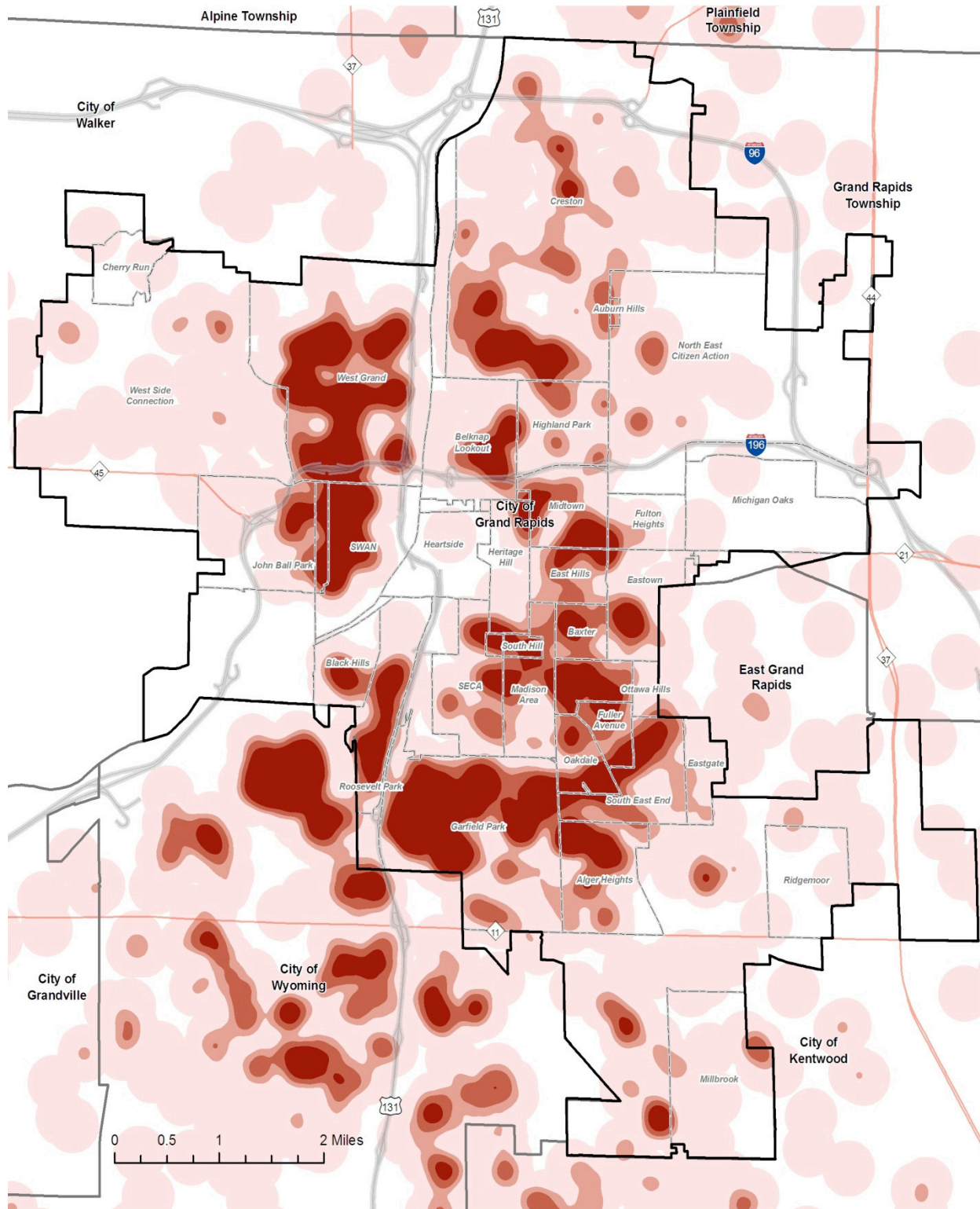
²² City of Milwaukee Residential Rental Inspection Program Website, available at <http://city.milwaukee.gov/DNS/RRI>

Appendix H: Map of USPS Vacancy Concentrations by Census Tract²³



²³ Map provided by the Johnson Center's Community Research Institute at GVSU using 2010 HUD Aggregated USPS Administrative Data on Vacancies. Created on June 30, 2010

Appendix I: Concentrations of Residential Foreclosures²⁴



²⁴ Map provided by the Johnson Center's Community Research Institute at GVSU using 2010 Kent County of Equalization data. Created on June 30, 2010

Appendix J: Grand Rapids Foreclosure Data²⁵

Neighborhood Area	Total Homes*	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010 Q1		2010 Q2		2010 Q3		Change 2010Q2 - 2010Q3	2010 YTD**		Total 2004-2010YTD** (cumulative)	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	% Increase (Decrease)	Count	%	Count	%
Alger Heights	1,622	20	1.2	17	1.0	38	2.3	39	2.4	39	2.4	42	2.6	18	1.1	20	1.2	4	0.2	(400.0%)	47	2.9	242	14.9
Auburn Hills	40	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	7.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0.0	1	2.5	NA	2	5.0	6	15.0
Baxter	759	16	2.1	24	3.2	30	4.0	56	7.4	43	5.7	23	3.0	8	1.1	4	0.5	3	0.4	(33.3%)	16	2.1	208	27.4
Belknap Lookout	1,335	15	1.1	18	1.3	40	3.0	44	3.3	36	2.7	25	1.9	16	1.2	9	0.7	9	0.7	0.0%	35	2.6	213	16.0
Black Hills	271	4	1.5	8	3.0	10	3.7	13	4.8	19	7.0	16	5.9	7	2.6	0	0.0	4	1.5	NA	11	4.1	81	29.9
Cherry Run	238	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.4	4	1.7	5	2.1	1	0.4	1	0.4	0	0.0	1	0.4	NA	2	0.8	13	5.5
Creston	8,581	78	0.9	99	1.2	153	1.8	181	2.1	214	2.5	169	2.0	60	0.7	56	0.7	39	0.5	(43.6%)	164	1.9	1,058	12.3
East Hills	1,040	13	1.3	11	1.1	24	2.3	44	4.2	35	3.4	26	2.5	10	1.0	5	0.5	5	0.5	0.0%	20	1.9	173	16.6
Eastgate	567	5	0.9	1	0.2	3	0.5	13	2.3	18	3.2	4	0.7	3	0.5	2	0.4	1	0.2	(100.0%)	6	1.1	50	8.8
Easttown	1,280	6	0.5	5	0.4	23	1.8	23	1.8	34	2.7	22	1.7	12	0.9	1	0.1	8	0.6	87.5%	23	1.8	136	10.6
Fuller Avenue	627	13	2.1	15	2.4	23	3.7	40	6.4	35	5.6	30	4.8	6	1.0	8	1.3	2	0.3	(300.0%)	16	2.6	172	27.4
Fulton Heights	753	4	0.5	3	0.4	4	0.5	7	0.9	7	0.9	5	0.7	2	0.3	2	0.3	3	0.4	33.3%	7	0.9	37	4.9
Garfield Park	4,655	70	1.5	73	1.6	142	3.1	190	4.1	267	5.7	191	4.1	56	1.2	66	1.4	55	1.2	(20.0%)	178	3.8	1,111	23.9
Heartside	328	0	0.0	1	0.3	0	0.0	3	0.9	0	0.0	3	0.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3	NA	1	0.3	8	2.4
Heritage Hill	894	2	0.2	9	1.0	6	0.7	16	1.8	18	2.0	9	1.0	3	0.3	6	0.7	3	0.3	(100.0%)	12	1.3	72	8.1
Highland Park	1,170	11	0.9	17	1.5	31	2.6	37	3.2	38	3.2	32	2.7	11	0.9	4	0.3	9	0.8	55.6%	25	2.1	191	16.3
John Ball Park	1,696	14	0.8	21	1.2	33	1.9	47	2.8	41	2.4	50	2.9	11	0.6	14	0.8	4	0.2	(250.0%)	30	1.8	236	13.9
Madison Area	1,224	28	2.3	38	3.1	58	4.7	75	6.1	80	6.5	45	3.7	10	0.8	13	1.1	9	0.7	(44.4%)	32	2.6	356	29.1
Michigan Oaks	702	2	0.3	2	0.3	0	0.0	3	0.4	8	1.1	3	0.4	3	0.4	0	0.0	2	0.3	NA	5	0.7	23	3.3
Midtown	1,366	19	1.4	18	1.3	31	2.3	35	2.6	50	3.7	28	2.0	10	0.7	12	0.9	8	0.6	(50.0%)	32	2.3	213	15.6
Millbrook	1,414	6	0.4	13	0.9	20	1.4	28	2.0	26	1.8	23	1.6	5	0.4	3	0.2	7	0.5	57.1%	16	1.1	132	9.3
Non Neighborhood Associations	4,525	25	0.6	29	0.6	49	1.1	72	1.6	67	1.5	75	1.7	27	0.6	28	0.6	21	0.5	(33.3%)	77	1.7	394	8.7
North East Citizen Action	2,274	7	0.3	15	0.7	29	1.3	28	1.2	48	2.1	24	1.1	10	0.4	6	0.3	8	0.4	25.0%	26	1.1	177	7.8
Oakdale	704	18	2.6	17	2.4	38	5.4	42	6.0	47	6.7	31	4.4	7	1.0	9	1.3	12	1.7	25.0%	28	4.0	221	31.4
Ottawa Hills	256	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	1.6	2	0.8	2	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.4	NA	1	0.4	9	3.5
Ridgemoor	808	2	0.2	1	0.1	5	0.6	5	0.6	3	0.4	3	0.4	0	0.0	1	0.1	2	0.2	50.0%	3	0.4	22	2.7
Roosevelt Park	1,182	13	1.1	15	1.3	30	2.5	49	4.1	51	4.3	62	5.2	18	1.5	12	1.0	15	1.3	20.0%	46	3.9	266	22.5
South East Community (SECA)	1,070	12	1.1	33	3.1	42	3.9	64	6.0	55	5.1	33	3.1	13	1.2	12	1.1	8	0.7	(50.0%)	33	3.1	272	25.4
South East End	4,117	77	1.9	90	2.2	145	3.5	211	5.1	214	5.2	152	3.7	38	0.9	45	1.1	31	0.8	(45.2%)	115	2.8	1,004	24.4
South Hill	281	6	2.1	8	2.8	13	4.6	13	4.6	14	5.0	17	6.0	5	1.8	3	1.1	3	1.1	0.0%	11	3.9	82	29.2
South West Area Neighbors (SWAN)	1,649	29	1.8	28	1.7	52	3.2	88	5.3	94	5.7	70	4.2	26	1.6	17	1.0	17	1.0	0.0%	65	3.9	426	25.8
West Grand	5,192	68	1.3	81	1.6	146	2.8	190	3.7	219	4.2	177	3.4	68	1.3	49	0.9	50	1.0	2.0%	170	3.3	1,051	20.2
Westside Connection	4,993	13	0.3	18	0.4	49	1.0	41	0.8	43	0.9	41	0.8	17	0.3	13	0.3	19	0.4	31.6%	52	1.0	257	5.1
Grand Rapids Total	55,332	551	1.0	679	1.2	1,185	2.1	1,587	2.9	1,756	3.2	1,336	2.4	458	0.8	397	0.7	344	0.6	(15.4%)	1,238	2.2	8,332	15.1

²⁵ Reported by the Community Research Institute in the *Residential Foreclosures in Grand Rapids' Neighborhoods* dataset for 3rd Quarter 2010 published on November 30, 2010. Total Homes: based on total counts of 1-4 unit residential properties in the county (source: Kent County Information Technology - parcel counts with property class = 401).

Appendix K: Vacant Property Registration Ordinance Enhancements Budget

Vacant Property Registration Ordinance Enhancement Budget					
Revenue	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Total	Assumptions
Vacant Property Registration Fee	180,000	180,000	180,000	540,000	4,000 vacant properties at \$45 per parcel
Expenditures					
Inspector Salary (1 FTE)	47,000	48,000	49,000	144,000	
Clerical Salary (.5 FTE)	20,000	20,500	21,000	61,500	
Fringe Benefits	42,724	43,294	43,864	129,881	38% of salaries, plus health insurance
Overhead (office space, IT, phones, supervision, etc.)	26,800	27,400	28,000	82,200	40% of salary cost
Central Services (exec, attorneys, fiscal services, etc.)	10,720	10,960	11,200	32,880	16% of salaries
New Computer	3,500	-	-	3,500	
New Automobile	13,000	-	-	13,000	
Annual Automobile Fleet Cost	4,212	4,212	4,212	12,636	
Program Evaluation	5,000	5,000	5,000	15,000	
Total Expenditures	172,956	159,366	162,276	494,597	
Balance	7,045	20,635	17,725	45,404	

Note: Education and outreach is included in the proposed Single-Family Rental Inspection and Certification Pilot Project budget

Appendix L: Intermediary Work Group Progress Reports

The following work group progress reports were submitted to the City Manager at the 30 and 60 day mark.

Housing Policy Work Group Meeting Thirty Day Report July 28 – August 25, 2010

Stemming from months of advocacy and coalition building, a work group was formed with community members and City staff to meet at City Hall to discuss and strategize detailed policy recommendations regarding rental inspections and vacant property issues.

Group members include: Tyler Nickerson and Janay Brower, Coalition to End Homelessness; Kym Spring, Foreclosure Response; Deb Eid, Creston Neighborhood Association; Connie Bohatch, Virginia Million and Phil Schaafsma, City of Grand Rapids; Jeremy DeRoo and Darel Ross, Lighthouse Communities; Frank Lynn, Disability Advocates of Kent County; Ruth Kelly, City of Grand Rapids 2nd Ward Commissioner; Lee Nelson Weber, Dyer-Ives Foundation; Paul Haan and Lauren Baker, Healthy Homes; Jamie Zamora, Grand Rapids Urban League

Meeting #1 – July 28, 2010

The first meeting largely served as an introductory session. The group formally agreed on the concerns of sub-standard single-family rental units and the detrimental effects of vacant properties, along with the overall purpose, agenda, and plan of the work group. Seven meetings were scheduled over the course of ninety days ending on October 31, 2010. Data that will be needed to make future decisions was identified and City staff provided an update to the work of the Code Compliance Department.

Meeting #2 – August 11, 2010

Much of the second meeting focused on analyzing the data from the City and other parties regarding housing issues. Data presented included:

- Number of rental units and parcels broken down by type
- Principle Resident Exemption totals of single-family units
- Active rental certifications
- Registered Rental List
- Vacant properties list
- Blighted properties list
- Relevant sections of the Housing Code Chapter 140
- City water shut-off list
- Demolition case notes and statistics
- USPS vacant property data
- Basic financial data of the Code Compliance Department

The group also noted the letter from the Rental Property Owners Association addressed to the City Commission and began a broad conversation regarding vacant property solutions.

Meeting #3 – August 25, 2010

The meeting focused on two main issues: vacant property registration ordinance and demolition. The group recognized the negative impacts of vacant properties on neighborhoods, along with the need for a proactive vacant property registration and encouraging the reuse of these properties in the community. They discussed the need to support the cost of maintaining the list of vacant properties, in addition to the need for renewal of the registration and providing local property management contact information. Suzanne Schultz, Director of the Planning Department, and Code Compliance staff spoke about the process of demolishing a structure. The group was not concerned with the demolition policy as written, but more with the administrative process and implementation. Some group members felt like there should be a greater degree of citizen participation and openness to diversity in the type of development that occurs after the structure has been razed. It was noted that the City has recently applied the lean principles to the demolition process to both the planning and housing departments to shorten the time and cost. Discussion regarding demolition also included the value of dense neighborhoods, a strong tax base, the best strategies for improving the quality of housing and the work of the upcoming Kent County Land Bank.

Upcoming

The following four meetings will address single family rental inspections, vacant property registration, and vacant property monitoring.

Housing Policy Work Group Meeting Sixty Day Report August 26 – September 22, 2010

During the month of September 2010, the Housing Policy Work Group was largely focused on the issues regarding single-family rental units. The group is working to create an implementation plan and cost structure to support the work.

Meeting #4 – September 8, 2010

At meeting #4 the group began discussions around single-family rental units. After a thoughtful dialogue, the group approved a statement agreeing to the importance of single-family rental inspections and certifications. A great deal of research was submitted to the group portraying what other cities were doing as it relates to rental inspections. It became clear that other cities do not separate out the different types of rental units, but inspect all units within their jurisdiction and utilize some sort of fee structure to pay for the work.

The group also discussed possible implementation strategies and budget scenarios. A three phase pilot project, over the course of three years, was found to have consensus. The targeted implementation would start with

focusing upon the blocks with the highest ratio of complaints and concentration of single-family rental units. Over the course of three years, all single-family rental units would be certified. A phased-in approach demands less up-front costs and the ability to evaluate the program as it is implemented.

Meeting #5 – September 22, 2010

The City submitted revised budget numbers to the group to better inform future discussions. The group participated in a broad conversation regarding budgetary issues and possible cost structures to support inspections. Issues raised and discussed include: the appropriateness of using fees to support inspections, possibility of using other revenue streams, effects that the policy could have on affordable housing, historic fluctuations in rent prices, evaluating the program as it starts, and the possibility of contracting out inspections. No decisions were made at this meeting, but conversations took place that addressed these important issues.

Upcoming

The following two meetings will be focused on finishing up the discussion on single-family rental inspections and certifications, along with addressing vacant properties. The next report will be the final document submitted to the City Commission and City Manager outlining policy recommendations related to inspections and vacant properties.