

December 14, 2011

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Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle
& Cook County Commissioners
118 N. Clark Street Room 537
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: Cook County Vacant Building Ordinance

Dear President Preckwinkle and Commissioners,

I am writing to urge the Cook County Board to vote *yes* on the Vacant Building Ordinance. Falling property values, increasing levels of crime, difficulty in attracting new businesses and decreased property tax revenues are all putting tremendous financial pressures on governments throughout Cook County. I agree that there needs to be a consistent solution to address these issues across Cook County, especially for the municipalities that do not have vacant building regulations or data gathering systems.

The Cook County Vacant Building Ordinance provides a strong foundation for our policy leaders to address the unprecedented levels of vacant buildings by creating a common template to track, monitor and manage vacant properties throughout Cook County. A recent study by Neighborworks America estimated that a single foreclosed vacant property can cost municipalities up to \$30,000: police and fire protection, clean-up of debris, court costs, unpaid water bills and in some cases demolition. No level of government has the ability to cover the costs these vacant buildings.

While the ordinance applies directly only to unincorporated Cook County, it allows municipalities within the County to *opt-in* to the regulation, registry and use of administrative hearings if they choose. The opt-in provision will allow municipalities the ability to enforce the maintenance and enclosure standards that banks have already agreed upon. In addition, the Cook County Administrative Hearings Department will be available at the suburban courthouses for municipalities opting-in for adjudication, reducing lengthy and costly hearings for noncompliance. Finally, the ordinance will create a comprehensive vacant building registry for Cook County that will allow direct registration or a feed-in from municipalities with their own registry.

I stand by the goal of the ordinance and urge the uniform accountability for the maintenance, security, and enclosure for our communities who are struggling to tackle this issue and for those communities who are seeking preventive measures before vacant buildings became problematic.

Sincerely,



Andrea L. Zopp
President and CEO

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