

# City eyes solutions to vacant lot problem

By David Hutton  
of The StarPhoenix

The city is eyeing an incentive program in an attempt to spur development of the hundreds of vacant lots and derelict buildings in Saskatoon's downtown and older neighbourhoods.

More than 115 acres of vacant lots of abandoned buildings — the equivalent of an entire neighbourhood — exist inside of Circle Drive.

The proposed policy would pay the developer five years of property taxes in the form of a cash grant

at the completion of the project. The amount the developer receives would be based on a point system based on the type of development and how well it meets certain criteria set out by the city.

"The program encourages infill," said Randy Grauer, manager of planning and development for the city.

"Perpetually vacant properties are a thorn in the side of older historic neighbourhoods."

The vacant lot program was presented for the first time to the city's planning and operations committee Tuesday and will now go through a

consultation phase with local developers.

The goal is to have the program up and running by next year, the report said, and to create a vacant lot inventory to make it easier for developers to find potential sites.

The vacant lot program would replace the municipal enterprise zone, a lauded incentive program dating to 2002 designed to encourage investment and redevelopment in several core neighbourhoods.

Coun. Pat Lorje said there also needs to be a disincentive program to force absentee owners to do something with vacant sites. Incen-

tives won't spur the activity the city is hoping for, she said.

The property maintenance by-law needs to be beefed up to force owners to clean up vacant lots that contribute to neighbourhood blight, Lorje said.

"We need something to deal with derelict buildings and then something to deal with vacant lots," said Lorje. "We need the carrot and the stick."

The city report said the use of fees or disincentives to spur development could unfairly penalize those who intend to develop the vacant sites.

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## WHAT QUALIFIES?

A vacant lot is any site where a building has been demolished, a building has been without use for three years or any brownfield site with environmental contamination. The city is also including adaptive reuse projects on commercial or industrial sites that have been "substantially abandoned" for three years.

## VACANT LOTS INSIDE CIRCLE DRIVE

Residential — 142  
Multi-family — 15  
Commercial — 271

—Source: City of Saskatoon