

ORDINANCE NO. 2022-112

---

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF FALLS CITY, NEBRASKA, RELATING TO BUILDING REGULATIONS; TO REQUIRE THE REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES; PROVIDE REGISTRATION FEES; PROVIDE PENALTIES FOR FAILING TO REGISTER VACANT PROPERTIES; TO REPEAL CONFLICTING ORDINANCES AND SECTIONS; TO PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND ORDERING THE ORDINANCE PUBLISHED IN PAMPHLET FORM.**

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE MAYOR AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FALLS CITY, NEBRASKA:

Section 1. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1001 of the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City be amended as follows:

§9-1001: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: PURPOSE. Recognizing that vacant commercial and residential buildings (hereinafter referred to as "vacant properties") contribute to blight, discourage economic development, hinder appreciation of property values, endanger public health and safety, attract criminal activity, and create fire hazards, it is the responsibility of property owners to prevent vacant properties from becoming a burden to the neighborhood and community and a threat to the public health, safety and welfare. Maintenance of the public health, safety, and welfare thus requires the City to maintain an accurate registration of all vacant properties. Any fees imposed under a vacant property registration ordinance have the potential to benefit the owners of vacant properties by helping to finance additional government services to protect the value and security of such properties.

Section 2. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1002 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1002: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: PUBLIC NUISANCE. Vacant properties shall constitute a public nuisance. The City of Falls City is given the power and authority pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute §18-1720 to define, regulate, suppress and prevent such nuisances. A vacant property registration ordinance places a duty on the owner of vacant properties to assist the City in preventing public nuisance. The City Clerk shall be the program administrator for the vacant property registration list and said registration applies to any and all vacant properties within the City limits.

Section 3. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1003 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1003: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: DUTY OF OWNER. All owners of vacant property subject to a vacant property registration ordinance, adopted pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute §19-5406, shall be required to register such property with the City Clerk.

Section 4. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1004 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1004: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: VACANT PROPERTY REGISTRATION. The owner of a vacant property must register said property with the City Clerk within thirty (30) calendar days of written notice provided to the owner or the owner's resident agent of the existence of the vacant property. Such notice shall be served on the owner or resident agent by personal service or by certified mail, return receipt requested. If notice by personal service or certified mail is unsuccessful, notice shall be given by publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the City and by conspicuously posting the notice on the commercial building or residential building which is vacant. A copy of the notice under this section shall be recorded by the County Clerk, or his or her designee, in the records of the Register of Deeds for Richardson County, Nebraska and indexed against the premises.

For purposes of this Section, evidence of vacancy means any condition or circumstance that on its own or in combination with other conditions or circumstances would lead a reasonable person to believe that a residential building or commercial building is vacant. Such conditions or circumstances may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) Overgrown or dead vegetation, including grass, shrubbery, and other plantings;
- (b) An accumulation of abandoned personal property, trash or other waste;
- (c) Visible deterioration or lack of maintenance of any building or structure on the property;
- (d) Graffiti or other defacement of any building or structure on the property; or
- (e) Any other condition or circumstance reasonably indicating that the property is not occupied for residential purposes or being used for the operation of a lawful business.

For purposes of this section, a vacant property shall not be used for storage unless specifically allowed pursuant to the City of Falls City Zoning Ordinance.

Section 5. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1005 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1005: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: DEFINITIONS. For purposes of this section, the following words and phrases shall have the meanings respectively ascribed to them:

*Vacant* means the property has been vacant for 180 days or longer and during such time, has continuously exhibited evidence of vacancy as described in Section 4.

*Owner of vacant property* means the person or persons shown to be the owner or owners of record on the records of the register of deeds.

*Commercial building* means a building with more than fifty (50) percent of its floor space used for commercial activity. For the purposes of this section, floor space shall be designated as the area on the main or street level of the building. For purposes of this section, commercial activity means having the objective of supplying commodities (goods and services), industrial uses, industrial manufacturing, and ancillary business functions.

***Residential building*** means a housing structure or other framework, together with such land on which the dwelling and appurtenant buildings are located, that is used or intended to support occupancy of one or more persons for non-business purposes. This includes, but is not limited to the following: a house, a condominium, a townhouse, an apartment unit or building, or a trailer house.

Section 6. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1006 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1006: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: EXEMPTIONS. The vacant property registration ordinance provides the following exemptions to the vacant property registration and fee requirements, including, but not limited to, the following:

- (a) Property only considered to be a seasonal residence; and the property is in compliance with current building code/property maintenance code
- (b) Property of an owner who is temporarily absent, but who has demonstrated his or her intent to return; and the property is in compliance with current building code/property maintenance code
- (c) Property that is scheduled for demolition and has a valid demo permit issued by the City of Falls City
- (d) Property under construction or renovation pursuant to a valid building permit issued by the City of Falls City;
- (e) Property subject to divorce, probate or estate proceedings; and the property is in compliance with current building code/property maintenance code
- (f) Property that is "for sale," "for rent," or "for lease" and where the owner can produce sufficient good faith evidence of active marketing of sale, rent or lease; and the property is in compliance with current building code/property maintenance code
- (g) Property owned by the federal government, the State of Nebraska, the City of Falls City or any other political subdivision.

Section 7. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1007 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1007: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: REGISTRATION FORMS. The required vacant property registration shall be submitted on the form provided by the City. The form shall include, but not be limited to the following: the name, current mailing address, telephone number and facsimile and email address (if applicable) of the property owner and his or her agent; the street address and parcel identification number of the vacant property; the transfer date of the instrument conveying the property to the owner; the date on which the property became vacant; and such other information deemed necessary by the City. The form shall also include the period of time the vacant property is expected to remain vacant, and a plan and timetable for performance of one or more of the following:

- (a) Returning the vacant property to the appropriate occupancy or use;
- (b) Marketing the property for sale or lease;
- (c) Making any necessary repairs; or

(d) Demolition of the property.

All applicable laws and codes shall be complied with by the owner. The owner shall notify the City of any changes in information supplied as part of the vacant property registration within thirty (30) calendar days of the change.

If the owner of the vacant property does not reside in Richardson County for at least one hundred eighty (180) days in a calendar year, then the owner must provide information for a resident agent with authority to act with respect to the property, including the name, current mailing address, phone number, and any other contact information of the owner's agent. Any subsequent owner of a vacant property must register or re-register the building with the City within thirty (30) calendar days of any transfer of any ownership interest in the vacant property. The new owner(s) shall comply with the approved plan and timetable submitted by the previous owner until any proposed changes are submitted by the new owner and meet the approval of the City.

An owner who acquires a vacant property for which a registration fee has already been paid for a particular period is not liable for an additional registration fee for that period; however, the new owner must register the change of ownership with the City.

Section 8. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1008 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1008: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: VACANT PROPERTY FEES.

Residential Property: There is no fee for initial registration of vacant residential property. However, if the owner fails to remedy the vacant property and successfully have it removed from the vacant property registration list within 180 days from the initial registration date, or within 180 days from the initial registration date deadline if the owner fails to register the property, then the owner of a vacant residential property shall be assessed a fee of \$250.00, payable to the City of Falls City. In addition, a supplemental fee of \$500.00 will be assessed to the owner of the vacant property for every 180-day period thereafter, until the vacant property is removed from the registration list.

Commercial Property: There is no fee for initial registration of vacant commercial property. However, if the owner fails to remedy the vacant property and successfully have it removed from the vacant property registration list within 180 days from the initial registration date, or within 180 days from the initial registration date deadline if the owner fails to register the property, then the owner of a vacant commercial property shall be assessed a fee of \$500.00, payable to the City of Falls City. In addition, a supplemental fee of \$1000.00 will be assessed to the owner of the vacant property for every 180-day period thereafter, until the vacant property is removed from the registration list.

Registration fees may be refundable for the year preceding the date on which the property is no longer vacant. Unpaid registration fees shall become a lien on the premises, as well as a liability of the responsible party. Additionally, the City attorney may institute appropriate action against the owner for the recovery of such costs.

Section 10. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1009 be added to the Municipal Code of the City

of Falls City as follows:

§9-1009: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: PENALTIES. Any person upon whom a duty is placed by the provisions of this ordinance who shall fail, neglect, or refuse to perform such duty, or who shall violate a provision of this ordinance shall be deemed guilty of an infraction and upon conviction thereof shall be fined in any sum not to exceed five hundred dollars (\$500.00), except that each person so convicted shall be fined in a sum of not less than two hundred dollars (\$200.00) for the first offense, not less than three hundred dollars (\$300.00) for the second offense, and not less than four hundred dollars (\$400.00) for the third offense and each offense thereafter. The penalty herein provided shall be cumulative with and in addition to the revocation, cancellation, or forfeiture of any license, permit, or right elsewhere provided for or as provided by law. Each day that a violation of this ordinance continues shall constitute a separate and distinct offense and shall be punishable as such.

Any and all civil penalties assessed under this ordinance shall be billed to the owner or other responsible party. Failure or refusal to pay any and all such penalties permits the City to pursue any and all available legal remedies for the enforcement and collection of such penalties; including, but not limited to, civil actions being filed in district court, suits or actions being maintained in any court of competent jurisdiction, abatement of nuisances maintained in violation of this ordinance, institution of injunction, mandamus, or other appropriate action or proceedings to enforce the penalty provisions of this ordinance. This ordinance in no way limits the penalties, actions or abatement procedures which may be taken by the City for a violation of any other ordinance of the City or statute of the State of Nebraska.

Section 10. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1010 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1010: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: REMOVAL OF PROPERTY FROM REGISTRATION LIST. An owner may have his or her vacant property removed from the vacant property registration by providing sufficient notification and evidence to the City Clerk, or his or her designee, that said vacant property no longer meets the definition of vacancy as described in Section 4. The City Clerk, or his or her designee, may then evaluate or inspect the property to determine whether the property should be removed from the registration list.

Section 11. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1011 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1011: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: APPEAL. Upon receiving notice declaring that a building is vacant or remains vacant, the owner of the building may appeal such decision within twenty (20) calendar days of receipt of the notice. Such appeal shall be in writing to the City Clerk accompanied by a non-refundable appeal fee. Such appeal shall request a hearing before the City Council to present reasons why the building should not be declared vacant. The appeal fee shall be set by resolution of the City Council. The City Council shall set such hearing within twenty (20) business days from the date of receipt of the written request.

A written notice of the City Council decision following the hearing shall be sent to the property owner by certified mail or shall be provided at the conclusion of the meeting. If the City Council rejects the appeal, the owner shall have thirty (30) calendar days from the decision to



register the vacant building; provided, the property owner may appeal such decision, within thirty (30) calendar days of the City Council decision, to the appropriate court for adjudication during which proceedings the decision of the City Council shall be stayed.

Section 12. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1012 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1012: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: REPEAL ACTION. Any other ordinance or section passed and approved prior to passage, approval, and publication or posting of this ordinance and in conflict with its provisions is repealed.

Section 13. That Chapter 9, Article 10, Section 9-1013 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§9-1013: REGISTRATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES: EFFECTIVE DATE. This ordinance shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage, approval, and publication or posting as required by law.

Section 1. That Chapter 9, Article 11, Section 9-1101 be added to the Municipal Code of the City of Falls City as follows:

§ 9-1101 VIOLATION; PENALTY. Any person who shall violate or refuse to comply with the enforcement of any of the provisions of this Chapter, set forth at full length herein or incorporated by reference shall be deemed guilty of an offense and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not more than five hundred dollars (\$500.00) for each offense.

A new violation shall be deemed to have been committed every twenty-four (24) hours of such failure to comply.

Passed and approved this 5<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2022.

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mayor of the City of Falls City, Nebraska

(Seal)

  
\_\_\_\_\_

City Clerk