

SOLVING ST. LOUIS' VACANCY CHALLENGE

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATED APRIL 2023



BACKGROUND

In the Spring of 2022, the St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative released a six-page funding recommendation: “Solving St. Louis’ Vacancy Challenge: Funding Recommendations to Increase City Capacity.” This document was designed to serve as a blueprint for the City to quickly identify programs and departments within the City of St. Louis that, if robustly funded, could best help the City to better address its costly and pernicious vacant property problem.

METHODOLOGY

These estimates were calculated by approximating annual salaries for suggested new employees, and by extrapolating the costs of existing routine treatments, such as demolition and vacant lot maintenance, to a scale that would better meet the overall need as suggested by best available data.

Funding Recommendations	Recommended	Allocated
Vacant Building Demolition & Stabilization	\$22.8 million	\$20.8 million
Vacant Property Maintenance & Minor Stabilization	\$15 million	\$6.5 million
Data Coordination & Community Partner Support	\$500,000	\$500,000
Staffing - Inspection, Project Management, Planning, LRA	\$3,130,000	--
City & Neighborhood Legal Interventions	\$1,400,000	--
	\$42,830,000	\$27,800,000

65%

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS - MET

In the following categories, the Vacancy Collaborative believes that the City is currently adequately funded to meet the need.

DEMOLITION

\$8 MILLION/YR

The City has allocated a combination of general revenue and MO state ARPA funding towards inspection and demolition of vacant and condemned buildings.

PUBLICLY-OWNED STABILIZATION (PROP NS)

\$6.3 MILLION/YR

Proposition NS, which stabilizes LRA properties, has been funded with supplemental support from the Department of Public Safety's general revenue allocation for building demolition, as needed.

PRIVATELY-OWNED STABILIZATION

\$6.5 MILLION/YR

The City has allocated \$6.5 million annually (for two years) to stabilize privately-owned condemned buildings. This includes funding to stabilize residential buildings at an estimated cost of \$80k per structure, in addition to several large scale commercial and industrial buildings.

DATA COORDINATION

\$250K/YR






The City has purchased the Tolemi software program at a cost of \$100k per year to help with vacancy related data collection. Additionally, the Chief Technology Officer has begun to staff a data analytics team.

COMMUNITY PARTNER SUPPORT

\$250K/YR

DATA COORDINATION, OUTREACH, COLLABORATION, & FACILITATION

The Community Development Administration has agreed to provide support for the St. Louis Vacancy Collaborative to maintain and improve its Vacant Property Explorer (www.stlvacancytools.com), develop and maintain a dashboard, and support community-informed policy-making around vacancy.

Currently Funded Programs & Recommendations	Annual Allocation
Demolition 	\$8 million
Publicly-Owned Stabilization (Prop. NS) 	\$6.3 million
Privately-Owned Stabilization 	\$6.5 million
Data Coordination 	\$250,000
Community Partner Support 	\$250,000
PER YEAR TOTAL	\$21,300,000

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS - UNMET

In the following categories, the Vacancy Collaborative believes that the City should consider increasing expenditures.

LOT MAINTENANCE & MINOR STABILIZATION

\$8.5 MILLION/YR

Although an allocation of \$6.5 million has been made to maintain vacant lots, funding has not been allocated to board up and maintain vacant buildings. Funding is needed for routine maintenance of both publicly and privately owned vacant buildings, and for two dedicated project managers to oversee non-demolition maintenance subcontracts.

VACANT PROPERTY-DEDICATED INSPECTORS & TRAINING **\$920K/YR**

The Building Division is short more than a dozen inspectors. Routine exterior inspections for vacant buildings could be handled by less experienced staff, allowing more seasoned inspectors to focus on occupied homes and businesses. Funding for training is also needed.

DECONSTRUCTION

\$2 MILLION/YR

In addition to demolition, the city must allocate an additional \$1-2 million towards deconstruction costs of less hazardous buildings to allow reuse of their construction materials. Deconstruction costs about \$25k per building.

CITY-INITIATED LEGAL INTERVENTIONS

\$700K/YR

This would fund the salaries for 7-8 city attorneys focused on problem property and code enforcement as well as supporting project managers on vacancy efforts. Currently, the City Counselor's Problem Properties team has no attorney position focused solely on vacant properties.

NEIGHBORHOOD-INITIATED LEGAL INTERVENTIONS

\$700K/YR

This would fund 8-9 nonprofit attorneys to use private, neighborhood-based litigation to support code compliance and nuisance remediation.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

\$300K/YR

This would fund the salaries for 4-5 staff members focused on vacancy programs distributed between SLDC, LRA, Forestry, and the Building Division.

EXECUTIVE VACANCY MANAGER

\$110K/YR

This would fund a position within the executive branch dedicated to ensuring a coordinated response to vacancy, promoting accountability, and cross-sector engagement.

PLANNING & URBAN DESIGN AGENCY (PDA)

\$700K/YR










This would fund salaries for staff members involved in neighborhood planning and public engagement. These staff members would facilitate the City's collaboration with neighborhoods to set priorities that ensure the City's vacancy interventions reflect the input and vision of existing residents, public feedback, and available data. Additionally, they would support neighborhood organizing efforts to build stronger communities.

LAND REUTILIZATION AUTHORITY (LRA)

\$1.1 MILLION/YR

LRA is one of the most underfunded and understaffed land bank agencies in the country. A 2017 assessment of the LRA concluded that staffing should be at least tripled to increase its effectiveness, including: Director of Strategy; Marketing and Communications Director; Community Engagement Coordinator; Case Managers; Greening Coordinator. These funds will pay the salaries for these positions and will help pay for legal assistance for quiet titles actions on LRA-owned properties.

TOTAL FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Unmet Funding for Programs & Recommendations	Annual Allocation Recommendation
Vacant Building Property Maintenance & Board-Ups 	\$8.5 million
Vacant Property-Dedicated Inspectors & Training 	\$920,000
Deconstruction & Building Material Reuse 	\$2 million
City-Initiated Legal Interventions 	\$700,000
Neighborhood-Initiated Legal Interventions 	\$700,000
Project Management 	\$300,000
Executive Vacancy Manager 	\$110,000
Planning & Urban Design Agency 	\$700,000
Land Reutilization Authority 	\$1.1 Million
PER YEAR TOTAL	\$15,030,000

CONCLUSION

These interventions, if funded consistently for five years, could help the City reduce the number of vacant parcels by half - an outcome which should be a stated goal of the administration. A significant reduction in vacant buildings in St. Louis will improve environmental health and public safety outcomes and constitute an important step in combatting our city's history of systemic disinvestment on the Northside. This reduction will come about from removal of some buildings, re-occupancy of others, and new construction on vacant properties. In addition, the City should continue to fully fund the following vacancy prevention strategies at or above existing levels: home repair, foreclosure assistance, and basic estate planning.