

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION 2024-25

## VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS STRATEGIES

Community Development Committe

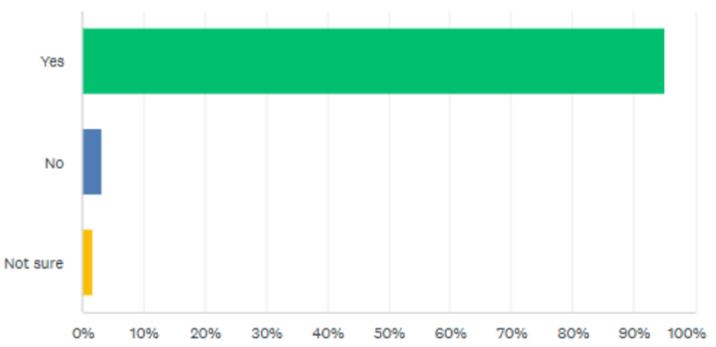


# SURVEY RESULTS: JULY/AUGUST



## Section 1: Community Perception Do you believe vacant storefronts and commercial buildings are a concern in Fort Bragg?

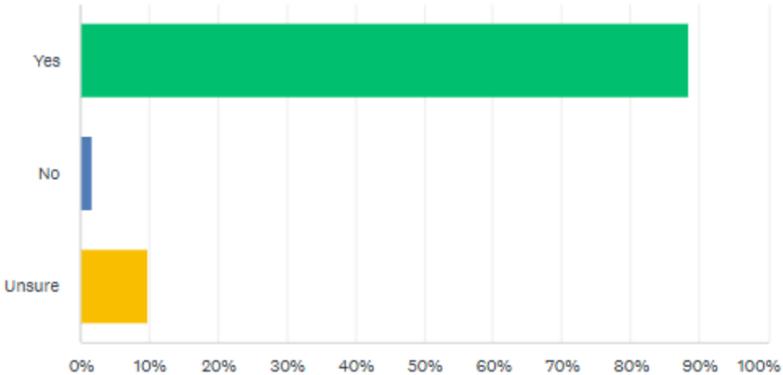
Answered: 61 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	95.08%	58
No	3.28%	2
Not sure	1.64%	1

## Section 2: City Action & Policy Do you think the City should take a more active role in addressing vacant storefronts?

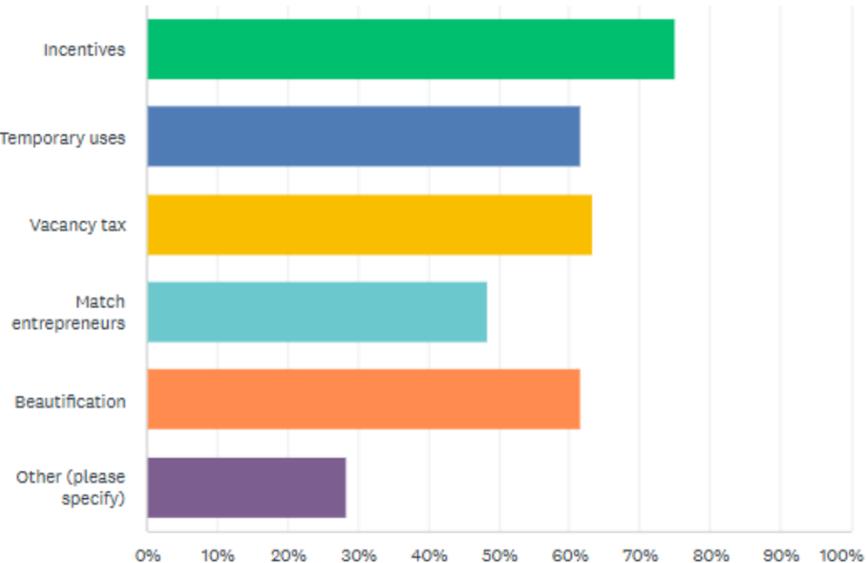
Answered: 61 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	88.52%	54
No	1.64%	1
Unsure	9.84%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>61</b>

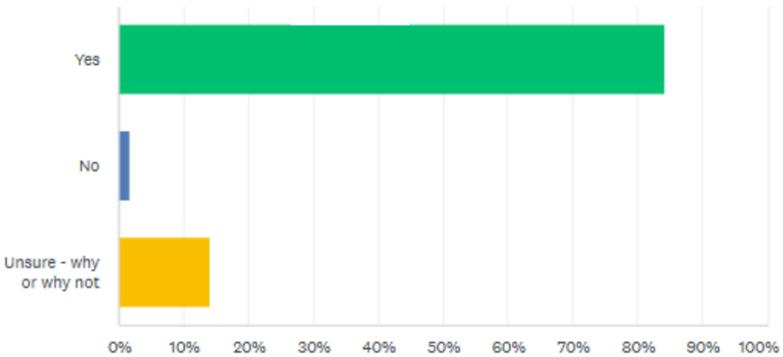
## What types of actions would you support the City taking? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 60 Skipped: 1



## Do you feel this issue should be a priority for the City Council in the next 12-18 months?

Answered: 57 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	84.21%	48
No	1.75%	1

# STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS

---

1.(A) COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS REGISTRY

(B) INACTIVE STOREFRONTS STANDARDS FOR CBD

2. STOREFRONT ACTIVATION INCENTIVE PROGRAM

3. VACANCY TAX

4. ENFORCE EXISTING BLIGHT AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

5. TEMPORARY USE AUTHORIZATION & FLEXIBILITY

# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

---

## PURPOSE OF THE CVBL

- Keep commercial areas vibrant, safe, and attractive
  - Address blight, vandalism, and public safety risks
  - Encourage reuse of vacant properties
  - Support business attraction and revitalization
- 

# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

---

## APPLICABILITY

- It is within the Commercial Zone in Fort Bragg **AND**
- Vacant or unused for (90+ days) **AND**
- Properties with clear signs of neglect **AND**  
(**disconnected utilities, overgrown vegetation, graffiti, uncollected mail, junk visible from the storefront, broken windows**)
- Mixed-use properties (commercial units only)
- Vacant lots are also included if they have no active use or exhibit similar signs of neglect

# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

## REQUIREMENT

The program emphasizes education, but for properties that remain non-compliant

- Registration with the City
- Annual Registration fees: \$150 (buildings) \$100 (lots)
- Monthly Monitoring fees: \$150 (if applicable)
- Post Visible signage with owner/manager contact information (no trespassing, contact information, status)
- Monthly inspections and reporting
- Secure property from trespassers
- Ongoing Maintenance of Buildings and grounds

# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

## Vacant & Inactive Commercial Properties – CVBL Program

### **Vacant Commercial Buildings**

\$100 annual registration fee

\$150/month monitoring fee (per building)

### **Vacant Commercial Lots**

\$100 annual registration fee

\$80/month monitoring fee (per lot)

# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

## MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

### Exterior

- Landscaping maintained, weeds removed, sidewalks clean.
- Trash/debris removed promptly; graffiti abated.
- Structural integrity preserved (paint, roof, gutters, windows, stairs, etc.)

### Interior

- Secure from unauthorized entry and weather damage.
- Garbage removed; pests controlled.
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed.
- Compliant with all City and building codes.

# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

## SIGNAGE REQUIREMENTS

- “No Trespassing” Sign — Must meet City standards and comply with California Penal Code § 602 for enforcement purposes.
- Contact Information — Must list the property owner’s or authorized local agent’s name
- Property Status Signage — Must clearly state the property’s status, such as: • “UNDER MAINTENANCE — NOT AVAILABLE FOR SALE, LEASE, OR RENT,” or • “AVAILABLE — FOR SALE/LEASE/RENT” (if the property is actively being marketed).

**Not requiring property owners to advertise availability unless they are actively marketing the property.**



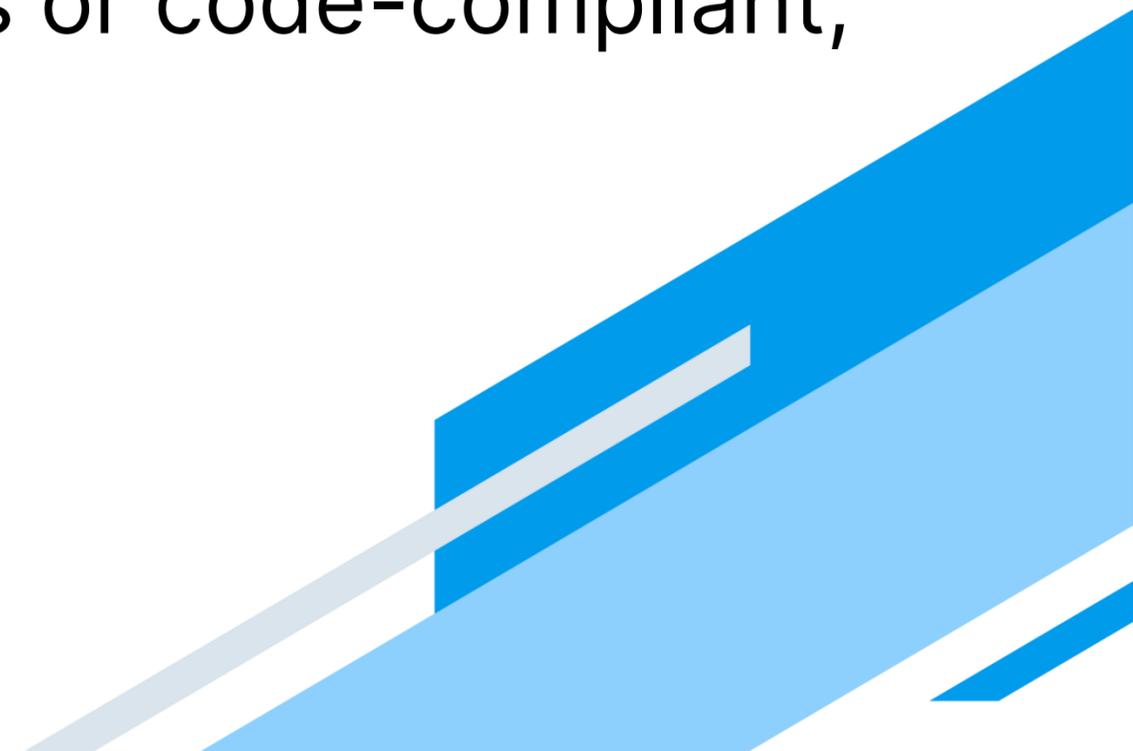
# 1.COMMERCIAL VACANT BUILDINGS/LOTS (CVBL)

## OWNERS OUTSIDE MENDOCINO COUNTY

- Must hire a local agent/service provider for inspections, maintenance, and reporting,
- Contract evidence must be submitted to the City,
- Owner/agent must be available 24/7 and respond within 2 hours to complaints, and
- Owner remains responsible for compliance.

# RELIEF FROM CVBL REQUIREMENTS

Owners may request relief if:

- Property is in full compliance as of the ordinance's effective date,
  - Violations are corrected within the compliance period,
  - No violations for 12 months or at least 75% of the property is occupied for 6 months, and
  - Monitoring fee may be waived for active permits or code-compliant, marketed properties.
- 

# Policy Options – Registration Requirements

## Option A: Mandatory Registration for all Vacant Properties

- All vacant commercial buildings and lots must register within 90 days of vacancy.
- Ensures comprehensive tracking of all vacant properties.
- Provides a clear and consistent registry for Code Enforcement and Economic Development.
- Monitoring fees may still be waived if:
- Property has an active building permit with ongoing work, or
- Property is code-compliant and actively marketed

## Option B: Registration Triggered by Non-Compliance

- Only vacant commercial properties that fall into non-compliance (e.g., blight, nuisance, unsecured access) must register.
- Well-maintained properties are not required to register until an issue arises.
- Annual registration and monitoring fees apply only once a property is required to register.
- **Fee Waivers Available if:**
  1. Active building permit with ongoing work.
  2. Property is code-compliant and actively marketed.
  3. City verifies ongoing compliance after inspection.

# Vacant Property Registries- Comparison

City	Mandatory Registration?	Vacancy Threshold	Registration Fee	Key Notes
Willits	✓ Yes	90 days	\$100 (Year 1); \$200 (Year 2); \$1,000 (Year 3); \$2,000 (Year 4+)	Fees escalate with each year of vacancy
Ukiah	✓ Yes	Broad (abandoned or distressed)	Fee set annually by Council resolution (not publicly specified)	Applies to most vacant or abandoned properties
Clearlake	✓ Yes	30 days + register within 10 days	Initial: \$100 + \$12.50/month until renewal; Renewal: \$250 + \$200/month monitoring	Requires monthly inspections & signage
Fort Bragg	✓ Yes	90 days	\$100 annual registration + \$150/month monitoring (proposed, set by resolution)	Requires monthly inspections & signage

# 1.B. INACTIVE STOREFRONT STANDARDS - CBD

## Inactive Storefront Standards (Central Business District)

- **Ground-floor unit closed to public for >50% of normal business hours over 60 consecutive days**
- **Applies without an approved Temporary Closure Plan**

## Temporary Closure Plan

- Required for closures of 30+ days
- Must include: reason for closure, anticipated reopening date, contact information

### MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

WINDOWS: MAINTAINED, GRAFFITI/CLUTTER-FREE, NO BROKEN GLASS

ADEQUATE LIGHTING AT STOREFRONT

SIDEWALKS/ENTRYWAYS: CLEAN, SAFE, ACCESSIBLE

PROMINENT SIGNAGE: REASON FOR CLOSURE & REOPENING DATE

# 1.B. INACTIVE STOREFRONT STANDARDS - CBD

## Temporary Activation (Encouraged)

- Pop-up retail/dining
- Art displays, student projects
- Nonprofit programming
- Rotating vendor markets

## Transition to VBLC Program

- Inactivity >6 months without approved plan or activation = classified as Vacant Commercial Property
- Subject to registration, maintenance, and monitoring fees

# 1.B. INACTIVE STOREFRONT STANDARDS - CBD

## Committee Direction

Staff requests the Committee's input on whether Inactive Storefronts in the Central Business District should be addressed within the CVBL Program. Specifically:

- If storefronts remain inactive for more than six months without an approved plan or activation, should they be classified as vacant and subject to registration, monitoring, and maintenance requirements?

## 2. STOREFRONT ACTIVATION INCENTIVE PROGRAM

### Storefront Activation Incentive Program – Tools & Incentives

- Fee Waivers/Reductions

Waive monitoring fees for approved temporary activations.

- Mini-Grants & Stipends

Small grants for pop-ups, art installations, and nonprofit programming.

- Fast-Track Permitting

Simplified process for short-term use approvals.

- City Partnerships

Match property owners with local artists, students, and small businesses.

- Recognition & Promotion

Spotlight activated storefronts through City marketing and events.

## 2. STOREFRONT ACTIVATION INCENTIVE PROGRAM

### Examples of Temporary Activation Uses #

- **Art installations or student projects** – rotating exhibits in vacant storefronts that showcase local talent, improve street appeal, and deter vandalism.
- **Pop-up events or retail** – short-term leases for seasonal businesses, specialty markets, or product launches.
- **Nonprofit incubators** – temporary space for local nonprofits to provide services or host workshops.
- **Rotating vendor marketplaces** – indoor micro-retail spaces for multiple vendors sharing a location.
- **Community information centers** – providing updates on City projects, local events, and small business resources.
- **Short-term cultural uses** – such as live performances, reading rooms, or art workshops in unused commercial spaces.

## 2. STOREFRONT ACTIVATION INCENTIVE PROGRAM

### Implementation Considerations:

- Establish a streamlined, low-fee permit process for temporary uses, consider modifying the Limited Term Permit program to allow longer term temporary uses (e.g., 90–180 days) for retail storefront activation in the downtown.
- Provide small activation grants or matching funds for basic improvements like the Cascade Improvement Grant (lighting, display setup).
- Create a City-managed activation roster of artists, nonprofits, and small business applicants that could be interested in occupying space when vacancies arise. By making it easier and more attractive to temporarily activate vacant properties, the City can ensure that no storefront sits idle without contributing to downtown's energy and appeal.

# 3. VACANCY TAX

## Purpose:

- Evaluate whether a tax on long-term vacant properties could encourage property activation.
- Ensure vacant commercial properties contribute to the community if left idle.

## Potential Features:

- Applicability: Commercial properties vacant beyond 6–12 months.
- Exemptions:
  - Properties under active renovation permits.
  - Properties actively marketed and code-compliant.
  - Non-rentable spaces due to zoning/building restrictions.
- Revenue Use: Dedicated to downtown revitalization, economic development, and public safety.

# 3. VACANCY TAX

## Committee Direction

**☞ SHOULD STAFF PURSUE FURTHER RESEARCH AND RETURN WITH OPTIONS FOR A VACANCY TAX ORDINANCE IN FORT BRAGG?**

Next steps:

- Staff study to assess feasibility and structure.
- Review best practices from other California cities (e.g., San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland).
- Return to Committee with recommendations and fiscal impacts.

# 4. ENFORCE EXISTING BLIGHT AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

## Background

- Fort Bragg already has Municipal Code provisions addressing property maintenance, blight, and aesthetic standards.
- Enforcement has historically been complaint-driven and limited by staffing.
- Aligning the Vacancy Registry Program with existing enforcement tools could strengthen accountability and improve downtown vitality.

## Examples of Standards:

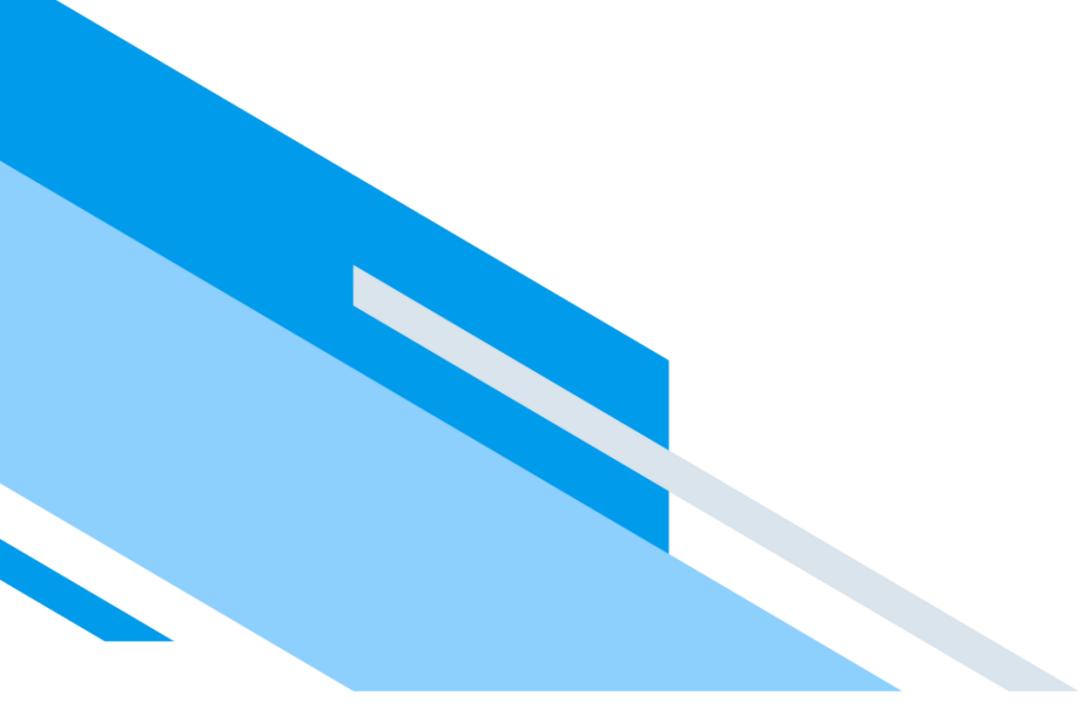
- Removal of graffiti, trash, and weeds.
- Boarding/securing broken windows and doors.
- Maintaining landscaping and exterior paint.
- Ensuring signage is not dilapidated or misleading.

# 4. ENFORCE EXISTING BLIGHT AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

## Committee Direction

☞ **Should staff increase enforcement of existing blight and aesthetic standards by:**

**1. Integrating enforcement into the Vacancy Registry Program, or**



# **QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK**