

Vacant Building & Lot Commercial (VBLC) Program – Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the VBLC Program?

The Vacant Building & Lot Commercial (VBLC) Program is a City of Fort Bragg initiative designed to keep commercial areas vibrant, safe, and well-maintained. It requires owners of vacant, abandoned, or underutilized commercial buildings and lots to register with the City, maintain their property to code, and take proactive steps to prevent blight, vandalism, and safety hazards.

2. Why is the City implementing this program?

Vacant and inactive properties can hurt Fort Bragg's appearance, reduce pedestrian traffic, deter new investment, and create public safety concerns. The VBLC Program helps:

- Encourage timely reuse or temporary activation of vacant spaces.
- Hold property owners accountable for maintenance and safety.
- Allow the City to track, monitor, and address chronic vacancies.
- Support downtown revitalization and business attraction efforts.

3. Which properties are covered?

The program applies to all commercial buildings, commercial units, and lots within Fort Bragg's commercial zoning districts that meet any of the following conditions:

- Vacant or unused for 90 consecutive days or longer,
- Subject to foreclosure (Notice of Default or Trustee's Sale recorded),
- Exhibit nuisance or blight conditions, or
- Are underutilized—meaning not open to the public at least 20 hours per week on a regular schedule (appointment-only operations do not qualify as open).

4. What about mixed-use buildings?

If a property includes ground-floor commercial space with residential units above:

- Only the vacant or underutilized commercial portion is subject to the program.
- Residential units remain exempt unless also vacant or abandoned under other housing regulations.
- The intent is to ensure active, welcoming street-level storefronts in the Central Business District.

5. What are “inactive” or “dark” storefronts?

Some businesses in the downtown core have active business licenses but are closed to the public for extended periods. These “**dark**” or **inactive storefronts** diminish downtown vibrancy, reduce pedestrian activity, and give the appearance of vacancy even when technically occupied. Section 6.30.90 requires such businesses to maintain at least **20 open hours per week** or pursue an approved temporary activation.

6. What must I do if my property qualifies?

Registered owners must:

- Pay the **annual registration fee (\$100)** per building, unit, or lot.
- Post required signage with:
 - “No Trespassing” notice per City standards;
 - Local contact information for the owner or property manager (24-hour phone number or email);
 - Optional status signage (“Under Maintenance” or “Available for Lease”).
- Keep the property secure, clean, and free of graffiti (abated within 72 hours).
- Conduct **monthly inspections** and submit reports to the City.
- Maintain insurance coverage and comply with nuisance and building codes.
- Pay the **monthly monitoring fee (\$150)** while the property remains vacant or inactive.

7. What is the purpose of the monitoring fee?

The \$150 monthly monitoring fee covers City costs for inspections, documentation, enforcement, and administration. It also funds services provided by 4Leaf, Inc., which assists with property inspections and compliance tracking while the City’s Code Enforcement Officer position remains vacant.

8. Who manages enforcement and billing?

The **Community Development Department** administers the VBLC Program and coordinates enforcement in partnership with **4Leaf** and **Finance staff**, who manage billing, renewals, and special assessments for unpaid fees.

9. Are there any fee waivers or relief options?

Yes. The ordinance allows several relief mechanisms:

- **Automatic Relief** – Monitoring fees are temporarily waived for properties with active building permits, ongoing construction, or approved temporary activation.
- **Active Marketing Incentive** – Properties that are code-compliant and **actively**

marketed for sale or lease may receive a temporary monitoring fee waiver during the verified marketing period.

- **Hardship Waiver** – The City Manager may grant a waiver for verified financial hardship and good cause. Owners must still register their property to maintain current contact and compliance information.

10. What is a Temporary Activation?

Temporary Activations (Section 6.30.50) allow owners to use otherwise vacant spaces for **short-term, seasonal, or special-purpose uses**—such as pop-up shops, art installations, nonprofit programming, or vendor markets—for up to **three months** (with possible extension). These activations:

- Keep the area lively and visually appealing.
- Reduce nuisance activity and vandalism.
- Serve as a marketing opportunity for the property.
- Support local artists, entrepreneurs, and small businesses.

A low-fee, streamlined permit process will be administered by the Community Development Director.

11. What happens if I don't register my property?

Failure to register or maintain compliance is a **public nuisance** under Fort Bragg Municipal Code Section 6.30 and may result in:

- Administrative citations and fines.
- Recovery of enforcement costs through liens or special assessments (Gov. Code §38773.5).
- Misdemeanor prosecution or civil action, if warranted.

12. When does the program take effect?

The ordinance takes effect **30 days after adoption**, with registration and outreach beginning in **early 2026**. Initial compliance notices will provide a 30-day correction period before registration is required.