

Addressing the Vacant and Abandoned Property Problem

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Abstract

Vacant and abandoned property is increasingly recognized as a significant barrier to the revitalization of central cities. This study sheds some light on the nature of the property abandonment problem and on current city efforts to address it. It is based upon the findings of a survey of the 200 most populous central cities in the United States, conducted during the summer and fall of 1997, and on follow-up interviews with a portion of the survey population, conducted during the summer of 1998. The findings of the survey and interviews indicate that vacant and abandoned property is perceived as a significant problem by elected and appointed officials in the nation's largest central cities. This type of property affects many aspects of community life, including housing and neighborhood vitality, crime prevention efforts, and commercial district vitality. Single- and multi-family housing, retail properties and vacant land are the most problematic types of vacant and abandoned property for most cities. Cities use a variety of techniques to address this problem, including aggressive code enforcement, tax foreclosure, eminent domain, and cosmetic improvements. One-third of the cities surveyed use a variety of other innovative tools to combat the vacant and abandoned property problem. Nevertheless, current efforts to combat the problem suffer from a number of shortcomings that are described in the article.

Citing Literature

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