

Brookhaven Town Legislation to Tackle Abandoned Buildings

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Romaine: Vacant House Registry Will Target Neglected Foreclosure Eyesores Plaguing Residential Communities

Farmingville, NY - Brookhaven Supervisor Romaine and members of the Town Council today announced an initiative to combat abandoned houses and buildings that have been a blight on our neighborhoods. The announcement was made during a press conference held in front of a burned out and boarded house located at 26 Gabon Lane in Coram. The legislation, which will be introduced at the October 1 Town Board meeting, will create a vacant building registry, requiring the owners of vacant property to register with the Town of Brookhaven, and provide a local point of contact for the party responsible for maintaining the property. The proposed legislation is modeled after similar vacant home registries that have been adopted by municipalities across the nation in response to the foreclosure crisis. The Cities of Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Minneapolis and Jacksonville have adopted similar legislation, as has the Town of Babylon here on Long Island. "The idea behind this law is simple: if you own it, you're responsible for it," said Supervisor Romaine. "In the wake of the foreclosure crises, hundreds of homes have been abandoned in communities across our town. However, while the previous owners vacated these houses, they are still owned by someone - whether it be a bank, a corporation or some other entity. This law makes it clear to those owners that they are just as responsible for maintaining their property as



the hardworking families who live here." The proposed law will require the registration of all vacant buildings, providing the Town with a local individual or organization responsible for maintaining the property, and up-to-date contact information where they can be reached by Town officials. "We will not allow properties owned by banks, which are mostly located in California, to allow homes in our communities to deteriorate into eyesores," commented Councilman Dan Panico. "We regularly clean up, board up and mow these properties when these banks fail, and we also understand that the foreclosure process takes time. However, we will not allow the quality of life of our residents to suffer throughout the process and the banks are hereby on notice." "Nearly every community faces the problem of abandoned homes that are in disrepair and present a danger to people who live near them,"

said Councilwoman Jane Bonner. "My priority is to help ensure that all our neighborhoods are a safe place to live and I am in full support of this, or any legislation aimed at cleaning up these eyesores." "Vacant and abandoned properties have a negative impact on other homes in the community. They pose a fire hazard, provide shelter to criminals and vagrants, and are an attractive nuisance to children and adults alike," said Councilman Tim Mazzei. "This new legislation will help clean up neighborhoods, make them safer for our residents and improve the quality of life of all who live and work in the Town." "Hundreds of cities, counties and towns in the United States have enacted Vacant Property Registration Ordinances. This type of ordinance will be useful in the Town of Brookhaven in that it will help to insure that the town will be able to quickly reach the owners of vacant property, and that we can readily enforce the maintenance of these properties," stated Councilwoman Connie Kepert. "A local point of contact is crucial for vacant property complaints," said Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh. "Neighbors should not have to wait weeks for unsightly property to be addressed in this age of such advanced technology. It is imperative to establish an up-to-date registry." Councilman Steve Fiore-Rosenfeld said, "I stand with the Supervisor and our entire town board to hold accountable owners of abandoned or vacant houses within our township. They must properly maintain these properties to ensure our communities remain healthy and vibrant, to help restore our property values, and to encourage families to seek out and actually purchase such homes. Promoting family ownership of these homes is the best means of preserving the quality of life that our citizens have come to expect. I sponsored the town law back in 2011 which requires owners of such abandoned or foreclosed homes to maintain their lawns and that if state standards are exceeded our town will step in, mow, and charge back the cost to that absent landlord as a lien against the property. I applaud the Supervisor for advancing further on these community public nuisances." The registration fee is \$100 for property that is vacant for less than one year; with fees increasing the longer a structure is vacant. Registration fees will be used to assist the Town in protecting the public health, safety and welfare; to monitor the number of vacant buildings in the Town; and to promote efforts to rehabilitate vacant buildings. The failure or refusal for any reason of any property owner to register a vacant building within 30 days after they become due will result in a fine of \$1,000 to \$15,000 for each failure or refusal to register. The Town boarded and secured 307 vacant homes in 2012 and to date, 276 houses have been boarded in 2013. **About the Town's New Mobile App for Reporting Housing**

and Property Violations Earlier this month, Supervisor Romaine announced the launch of a mobile phone app to be used by residents as the newest weapon against illegal multi-family housing and other housing violations. Brookhaven Town's new mobile phone app, which is the first of its kind on Long Island, will allow residents to immediately report housing and property violations as they see them, helping to increase enforcement of housing codes within our communities. The app is available now for both Apple iPhones and Android mobile phones. With simple to fill-in fields, drop down menus of violations and automated e-mail, this software application is a powerful weapon in the Town's arsenal for addressing code violations, and improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods. To download the free mobile app, please visit the Town's website at www.brookhaven.org from a mobile device. Residents can also call 451-TOWN between the hours of 9:00 am to 4:30 pm to report housing violations. For more information or to access the Town's Code Book, go to www.brookhaven.org.

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