

## Fresno council adopts vacant-building law

By George  
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A recent photo of a boarded-up home in Fresno taken by Faith In Community, an advocacy group that has been pushing for the city to revamp its laws to require property owners to fix such dwellings.

### FAITH IN COMMUNITY

A law to help eliminate neighborhood blight was adopted Thursday by the Fresno City Council.

The law is aimed mainly at owners of homes that remain vacant for considerable periods. It requires the owners to keep the yards and buildings in good shape. Coverings on windows visible from any public right-of-way must be of a transparent material. The days of plywood coverings are ending.

The law is an important part of Mayor Ashley Swearingin's "Restore Fresno" initiative. Older neighborhoods are expected to see the most immediate effect.

The council, on a motion from Council Member Clint Olivier, divided its legislative duty into two votes.

The first was on whether to include a city-maintained registry of buildings expected to be vacant for more than 30 days. The registry, which will not be available for public review, would include the building's address, owner and a local contact.

The registry is to help city officials ensure that property owners follow the law.

The registry was approved 5-2, with Olivier and Council Member Steve Brandau voting no. Olivier said the council should get a staff report on how the registry will work before jumping into a vote on something untested in Fresno.

The second vote was on the remainder of the law. This passed 7-0.

In other action, the council:

- Accepted the proposed fiscal year 2016 budget from Swearingin. The mayor expects City Hall to spend \$1.2 billion next year. Budget hearings begin in June.
- Received a progress report on the city's five-year housing plan. The council will return to the issue in June.
- Approved a handful of changes to the Reserve Management Act. The debate moved into familiar territory whenever City Hall's financial position improves: How much reserve is wise in a city always in need of more and better services? The question was not answered to everyone's satisfaction.
- Rejected a request by the planning department to apply for a state grant of up to \$100,000 to help fund the development of a farmland preservation program. The vote was 4-3, with Council President Oliver Baines and Council Members Esmeralda Soria and Sal Quintero voting no. Council Member Lee Brand said a council committee might take the lead in developing a preservation policy. The nearly three-hour hearing included a sharp exchange between Swearingin and Brandau.
- Agreed to vacate a portion of the public street right-of-way at the northeast corner of Shields and Blackstone avenues, next to Manchester Center. The shopping center is considering big changes.

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