

Meeting Agenda
Owosso Downtown Historic District Commission
Wednesday, May 20, 2026, 6:00 p.m.

Call to order and roll call:

Review and approval of agenda: May 20, 2026

Review and approval of minutes: March 18, 2026

Communications:

1. Staff Liaison to HDC transitioning to DDA Director this summer.

Public Comments:

Committee Reports:

Public Hearings:

Items of Business:

1. Resolution Urging City Council to Adopt a Vacant Commercial Building Registration and Inspection Program

Public Comments:

Board Comments:

1. Next Meeting: June 17, 2026

Adjournment:

[The City of Owosso will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio tapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting/hearing upon 72 hours notice to the City of Owosso. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids on services should contact the City of Owosso by writing or calling Amy Kirkland, City Clerk, 301 W. Main St, Owosso, MI 48867 (989) 725-0500 or on the Internet. The City of Owosso Website address is www.ci.owosso.mi.us.]

MINUTES FOR REGULAR MEETING
OWOSSO HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Wednesday, March 18, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.
City Hall Conference Room

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: at 6:01 p.m. by Chairperson Steven Teich.

ROLL CALL: was taken by City Manager Nathan Henne.

PRESENT: Chairperson Steven Teich, Commissioner Ferweda, Commissioner Harrington, Vice Chair Omer, Commissioner Byrne, Commissioner Powell

ABSENT:

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

AGENDA APPROVAL: March 18, 2026.

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA BY OMER SECONDED BY HARRINGTON

AYES ALL. MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES APPROVAL: February 18, 2026

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF MINUTES AS PRESENTED BY BYRNE. SECONDED BY HARRINGTON.

AYES ALL. MOTION CARRIED.

COMMUNICATIONS

The commission welcomed new member Jeff Ferweda. Then the commission viewed training materials from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network; specifically the "Historic Preservation Overview" presentation.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS:

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

BOARD COMMENTS: None

NEXT MEETING: April 15, 2026

MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING MADE BY OMER, SECONDED BY POWELL.

AYES ALL. MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7.30 P.M.



DATE: 5.19.26
TO: Historic District Commission
FROM: City Manager
SUBJECT: Resolution Urging City Council to Adopt a Vacant Commercial Building
Registration Ordinance

PURPOSE

This memorandum accompanies a resolution adopted by the Historic District Commission formally urging the Owosso City Council to study, draft, and adopt a Vacant Commercial Building Registration Ordinance. It explains the Commission's concerns, the connection between this action and the Commission's preservation mandate, and the key provisions the Commission recommends for inclusion in any such ordinance.

BACKGROUND

Vacant commercial buildings are among the most serious and recurring threats to the integrity of Owosso's Historic District. Buildings that sit empty and unsupervised deteriorate rapidly: water infiltrates through broken or unsecured windows, structural systems weaken, and the absence of active occupancy invites vandalism, theft of architectural materials, illegal dumping, and pest infestation. In a designated historic district, the loss of even a single contributing structure through demolition by neglect permanently diminishes the cohesion and authenticity of the district as a whole.

Vacant and deteriorating storefronts also undermine the City's goals for downtown revitalization and community investment. They discourage prospective buyers, deter neighboring businesses, and depress surrounding property values. These are costs borne not just by adjacent owners but by the community as a whole.

Currently the City lacks a dedicated mechanism for identifying vacant commercial properties, establishing reliable contact with their owners, or requiring minimum maintenance standards while a building sits empty. Existing code enforcement authority is largely reactive, addressing conditions only after they become acute. A registration program would give the City the information and legal framework to act before deterioration becomes irreversible.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMISSION'S MANDATE

The Historic District Commission is charged with preserving and protecting the historic character and cultural heritage of Owosso's designated historic district, including the Downtown Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2014. That charge extends beyond the review of individual Certificates of Appropriateness to include advocacy for policies

and regulatory tools that protect historic resources from threats historic plan review alone cannot address. Demolition by neglect – the passive loss of a historic building through failure to maintain it – is among the most common of those threats. A vacant building registration ordinance is a well-established tool for addressing it, and some Michigan municipalities have adopted such programs successfully. The Commission is exercising its proper advocacy role in urging its adoption here.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ORDINANCE PROVISIONS

The resolution identifies the following core elements the Commission recommends for inclusion in any ordinance adopted by Council:

1. A clear statement of purpose declaring that the ordinance exists to protect public health, safety, and welfare by preventing blight, protecting property values, and facilitating the rehabilitation of vacant commercial structures.
2. Defined terms establishing when a commercial building is deemed “vacant,” including observable indicators such as overgrown vegetation, accumulated mail or debris, disconnected utilities, boarded or broken windows, graffiti, and notices of code violation, so that the City may treat a property as vacant based on visible conditions even absent a formal declaration by the owner.
3. A mandatory registration requirement obligating owners to register within sixty (60) days of vacancy, pay a registration fee set by Council resolution, pay a late fee for untimely registration, and consent to City inspection. Unpaid fees collectible as a special assessment against the property.
4. A registration form requiring owner contact information, identification of a local emergency access agent, utility status, and a plan of action for returning the building to active use.
5. An initial City inspection within thirty (30) days of registration for compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code, with authority to order required repairs and, where repair costs exceed the value of the property, to pursue condemnation.
6. Ongoing maintenance standards requiring compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code, security against unauthorized entry with broken windows repaired within fourteen (14) days, and a requirement that vacant street-level storefronts within the downtown or historic district be covered with approved decorative treatments mimicking an active storefront rather than plain plywood or boarding.
7. Authority for the City to secure a non-compliant property within seventy-two (72) hours at the owner’s expense, with all costs collectible as a special assessment.
8. Provisions for fire- or storm-damaged buildings requiring owners to apply for a permit to commence construction or demolition within ninety (90) days, after which the building is deemed vacant and subject to all ordinance requirements.
9. A re-occupancy requirement prohibiting re-occupancy until the City has inspected and certified compliance with all applicable codes and a certificate of occupancy has been issued.
10. Enforcement provisions making violations the responsibility of the owner of record, with civil infractions, fines, and other remedies available for non-compliance.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROVISIONS

The resolution specifically recommends that any ordinance include provisions tailored to historic structures: a prohibition on demolition of historically significant vacant commercial buildings without prior review and approval by the Historic District Commission; and a requirement that rehabilitation plans for properties within or adjacent to the historic districts comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. A general vacant building ordinance that does not account for historic significance would be an incomplete preservation tool. These provisions ensure that the ordinance serves the City's preservation goals as well as its broader blight-prevention objectives.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt the attached resolution and authorize the Chair to transmit a certified copy to the Mayor, the members of the City Council, and the City Manager, together with this memorandum. The resolution requests that Council provide a written response within sixty (60) days indicating whether it intends to pursue adoption and, if so, a proposed timeline. The Commission also requests the opportunity to consult with City staff and Council during the drafting process to ensure any ordinance adopted is consistent with the City's historic preservation goals.

CITY OF OWOSSO
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

RESOLUTION

**URGING THE OWOSSO CITY COUNCIL TO ADOPT A
VACANT COMMERCIAL BUILDING REGISTRATION ORDINANCE**

WHEREAS, the City of Owosso Historic District Commission is charged with preserving and protecting the historic character, architectural integrity, and cultural heritage of Owosso's historic districts, including its downtown commercial corridor; and

WHEREAS, vacant commercial buildings pose a significant and ongoing threat to the historic fabric of the community, as neglected and unsupervised properties become attractive nuisances, increase criminal activity, deter potential buyers and investors, and give rise to a host of deteriorating conditions including unsecured openings, broken water pipes, theft of materials, illegal dumping, and pest infestation; all of which devalue surrounding properties and cause deterioration in commercial and historic areas; and

WHEREAS, the presence of vacant, deteriorating, or blighted commercial buildings diminishes the aesthetic quality and economic vitality of Owosso's historic districts and undermines the City's efforts to promote heritage tourism, downtown revitalization, and community pride; and

WHEREAS, a vacant commercial building registration program would provide the City with an accurate and current inventory of vacant properties and the ability to contact owners for utility shutoff, fire safety, and police-related purposes, enabling proactive code enforcement and timely intervention before deterioration reaches the point of danger or irreversible blight; and

WHEREAS, registration fees and late fees, collectible as special assessments against non-compliant properties where necessary, can provide a self-funding mechanism so that such a program does not impose undue costs on the City's general fund; and

WHEREAS, other Michigan municipalities have successfully adopted and implemented vacant building registration ordinances that demonstrate such programs are workable and effective; and

WHEREAS, the Commission believes that responsible property ownership is a cornerstone of a healthy historic district, and that negligent owners who allow vacant structures to fall into disrepair impose unacceptable costs upon their neighbors, the broader community, and the irreplaceable architectural heritage of the City of Owosso; and

WHEREAS, it is the duty of the Commission to advocate for policies and tools that protect historic resources and advance the preservation goals of the community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Owosso Historic District Commission as follows:

SECTION 1. The Owosso Historic District Commission hereby formally urges the Owosso City Council to study, draft, and adopt a Vacant Commercial Building Registration Ordinance applicable to all commercial properties within the City of Owosso, with particular emphasis on properties located within or adjacent to the City's designated historic districts.

SECTION 2. The Commission recommends that such ordinance include, at minimum, the following provisions:

- (a) A clear statement of purpose declaring that the ordinance exists to protect public health, safety, and welfare by preventing blight, protecting property values and neighborhood integrity, avoiding nuisances, and facilitating the rehabilitation and restoration of vacant commercial structures;
- (b) Defined terms establishing when a commercial building is deemed "vacant," including a list of observable de facto vacancy indicators - such as overgrown or dead vegetation, accumulation of mail, circulars, or debris, disconnected or past-due utilities, boarded or broken windows, graffiti, abandoned vehicles, and notices of code violation or condemnation - so that the City may treat a property as vacant based on visible conditions even in the absence of a formal declaration by the owner;
- (c) A mandatory registration requirement obligating owners of vacant commercial buildings to register with the City within sixty (60) days of vacancy, accompanied by payment of a registration fee established by resolution of the City Council; a late fee for registrations not timely filed; and authority to collect unpaid fees as a special assessment against the property;
- (d) A registration form requiring owners to provide: their name and a reliable mailing and email address; the name, address, and contact information of a local agent capable of providing emergency access to the building; signed consent to city inspection upon reasonable advance notice and without notice in the case of emergency; the status of all utility services; and a detailed plan of action for returning the building to active, occupied use;
- (e) An initial inspection requirement under which the City shall inspect each registered vacant property within thirty (30) days of registration for compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code and all other applicable ordinances, with authority to order required repairs and, where the cost of repair is determined to exceed the value of the property, to pursue condemnation and demolition;
- (f) Ongoing maintenance standards requiring that all registered vacant properties be maintained in full compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code and kept free of weeds exceeding eight inches in height, dead vegetation, dry brush, trash, junk, debris, graffiti, and improperly stored vehicles; that all properties be secured against unauthorized entry, with broken windows repaired or replaced within fourteen (14) days; that boarding of open or broken windows be permitted only as a temporary emergency measure with city approval; and that vacant street-level storefront windows within the

downtown or historic district be covered with an approved decorative treatment that mimics an active storefront, rather than with plywood or plain boarding;

- (g) A provision requiring that any city order to secure a vacant property be complied with by the owner within seventy-two (72) hours, with authority for the City to perform the securing at the owner's expense if the owner fails to comply, and to collect all unpaid costs, including administrative fees, as a special assessment against the property;
- (h) A provision addressing fire or storm-damaged buildings, requiring owners to apply for a permit to commence construction or demolition within ninety (90) days of the damaging event, after which the building shall be deemed vacant and subject to all requirements of the ordinance;
- (i) A re-occupancy requirement prohibiting re-occupancy of any registered vacant structure until the City has inspected and certified compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code, the Michigan Building Code, and all applicable construction codes, and a certificate of occupancy has been issued; and
- (j) An enforcement provision making all code violations the responsibility of the owner of record, providing that a purchaser or transferee of a registered vacant property shall not be entitled to any extension of time to correct violations existing at the time of sale or transfer, and authorizing civil infractions, fines, and other enforcement remedies for non-compliance.

SECTION 3. The Commission further recommends that any such ordinance include provisions specific to the protection of historic structures, including a prohibition on demolition of historically significant vacant commercial buildings without prior review and approval by the Historic District Commission, and a requirement that rehabilitation plans submitted as part of registration comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

SECTION 4. The Commission requests that the City Council and City staff consult with representatives of the Owosso Historic District Commission during the drafting of any such ordinance to ensure that its provisions are consistent with and supportive of the City's adopted historic preservation goals.

SECTION 5. The Commission requests that the City Council provide a written response to this Resolution within sixty (60) days of its receipt, indicating whether the Council intends to pursue adoption of a vacant commercial building registration ordinance and, if so, a proposed timeline for doing so.

SECTION 6. The Chair of the Commission is hereby authorized and directed to transmit a certified copy of this Resolution to the Mayor, the members of the City Council, and the City Manager.

MOVED _____

SUPPORTED _____

Michigan Municipalities with Vacant Building / Vacant Property Registration Ordinances

Community	Vacancy Trigger (Days Vacant)	Property Types Covered	Registration Fee	Inspection Requirements	Late Fee / Penalties	Notable Provisions
Adrian	60 days (existing vacancies: 30 days to register)	Residential, Commercial (60%+ of ground floor unoccupied = vacant)	Fee set by City Commission resolution; late fee also set by resolution; collectible as special assessment if unpaid	Inspection required before reoccupancy per 2012 IPMC and Michigan Building Code; certificate of occupancy required	Civil infraction for failure to register; late fee by resolution; unpaid amounts collected as special assessment	Ordinance originally adopted 2013, amended 2015 and again in 2025 (Ord. 25-005). Requires 24-hr notice inspection consent; signed plan of action for reoccupancy; violations transfer to new owner on sale
Bay City	90 days	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	\$0 initial; quarterly fees while vacant (amount set by resolution)	Exterior inspection per 2012 IPMC required upon registration	Civil infraction; costs collectible as special assessment	Quarterly ongoing fees as long as property remains vacant; re-occupancy certificate required
Detroit	30 days	Residential, Commercial	Annual inspection fee: Single-family \$223; Two-family \$278; Multi-family \$501; Commercial flat fee \$197	Annual exterior inspection required; Certificate of Compliance issued annually	Civil infractions; blight violations; liens against property	Certificate of Compliance required annually; emergency order compliance within 72 hrs; city may secure at owner's expense
East Lansing	Not specified (all vacant/abandoned properties)	Residential, Commercial	\$150/year (includes required exterior inspection)	Exterior inspection required upon registration; \$60 re-inspection fee	Civil infraction; boarding prohibited except temporary emergency	Vacant Property Coordinator tracks properties; boarded doors/windows prohibited; re-occupancy requires compliance
Ferndale	Not specified	Residential, Commercial	\$600 per 6-month registration period	In-person inspection by community development and fire staff before registration issued; monthly exterior checks	Civil infraction; fines	One of Michigan's most recently adopted programs; fee designed to recover program costs and deter absentee owners
Grosse Pointe Park	30 days	Residential, Commercial	Not specified in public sources (set by resolution)	Required per ordinance	Civil infraction	Registration renewed every 6 months; applies to all property types including homes for sale
Kalamazoo	30 days (if vacant and blighted with 2+ criteria)	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	Monthly or biannual administrative fee set by City Commission resolution (amount varies by monitoring tier)	City may access interior for inspection; tiered monitoring (Tier 1: monthly; Tier 2: every 6 months)	Minimum \$200 fine (civil infraction); doubles for repeat violations within 6 months; misdemeanor for allowing occupancy with uncorrected violations	Applies only to 'vacant blighted' structures (not all vacant); two-tier monitoring system; city may assess unpaid fees against property on tax roll
Muskegon	90 days (fee triggered at 1 year)	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	No fee if vacant <1 year; Residential: \$100/yr; Commercial/Industrial: \$500/yr (2024 fee schedule). Escalating: 2 yrs \$1,000; 3-5 yrs \$2,000	Required upon registration; duty to amend within 30 days of any status change	\$100–\$500 fine per violation; 2-year fee waiver available for qualifying properties	Escalating annual fees based on duration of vacancy; vacation/seasonal homes exempt from fees; appeal committee may grant 2-year fee waiver
Plymouth Township	60 days	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	Set by resolution (amount not specified in public sources)	Initial inspection required; monitoring of fire safety hazards	Civil infraction; \$100 fine for failure to maintain current registration info (each day a separate offense); misdemeanor for second offense	Requires 24/7 emergency contact; assesses costs to determine ownership if owner fails to register
Pontiac	Not specified (registration required upon vacancy)	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	Set by resolution; government and registered nonprofits exempt from fees (registration still required)	Initial inspection within 30 days; ongoing semi-annual inspections	Civil infraction; costs collectible as special assessment	Re-occupancy certificate required before any reoccupancy; all outstanding taxes/water bills/liens must be paid before certificate issued; seasonal business exemption available
Rochester	Not specified	Residential, Commercial	Not confirmed in public sources	Required per ordinance	Civil infraction	Confirmed via Municode; detailed provisions not fully available in public sources
Roseville	45 days	Residential, Commercial	Set by City Council resolution (registration, inspection, re-inspection fees all separately established)	Inspection required upon registration; re-inspection fee applies	Civil infraction; fees collectible as liens	Registration valid for 365 days and must be renewed until property is occupied and certificate of compliance issued
Saginaw	Not specified	Residential, Commercial	Annual fee; renewal fees due each year by 4th Friday in February; 100% penalty for late payment	Inspection appointment required; registration includes inspection	100% penalty on renewal fees paid late	Dangerous Building Program runs parallel: catalogs abandoned/fire-damaged properties for rehabilitation or demolition

Southfield	Not specified (registration required upon vacancy)	Residential, Commercial, Industrial	Set by resolution; \$1,000 late fee per 30-day period of late registration	Initial inspection upon registration; semi-annual inspections while vacant; owner must conduct weekly inspections (or hire local property manager if owner is remote)	\$1,000 late registration fee per 30-day period; civil infractions	Most comprehensive Michigan program found; requires weekly owner self-inspection or property manager; 90-day permit requirement after fire damage; certificate of occupancy required before reoccupancy
West Bloomfield Township	30 days	Residential, Commercial	Annual registration fee (amount set by fee schedule; 1-year validity)	Required per ordinance; initial and periodic inspections	Civil infraction; past-due fees payable online	Township accepts online payment for past-due rental and vacant property fees; re-occupancy requires compliance certification
Ypsilanti (City)	Not specified (triggered by qualifying events)	Residential, Commercial	\$300/month escrow deposit required (waivable under certain conditions)	Required per ordinance; city may draw on escrow for inspection and emergency securing costs	Escrow funds not refunded upon sale or transfer unless property is reoccupied; civil infraction	Unique escrow mechanism: monthly \$300 deposit held by city; city deducts inspection and securing costs from escrow; funds follow the property not the owner
Ypsilanti Township	30 days	Residential, Commercial (including homes for sale)	Fee set by resolution (includes inspection fee)	Initial inspection required; \$30 re-inspection fee per return visit	Fines; administrative search warrant; potential legal action for non-compliance	Includes homes listed for sale; certain repairs require separate building permits; 2014-11 sets residential vacant property fees