CHAPTER 657A

ABANDONED OR UNSAFE BUILDINGS — ABATEMENT BY REHABILITATION

Nuisances in general, chapter 657

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657A.1 Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless context requires otherwise:

1. *"Abandoned"* or *"abandonment"* means that a building has remained vacant and has been in violation of the housing code of the city in which the property is located or the housing code applicable in the county in which the property is located if outside the limits of a city for a period of six consecutive months.

2. *"Abate"* or *"abatement"* in connection with property means the removal or correction of hazardous conditions deemed to constitute a public nuisance or the making of improvements needed to effect a rehabilitation of the property consistent with maintaining safe and habitable conditions over the remaining useful life of the property. However, the closing or boarding up of a building or structure that is found to be a public nuisance is not an abatement of the nuisance.

3. *"Building"* means a building or structure located in a city or outside the limits of a city in a county, which is used or intended to be used for residential purposes, and includes a building or structure in which some floors may be used for retail stores, shops, salesrooms, markets, or similar commercial uses, or for offices, banks, civic administration activities, professional services, or similar business or civic uses, and other floors are used, designed, or intended to be used for residential purposes.

4. *"Interested person"* means an owner, mortgagee, lienholder, or other person that possesses an interest of record or an interest otherwise provable in property that becomes subject to the jurisdiction of the court pursuant to this chapter, the city in which the property is located, the county in which the property is located if the property is located outside the limits of a city, and an applicant for the appointment as receiver pursuant to this chapter.

5. *"Neighboring landowner"* means an owner of property which is located within five hundred feet of property that becomes subject to the jurisdiction of the court pursuant to this chapter.

6. *"Owner"* includes a person who is purchasing property by land installment contract or under a duly executed purchase contract.

7. *"Public nuisance"* means a building that is a menace to the public health, welfare, or safety, or that is structurally unsafe, unsanitary, or not provided with adequate safe egress, or that constitutes a fire hazard, or is otherwise dangerous to human life, or that in relation to the existing use constitutes a hazard to the public health, welfare, or safety by reason of inadequate maintenance, dilapidation, obsolescence, or abandonment.

85 Acts, ch 222, §1; 86 Acts, ch 1059, §1; 96 Acts, ch 1204, §27

657A.2 Petition.

1. A petition for abatement under this chapter may be filed in the district court of the county in which the property is located, by the city in which the property is located, by the county if the property is located outside the limits of a city, by a neighboring landowner, or by a duly organized nonprofit corporation which has as one of its goals the improvement of housing conditions in the county or city in which the property in question is located. A petition for abatement filed under this chapter shall include the legal description of the real

property upon which the nuisance or dangerous or unsafe condition is located unless the nuisance or dangerous or unsafe condition is not situated on or confined to a parcel of real property or is portable or capable of being removed from the real property. Service on the owner shall be by personal service or by certified mail, or if service cannot be made by either method, by posting the notice in a conspicuous place on the building and by publication.

2. If a petition filed pursuant to this chapter alleges that a building is abandoned or is in a dangerous or unsafe condition, the city, county, if the property is located outside the limits of a city, neighboring landowner, or nonprofit corporation may apply for an injunction requiring the owner of the building to correct the condition or to eliminate the condition or violation. The court shall conduct a hearing at least twenty days after written notice of the application for an injunction and of the date and time of the hearing is served upon the owner of the building. Notice of the hearing shall be served in the manner provided in subsection 1.

3. If the court finds at the hearing that the building is abandoned or is in a dangerous or unsafe condition, the court shall issue an injunction requiring the owner to correct the condition or to eliminate the violation, or another order that the court considers necessary or appropriate to correct the condition or to eliminate the violation.

4. In a proceeding under this chapter, if the court makes the finding described in subsection 3 and additionally finds that the building in question is a public nuisance and that the owner of the building has been afforded reasonable opportunity to correct the dangerous or unsafe condition found or to eliminate the violation found but has refused or failed to do so, the judge shall cause notice of the findings to be served upon the owner, each mortgagee or other lienholder of record, and other known interested persons, and shall order the persons served to show cause why a receiver should not be appointed to perform work and to furnish material that reasonably may be required to abate the public nuisance. The notice shall be served in the manner provided in subsection 1.

5. In a proceeding under this chapter, if the court determines the building is not abandoned or is not in a dangerous or unsafe condition, the court shall dismiss the petition and may require the petitioner to pay the owner's reasonable attorney fees actually incurred.

85 Acts, ch 222, §2; 87 Acts, ch 113, §1, 2; 96 Acts, ch 1204, §28; 2004 Acts, ch 1165, §9, 11; 2010 Acts, ch 1050, §10

Referred to in **§657A.10A**

657A.3 Interested persons — opportunity to abate public nuisance.

1. Before appointing a receiver to perform work or to furnish material to abate a public nuisance under this chapter, the court shall conduct a hearing at which the court shall offer mortgagees of record, lienholders of record, or other known interested persons in the order of priority of interest in title, the opportunity to undertake the work and to furnish the materials necessary to abate the public nuisance. The court shall require the person selected to demonstrate the ability to undertake promptly the work required and to post security for the performance of the work. All amounts expended by the person toward abating the public nuisance are a lien on the property if the expenditures were approved in advance by the judge and if the person desires the lien. The lien shall bear interest at the rate provided for judgments pursuant to section 535.3, and shall be payable upon terms approved by the judge. If a certified copy of the court order that approved the expenses and the terms of payment for the lien, and a description of the property in question are filed for record within thirty days of the date of issuance of the order in the office of the county recorder of the county in which the property is located, the lien has the same priority as the mortgage of a receiver as provided in section 657A.7.

2. If the court determines at the hearing conducted pursuant to subsection 1, that no interested person can undertake the work and furnish the materials required to abate the public nuisance, or if the court determines at any time after the hearing that an interested person who is undertaking corrective work pursuant to this section cannot or will not proceed, or has not proceeded with due diligence, the court may appoint a receiver to take possession

and control of the property. The receiver shall be appointed in the manner provided in section 657A.4.

85 Acts, ch 222, §3
Referred to in **§657A.4**, **§657A.10A**

657A.4 Appointment of receiver.

After conducting a hearing pursuant to section 657A.3, the court may appoint a receiver to take possession and control of the property in question. A person shall not be appointed as a receiver unless the person has first provided the court with a viable financial and construction plan for the rehabilitation of the property in question and has demonstrated the capacity and expertise to perform the required work in a satisfactory manner. The appointed receiver may be a financial institution that possesses an interest of record in the property, a nonprofit corporation that is duly organized and exists for the primary purpose of improving housing conditions in the county or city in which the property in question is located, or any person deemed qualified by the court. No part of the net earnings of a nonprofit corporation serving as a receiver under this section shall benefit a private shareholder or individual. Membership on the board of trustees of a nonprofit corporation does not constitute the holding of a public office or employment and is not an interest, either direct or indirect, in a contract or expenditure of money by a city or county. No member of a board of trustees of a nonprofit corporation appointed as receiver is disqualified from holding public office or employment, nor is a member required to forfeit public office or employment by reason of the membership on the board of trustees.

85 Acts, ch 222, §4; 96 Acts, ch 1204, §29
Referred to in **§657A.3**, **§657A.10A**

657A.5 Determination of costs of abatement.

1. Prior to ordering work or the furnishing of materials to abate a public nuisance under this chapter, the court shall make all of the following findings:

a. The estimated cost of the labor, materials, and financing required to abate the public nuisance.

b. The estimated income and expenses of the property after the furnishing of the materials and the completion of the repairs and improvements.

c. The need for and terms of financing for the performance of the work and the furnishing of the materials.

d. If repair and rehabilitation of the property are not found to be feasible, the cost of demolition of the property or the portions of the property that constitute the public nuisance.

2. Upon the written request of all the known interested persons to have the property or portions of the property demolished, the court may order the demolition. However, demolition shall not be ordered unless the requesting persons have paid the costs of demolition, the costs of the receivership, and all notes and mortgages of the receivership.

85 Acts, ch 222, §5
Referred to in **§657A.10A**

657A.6 Powers and duties of receiver.

Before proceeding with the receiver's duties, a receiver appointed by the court shall post a bond in an amount designated by the court. The court may empower the receiver to do the following:

1. Take possession and control of the property, operate and manage the property, establish and collect rents and income, lease and rent the property, and evict tenants. An existing housing or building ordinance violation does not restrict the receiver's authority pursuant to this subsection.

2. Pay all expenses of operating and conserving the property, including but not limited to the cost of electricity, gas, water, sewerage, heating fuel, repairs and supplies, custodian services, taxes, assessments, and insurance premiums, and hire and pay reasonable compensation to a managing agent.

3. Pay prereceivership mortgages and other liens and installments of prereceivership mortgages and other liens.

4. Perform or enter into contracts for the performance of work and the furnishing of materials necessary to abate the public nuisance, and obtain financing for the abatement of the public nuisance.

5. Pursuant to court order, remove and dispose of personal property which is abandoned, stored, or otherwise located on the property, that creates a dangerous or unsafe condition or that constitutes a violation of housing or building regulations or ordinances.

6. Obtain mortgage insurance for a receiver's mortgage from an agency of the federal government.

7. Enter into agreements and take actions necessary to maintain and preserve the property and to comply with housing and building regulations and ordinances.

8. Give the custody of the property and the opportunity to abate the nuisance and operate the property to the owner or to a mortgagee or a lienholder of record.

9. Issue notes and secure the notes by mortgages bearing interest at the rate provided for judgments pursuant to section 535.3, and terms and conditions as approved by the court. When transferred by the receiver in return for valuable consideration in money, material, labor, or services, the notes issued by the receiver are freely transferable.

85 Acts, ch 222, §6
Referred to in **§657A.8**, **§657A.10A**

657A.7 Priority of receiver's mortgage.

1. If the receiver's mortgage is filed for record in the office of the county recorder of the county in which the property is located within sixty days of the issuance of a secured note, the receiver's mortgage is a first lien upon the property and is superior to claims of the receiver and to all prior or subsequent liens and encumbrances except taxes and assessments. Priority among the receiver's mortgages is determined by the order in which the mortgages are recorded.

2. The creation of a mortgage lien under this chapter prior to or superior to a mortgage of record at the time the receiver's mortgage lien was created does not disqualify a prior recorded mortgage as a legal investment.

85 Acts, ch 222, §7
Referred to in **§657A.3**, **§657A.10A**

657A.8 Assessment of costs.

The court may assess the costs and expenses set out in section 657A.6, subsection 2, and may approve receiver's fees to the extent that the fees are not covered by the income from the property.

85 Acts, ch 222, §8
Referred to in **§657A.10A**

657A.9 Discharge of receiver.

The receiver may be discharged at any time in the discretion of the court. The receiver shall be discharged when all of the following have occurred:

1. The public nuisance has been abated.

2. The costs of the receivership have been paid.

3. Either all the receiver's notes and mortgages issued pursuant to this chapter have been paid, or all the holders of the notes and mortgages request in writing that the receiver be discharged.

85 Acts, ch 222, §9
Referred to in **§657A.10A**

657A.10 Compensation and liability of receiver.

1. A receiver appointed under this chapter is entitled to receive fees and commissions in the same manner and to the same extent as receivers appointed in actions to foreclose mortgages.

2. The receiver appointed under this chapter is not civilly or criminally liable for actions pursuant to this chapter taken in good faith.

85 Acts, ch 222, §10; 86 Acts, ch 1238, §27
Referred to in **§657A.10A**

657A.10A Petition by city for title to abandoned property.

1. *a.* In lieu of the procedures in sections 657A.2 through 657A.10, a city in which an abandoned building is located may petition the court to enter judgment awarding title to the abandoned property to the city. A petition filed under this section shall include the legal description of the abandoned property. If more than one abandoned building is located on a parcel of real estate, the city may combine the actions into one petition. The owner of the building and grounds, mortgagees of record, lienholders of record, or other known persons who hold an interest in the property shall be named as respondents on the petition.

b. The petition shall be filed in the district court of the county in which the property is located. Service on the owner and any other named respondents shall be by certified mail and by posting the notice in a conspicuous place on the building. The action shall be in equity.

2. Not sooner than sixty days after the filing of the petition, the city may request a hearing on the petition.

3. In determining whether a property has been abandoned, the court shall consider the following for each building that is located on the property and named in the petition and the building grounds:

a. Whether any property taxes or special assessments on the property were delinquent at the time the petition was filed.

b. Whether any utilities are currently being provided to the property.

c. Whether the building is unoccupied by the owner or lessees or licensees of the owner.

d. Whether the building meets the city's housing code for being fit for human habitation, occupancy, or use.

e. Whether the building is exposed to the elements such that deterioration of the building is occurring.

f. Whether the building is boarded up.

g. Past efforts to rehabilitate the building and grounds.

h. The presence of vermin, accumulation of debris, and uncut vegetation.

i. The effort expended by the petitioning city to maintain the building and grounds.

j. Past and current compliance with orders of the local housing official.

k. Any other evidence the court deems relevant.

4. In lieu of the considerations in subsection 3, if the city can establish to the court's satisfaction that all parties with an interest in the property have received proper notice and either consented to the entry of an order awarding title to the property to the city or did not make a good faith effort to comply with the order of the local housing official within sixty days after the filing of the petition, the court shall enter judgment against the respondents granting the city title to the property.

5. If the court determines that the property has been abandoned or that subsection 4 applies, the court shall enter judgment awarding title to the city. The title awarded to the city shall be free and clear of any claims, liens, or encumbrances held by the respondents.

6. If a city files a petition under subsection 1, naming the holder of a tax sale certificate of purchase for the property as a respondent, the city shall also file the petition, along with a verified statement declaring that the property identified in the petition contains an abandoned building, with the county treasurer. Upon receiving the petition and verified statement, the county treasurer shall make an entry in the county system canceling the sale of the property and shall refund the purchase money to the tax sale certificate holder.

2004 Acts, ch 1165, §10, 11; 2010 Acts, ch 1050, §11, 12; 2013 Acts, ch 30, §261

657A.11 Jurisdiction — remedies.

1. An action pursuant to this chapter is exclusively within the jurisdiction of district judges as provided in section 602.6202.

2. This chapter does not prevent a person from using other remedies or procedures to enforce building or housing ordinances or to correct or remove public nuisances.

85 Acts, ch 222, §11

657A.12 Indexing of petition.

1. When a petition affecting real property is filed by a governmental entity under this

chapter, the clerk of the district court shall index the petition pursuant to section 617.10, if the legal description of the affected property is included in or attached to the petition.

2. After filing the petition with the clerk of the district court, the governmental entity shall also file the petition in the office of the county treasurer. The county treasurer shall include a notation of the pendency of the action in the county system, as defined in section 445.1, until the judgment of the court is satisfied or until the action is dismissed. Pursuant to section 446.7, an affected property that is subject to a pending action shall not be offered for sale by the county treasurer at tax sale.

2010 Acts, ch 1050, §13