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Policy Improvement for Vacant House Management
Considering Neighborhood Environment in Declining Urban Areas

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Vacant house is one of the physical results caused by the decrease of population and housing demand in declining areas, and the number of vacant houses is over 1,510,000 according to the data of the year 2019 from the National Statistics Office. With the aging of the society as well as the natural reduction of the population starting in 2020, the increase of vacant houses is unavoidable in declining areas where there is no new demand for housing. The vacant houses, concentrated in declining areas, are considered as the subjects of management, because they give a negative impression on the neighboring areas, accelerate the declining of the areas, and cause the hollowing of the areas.

However, the Korean policies related to the vacant houses are focused on the repair and utilization of each vacant house after its generation. As the policies are implemented by the central government support programs and municipal programs through the infill development to fill each vacant house with programs and facility functions, such as rent houses and community facilities, without considering the demand for space utilization, some of the vacant houses have been returned to an unused state. The Special Act on Vacant Houses and Small Scale Housing Improvement was legislated in 2018 to prepare a vacant house management system for urban areas, but it has limitations in addressing the local vacant house problems as the enforcement of the act is focused on the repair of

The present study was conducted to prepare a new vacant house management method

in consideration of the vacant house generation status and the physical and social conditions of the declining residential areas where the population decrease is accelerated, and to derive a method for improving the relevant policies.

Chapter 2 of this article suggests that a downscaling–based management plan should be prepared in response to the decrease of the population and the housing demand for the spatial management of the declining areas; that the residential area management needs to be performed in pursuit of the improvement of the quality of the residential environment in order to increase the settlement, and that the conditions for voluntary management by the civilians and the residents should be prepared to form sustainable residential areas. Considering these directions of the spatial management in the declining areas, the significance of the vacant house management is described below. First, the vacant houses are resources that can ben efficiently distributed and utilized in response to the local demand. Second, elimination of vacant houses may be used as a means of increasing the quality of the residential environment in terms of the amenity and convenience of the residential environment by securing distances between houses, improving the accessibility, increasing the amount of sunshine to the houses, and enhancing the ventilation. Third, in pursuit of the voluntary formation of residential area management conditions, the densely located vacant houses may be converted into infrastructure facilities, for example, by expanding the roads. Fourth, the vacant houses may be kept as a reservation area in preparation of the future changes of the demand.

The systematic basis of the Korea policies regarding vacant houses was prepared in 2018 through the legislation of the Special Act on Vacant Houses and Small Scale Housing Improvement for the management of the vacant houses in the urban areas. However, the policies are focused on the repair of each vacant house based on the grade according to the physical deterioration. The system of the Clusters of Vacant Houses, a means of area management of vacant houses, is not functioning properly in the absence of the specific roles and the related schemes. The annual budget allotted to the individual municipal governments in an amount of about 100 million KRW is not sufficient to respond to the increasing vacant houses. The Urban Regeneration New Deal Project induces the positive utilization of vacant houses, but the project is also focused on the filling of programs and facilities as a method for revitalizing the local areas and thus has limitations to provide a fundamental solution to the local vacant house problem.

In Japan and UK where various supportive plans have already been prepared to manage

vacant houses, the policies are directed to not only the repair and utilization of each vacant house but also the formation of high−quality infrastructure facilities in response to the local demand by integrating and replotting the vacant houses as well as the adjacent empty sites.

In the present study, to derive a method for improving the vacant house management policies under the policy−related status and background described above, the residential environment conditions and the status of vacant house generation were investigated in the declining areas in Nam−gu in Gwanju, Jeonju−si in Jeonbuk, and Yeongdo−gu in Busan. The results showed that the vacant houses generated in 2 or 3 administrative dongs accounted for more than 50% of the total number with in the same declining area. These areas showed a high population decrease rate and a high ratio of elderly population, indicating that vacant houses may increase more rapidly in the future and that preferential management and different management strategies are required in these areas. With regard to the residential environment conditions in the areas with a high vacant house generation rate, most of the vacant houses are located in parcels with poor road access conditions, and this suggests that the generation of vacant houses is significantly affected by the road access conditions. In addition, many vacant houses have been generated in areas where the accessibility is poor, including steep slopes and dead ends. Some of the areas where vacant houses are generated show a house density of over 100 house/ha, which damages the amenity, and generally have poor infrastructure conditions with regard to roads, parking lots and parks. The vacant houses in these areas, except about 3 to 4 houses in each area, have poor road access conditions, which make it impossible to repair and utilize the house in each parcel. The management plans for the Clusters of Vacant Houses designated in these areas, recited in the Strategic Management Plan for Vacant Houses, were reviewed, but they lacked specific interconnection strategies and management direction for the areas where vacant houses are concentrated. Rather, it was found that the steep slope areas where vacant houses are concentrated have not been designated as one of the Clusters of Vacant Houses. Based on these results, the following suggestions are provided in this article. First, separate management directions should be prepared for the areas where vacant house management is preferentially necessary in consideration of the population decrease rate, the ratio of elderly population, and the rate of vacant house generation. Second, a management plan for improving the road access is required to improve the settlement

conditions in the areas where vacant houses are generated. Third, the vacant house management plans should be prepared by comprehensively considering the characteristics of each vacant house in the residential areas, the characteristics of the individual parcels, the neighboring public facility conditions, and the infrastructure conditions. In particular, the need for maintaining the functions of a residential area should be firstly reexamined with regard to the areas of steep slopes, areas vulnerable to disasters and areas with extremely poor road access conditions. Since the approach based on individual parcels has limitations, there is a need for positively interconnecting the parcels of adjacent vacant or deteriorated houses.

Based on the analysis of the status and the requirements of the policy improvement, a simulation was performed with the Iksan−si to identify the areas that require preferential vacant house management and set up the management direction accordingly in order to verify the feasibility of the policies and prepare specific management processes. The following implications were derived from the simulation. The four vacant house management areas derived from the simulation had different sizes from 10,000 to 30,000 m2, and they were all different in terms of the vacant house status and residential conditions within the individual areas. The results showed that the applicable vacant house management plans are to investigate the development conditions of the individual parcels, including the road access conditions as well as the grade of the vacant houses, and improve the road access conditions and supply infrastructure facilities by using some of the vacant houses so that the public sector may take initiatives in the development of the vacant houses that can be improved independently. In addition, the results showed that a series of procedures, including the identification of the vacant management areas, the preparation of the management directions, and the preparation of the management strategy and responsive measures for each area, can be applied as a procedural standard for vacant house management. In the process, a different management plan was proposed through the determination of demolition depending on the site conditions related to the designation of the Clusters of Vacant Houses based on the conventional fragmentary criteria, the management strategy in conjunction with adjacent vacant or deteriorated houses, and the preferential consideration of the supply of infrastructure facilities. The alternative may be applied to increase the possibility of voluntary repair of the vacant houses by improving the road access conditions, increasing infrastructure facilities such as parking lots, and improving the residential

infrastructure facilities. The vacant house policy should not only consider each vacant house but also be extended to increase the possibility of the revitalization and voluntary repair of the residential areas. Besides, a survey of the specific status (analysis of buildings and parcel conditions, and demand for public services, etc.) within and around the vacant house management areas needs to be carried out to prepare effective management strategies and alternatives.

Comprehensively considering the policy implications that were derived from the review of the status and limitations of the previous policies, the status of vacant house generation and local conditions in declining areas, and the alternatives for preparing vacant house management plans, detailed action plans are provided according to the basic directions for preparing new plans for managing vacant houses based on the conditions of the declining areas.

First, in consideration of the efficient use of the limited budget and human resources as well as the impacts on the neighboring areas, there is a need for preparing a system for selecting the preferential areas for vacant house management. The conventional vacant house management system employs an approach depending on the conditions of each vacant house and is based a fragmentary method that applies uniform conditions throughout the country. Therefore, the conventional system is incapable of handling the different conditions and problems of the individual areas. The proposed method is to select the areas that preferentially require vacant house management, to examine the need for maintaining or increasing the residential functions in consideration of the comprehensive residential environment conditions, the characteristics of vacant houses, and the demand for public services, and then to prepare the management direction according to the examination results. In the cases of the vacant house management areas where the preferential intervention by the public sector is required urgently, various development projects may be designed with individual parcels or through the integration of parcels or areas. The implementation plans may be included in the Strategic Management Plan for Vacant Houses to be used as a basis for inputting the budget. The existing term, Clusters of Vacant Houses, has been changed to Vacant House Management Areas so that the purpose of designating the areas can be clearly recognized. In addition, flexibility has been added to the designation of the areas so that the designation may be performed in consideration of the local conditions.

Second, it is proposed that scope of the vacant house policies should be extended to

incorporate not only the repair of each vacant house but also the preparation of the conditions for voluntary residential areas management. In most of the areas where vacant houses are generated, voluntary repair and utilization of each vacant house are hardly expected because of the poor infrastructure and road access conditions in the areas. In addition, past examples have taught that demand for housing can hardly be incurred or maintained by the supply of houses through the utilization and repair of each vacant house without the improvement of the residential environment. Therefore, it is critical to extend the scope of the vacant house policy to incorporate the residential environment, not limiting to vacant houses themselves, so that the residential attractiveness may be increased and the recognition by the local residents may be improved by providing infrastructure facilities by using the vacant houses. Conditions for inputting the public budget, including the national and municipal funds, should be prepared to the areas where positive effects of the funds are expected through the preferential intervention of the public sector. The proposal in this paper also includes the reorganization of the goals and details of the 'Vacant House Specialized Urban Regeneration Pilot Program,' which has been implemented since 2020 as a program funded by the central government. The improved proposal encourages promoting the program by limiting the scope from the conventional Clusters of Vacant Houses to the areas that urgently require management and that can provide ripple effects to the neighboring areas through the improvement of the residential environment using the vacant houses. The proposal also allows for various types of projects for implementing the program depending on the local conditions, including the infrastructure facility improvement project, cadastral investigation−connected project, and residential function−reducing project. While the program is implemented with the vacant house management areas, the fund may be used to purchase the vacant houses and the adjacent lands in the areas. In the cases of voluntary house repair project, incentives may be given by providing a subsidy and a loan to enhance the initiative to implement.

Third, it is proposed that the vacant house management plans should be diversified by preparing locally customized methods in consideration of the residential demand of the declining areas. When preparing the vacant house management plans for the declining areas where the degree of deterioration and the rate of vacant house generation are high, the social conditions, such as the decrease of the population and the ratio of the elderly residents, should be taken into consideration with the comprehensive physical state of

the areas and their residential environment in order to examine whether the residential functions should be maintained or decreased and determine the direction of the management. Through the analysis of the status and the review of the alternatives, this paper suggests 4 management directions (residential condition improvement type, infrastructure repair type, functional conversion type, and reservation accumulation type). The precondition is that various management plans may be developed according to the different conditions and characteristics of the different areas, since the 4 directions are not generally applied to all the areas. In the case of the reservation accumulation type, having the prerequisite of reducing the residential functions, a reservation accumulation strategy may be applied to the areas where the residential functions may not be maintained for being a disaster prevention area, an area vulnerable to disasters or a railway protection area. The proposal also highlights the need for preparing locally customized management plans by considering the infrastructure conditions, physical characteristics and local conditions of the areas where the residential functions need to be maintained.

Furthermore, the preparation and implementation of the vacant house management plans considering the local conditions require the securing of local human resources exclusively devoted to the plans, experts such as supervising architect and public architect, and an operating system that provides the consultation with specialized institutions. In addition, the basic municipal governments need to reorganize the operating systems and roles of the participating entities, for example, by preparing a cooperative system with the related agencies. This paper also suggest that for the Strategic Management Plan for Vacant Houses to be firmly established as a means for preparing vacant management plans, the roles of the supporting organization should be reorganized to provide the necessary consultation.