



Legislation Text

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The official copy considered by the City Council is the first reader copy.

Introductory*

City of Baltimore Council Bill R (Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Porter

A Resolution Entitled

A Council Resolution concerning

Informational Hearing - Studying Options to rid Baltimore City of Vacant Properties

For the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Law Department, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Health to discuss the feasibility of certain specific recommendations to more efficiently and rapidly improve the ability of Baltimore City to remedy vacant dwellings.

Recitals

Vacant homes and properties in Baltimore City have become one of the top issues plaguing the City as it relates to other serious issues such as environmental health, illegal dumping, drug activity, and violent crime. Many vacant homes across the City are structurally unsound and therefore pose a substantial risk to life and nearby property. Despite momentous efforts by the City to remove or repair longstanding vacant properties, a 2019 report indicated that while the city took action to remedy over 1,500 vacant properties within 8 months, another 1,300 new vacant properties were reported in the same 8-month time frame. Currently, the number of vacant homes in the City is well above 15,000.

Vacant homes have become sites for those who dump waste illegally and for drug dealers to stash and perform illegal sales activity. For residents who struggle with substance addiction, vacant homes become havens for illicit drug activity, making the experience even more dangerous as vacant properties are already unsanitary, isolated, and structurally unsafe. Vacant homes drive down the property values of whole communities, which in turn leads to blight, trash, and illegal activities up to, and often including, violent crime.

It is for this reason we hope to bring together the best minds within our City's agencies to discuss how the process for addressing the vacant homes epidemic in the most efficient way possible and to discuss options pertaining to:

- Creating and implementing a sliding scale of fines on unstable vacant property owners.
- Reviewing the City's receivership process and guidelines to discuss ways to increase the speed of the receivership process by evaluating and amending the timeframe in which a property becomes eligible for receivership.

- Discussing the creation and implementation of a tax on vacant properties that is comparable to the occupied homes and other properties in the area.
- Discussing code enforcement, the issuance of fines and other penalties, and how these fines are triggered and imposed within the lens of better efficiency and fine collection.

If adopted, any one of these recommendations would have a drastically positive effect on Baltimore City. The safety of residents would be improved, crime rates would be reduced, and rat infestations would decrease. Further, reduction of vacant buildings may play a role in decreasing the number of building fires per year. City tax revenue would increase allowing for new revenue streams for other City programs, increased city services, and potential cuts to other taxes. An additional benefit would be the spurred, motivated development of vacant properties as homeowners would no longer be able to “sit” on vacant property for little to no cost. Reducing the stock of vacant structures has the benefit of motivating homeowners to rehabilitate properties to make them profitable, thereby protecting the property values of surrounding community members.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of Baltimore, That the Council invites representatives from the Baltimore City Law Department, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Health to discuss the feasibility of certain specific recommendations to more efficiently and rapidly improve the ability of Baltimore City to remedy vacant dwellings.

And be it further resolved, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the City Solicitor, the Acting Commissioner of the Housing and Community Development, the Health Commissioner, and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.