

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 15-0251R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Scott, Henry, Costello, Branch, Stokes, Holton, Welch, Clarke,
Middleton, President Young, Councilmembers Reisinger, Curran, Mosby

Introduced and read first time: August 17, 2015

Assigned to: Taxation, Finance and Economic Development Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Planning Commission, Department of Housing and
Community Development, Department of Real Estate, Department of Finance

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Request for State Action – Tax Credits for Vacant Lot Maintenance**

3 FOR the purpose of calling on the General Assembly to enact, and the Governor to sign,
4 legislation authorizing the City of Baltimore to issue tax credits to homeowners for providing
5 a valuable public service by maintaining vacant lots adjacent to their homes.

6 **Recitals**

7 Vacant lots throughout Baltimore pose challenges to the city, but also present many
8 opportunities for productive use. Depending on how they are maintained, these spaces can either
9 be unsafe, overgrown, trash-covered blights – or inviting green spaces that liven up their
10 surrounding neighborhoods.

11 The City works to keep all City-owned lots well maintained and attractive, but a chronic lack
12 of adequate resources for this task means that it sometimes falls short in its maintenance efforts.
13 When this happens, adjoining property owners sometimes take it upon themselves to take care of
14 these lots to prevent them from becoming blights.

15 Homeowners who step up like this are performing a public service. They deserve to be
16 recognized and compensated for the benefit they’re providing to their entire community. Given
17 the limited resources available to the City for maintaining vacant lots, it is also very much in the
18 City’s interest to encourage others to similarly assist in keeping these properties clean and clear
19 of hazards.

20 Granting homeowners who regularly maintain adjoining vacant properties a tax credit serves
21 both of these purposes. Authorizing a tax credit for maintaining vacant lots as useful public
22 spaces essentially would be allowing these good Samaritans to pay some of their taxes in-kind
23 through their work improving the lots. If the credit is properly calibrated, the City will get much
24 more value out of the transaction than it could generate by instead collecting the full taxes and
25 spending them to maintain the vacant properties.

26 The credit could also largely pay for its self by increasing property values in neighborhoods
27 once held back by lots that are currently dangerous eyesores, but could be transformed by
28 motivated neighbors into uplifting, and value-adding, open spaces.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 Before Baltimore could grant a tax credit along these lines it would first have to be
2 authorized at the State level. Tax credits to encourage homeowners to maintain vacant lots could
3 be a win for the City's finances, engaged homeowners, and the public at large. Hopefully the
4 City and State can work together to make this idea a reality in the coming fiscal year.

5 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
6 Council calls on the General Assembly to enact, and the Governor to sign, legislation authorizing
7 the City of Baltimore to issue tax credits to homeowners for providing a valuable public service
8 by maintaining vacant lots adjacent to their homes.

9 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor, the
10 Honorable Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City House and Senate Delegations to the
11 Maryland General Assembly, the President of the Maryland Senate, the Maryland House
12 Speaker, the Mayor, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.