

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 23-0362
(First Reader)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Ramos, Torrence, Porter, Cohen, Dorsey, Burnett, Glover,
Bullock

Introduced and read first time: March 13, 2023

Assigned to: Ways and Means Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: City Solicitor, Department of Finance, Department of
Housing and Community Development

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ORDINANCE concerning

2 **In Rem Foreclosure – Scope of Subtitle**

3 FOR the purpose of amending City Code, Article 28, Subtitle 8.1 {“In Rem Foreclosure – Vacant
4 and Abandoned Property”} to permit a Land Bank Authority of Baltimore City to initiate and
5 participate in certain in rem foreclosure proceedings on behalf of the Mayor and City Council
6 of Baltimore City; and providing for a contingent effective date.

7 BY repealing and re-ordaining with amendments

8 Article 28 - Taxes

9 Section(s) 8.1-1, 8.1-3, 8.1-5, 8.1-7 to 8.1-9, 8.1-12, 8.1-13, and 8.1-15

10 Baltimore City Code

11 (Edition 2000)

12 **SECTION 1. BE IT ORDAINED BY THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
13 Laws of Baltimore City read as follows:

14 **Baltimore City Code**

15 **Article 28. Taxes**

16 **Subtitle 8.1. In Rem Foreclosure – Vacant and Abandoned Property**

17 **§ 8.1-1. Definitions.**

18 (a) *In general.*

19 In this subtitle, the following terms have the meanings indicated.

20 (B) *AGENCY.*

21 “AGENCY” MEANS EITHER:

22 (1) THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT; OR

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS indicate matter added to existing law.
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 (2) THE LAND BANK AUTHORITY OF BALTIMORE CITY.

2 (C) [(b)] *Department.*

3 (1) *In general.*

4 “Department” means the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community
5 Development.

6 (2) *Inclusion.*

7 “Department” includes any attorney representing the Department in an action filed
8 under this subtitle.

9 (D) [(c)] *Interested party.*

10 “Interested party” has the meaning stated in § 14-873 {“Definitions: Interested party”} of
11 the State Tax-Property Article.

12 (E) [(d)] *Person.*

13 “Person” means:

14 (1) an individual;

15 (2) a receiver, trustee, guardian, personal representative, fiduciary, or representative
16 of any kind; or

17 (3) a partnership, firm, association, corporation, or other entity of any kind.

18 (F) [(e)] *Property; Real property.*

19 “Property” or “real property” has the meaning stated in § 1-101 {“Definitions: Real
20 property”} of the State Tax-Property Article.

21 (G) [(f)] *Tax.*

22 “Tax” has the meaning stated in § 14-801 {“Definitions: Tax”} of the State Tax-Property
23 Article.

24 **§ 8.1-3. [HCD may initiate] COMMENCEMENT OF action; Applicable properties.**

25 (a) *In general.*

26 In accordance with this subtitle, [the Department] AN AGENCY, on behalf of the Mayor
27 and City Council, may file an action in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City for the in rem
28 foreclosure of real property.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 (b) *Applicable properties.*

2 Except as provided in subsection (c) of this section, in order to be subject to an action for
3 foreclosure under this subtitle:

4 (1) the real property must be:

5 (i) a vacant lot; or

6 (ii) an improved property cited as vacant and unsafe or unfit for habitation or
7 other authorized use on a housing or building violation notice, provided
8 that:

9 (A) the time for appeal of the violation notice has expired without an
10 appeal having been filed; or

11 (B) an administrative review of a filed appeal has been decided in
12 favor of the Building Official, as defined in the City Building, Fire,
13 and Related Codes;

14 (2) the real property must be at least 6 months in arrears on taxes and liens; and

15 (3) the total amount of liens for unpaid taxes on the property must exceed the lesser
16 of the total value of the property as last determined by:

17 (i) the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation; or

18 (ii) an appraisal report prepared not more than 6 months before the filing of a
19 complaint under this section by a real estate appraiser who is licensed
20 under Title 16 of the State Business Occupations and Professions Article.

21 (c) *Other tax liens.*

22 (1) *In general.*

23 [The Department] AN AGENCY may not file an action for foreclosure against a
24 property under this subtitle if the property is subject to an active lien certificate held
25 by a third party.

26 (2) *Exception.*

27 Provided that the property otherwise meets the requirements set forth in
28 subsection (b) of this section, [the Department] AN AGENCY may file an action for
29 foreclosure against real property under this subtitle if:

30 (i) the real property is subject to an active tax certificate held by the Mayor
31 and City Council; and

32 (ii) the Mayor and City Council has not previously filed an action to foreclose
33 the right of redemption.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 § 8.1-5. Rules and regulations.

2 Subject to Title 4 {"Administrative Procedure Act – Regulations"} of the City General
3 Provisions Article, the Commissioner of Housing and Community Development AND THE
4 LAND BANK AUTHORITY OF BALTIMORE CITY may JOINTLY adopt rules and regulations
5 to carry out this subtitle.

6 § 8.1-7. Complaint.

7 (a) *Pre-complaint notice.*

8 (1) *In general.*

9 Prior to filing a complaint under this subtitle, the [Department] AGENCY shall send
10 notice by certified mail, restricted delivery, return receipt requested, to the record
11 owner of the subject property at the tax address on record among the City's real
12 property records.

13 (2) *Contents.*

14 The notice required by this subsection shall:

15 (i) clearly identify the property;

16 (ii) identify the tax and other municipal liens due to the Mayor and City Council;
17 and

18 (iii) state that unless full payment of all municipal liens is made to the Department
19 of Finance within 30 days, the [Department] AGENCY may file an in rem
20 foreclosure action in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City and seek the vesting
21 of title to the property in the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore.

22 (b) *In general.*

23 The [Department] AGENCY may file a complaint in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to
24 initiate an in rem foreclosure action if:

25 (1) the property otherwise meets the specifications in § 8.1-3(b) {"Applicable
26 properties"} of this subtitle;

27 (2) the [Department] AGENCY has sent the notice required by subsection (a) of this
28 section; and

29 (3) the full payment of municipal liens has not been paid within 30 days from the date
30 the notice described in paragraph (2) of this subsection was sent.

31 (c) *Contents.*

32 A complaint filed under this section shall include:

Council Bill 23-0362

- 1 (1) a description of the property as it appears in City land records;
 - 2 (2) the tax identification number of the property;
 - 3 (3) a statement that taxes for the property are delinquent at the time of filing;
 - 4 (4) the amount of taxes that are delinquent for the property at the time of filing;
 - 5 (5) the names and last known addresses of all interested parties to the property and,
6 if applicable, a statement that the address of a particular interested party to the
7 property is unknown;
 - 8 (6) a statement that the property is either:
 - 9 (i) a vacant lot; or
 - 10 (ii) an improved property cited by the Department as vacant and unsafe or
11 unfit for habitation or another authorized use;
 - 12 (7) if the [Department] AGENCY states that the property is an improved property cited
13 by the Department as vacant and unsafe or unfit for habitation or another
14 authorized use, a copy of any relevant notices or citations issued by the
15 Department;
 - 16 (8) a request that the Circuit Court not schedule a hearing on the complaint until 30
17 days after the date that the complaint has been filed; and
 - 18 (9) a request that the Circuit Court enter a judgment that forecloses the existing
19 interests of all interested parties to the property and orders ownership of the
20 property to transferred to the City.
- 21 (d) *Amendment.*
- 22 A complaint filed under this section may be amended to include all taxes that become
23 delinquent after the commencement of the in rem foreclosure action.
- 24 (e) *Cure.*
- 25 (1) Subject to paragraph (2) of this subsection, an interested party may cure the
26 delinquent taxes and liens on the property by paying all past due fees, payments, and
27 penalties at any time prior to the entry of the foreclosure judgment.
 - 28 (2) An interested party may not cure the delinquent taxes and liens on the property by
29 paying all past due fees, payments, and penalties after the entry of the foreclosure
30 judgment.

Council Bill 23-0362

§ 8.1-8. Defendants; Service of process.

(a) *In general.*

Each interested party to the property shall be named as a defendant in the complaint and shall be identified, located, and served with process as specified in this section.

(b) *Last known address.*

(1) The title of the complaint shall display the last known address of each defendant, as obtained from:

(i) any record examined as part of the title examination for the property;

(ii) the tax rolls of the Department of Finance and, if different from the Department of Finance's tax rolls, the tax address on file with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation; and

(iii) any other likely address that is known to the [Department] AGENCY.

(2) Other than the methods described in paragraph (1) of this subsection, the [Department] AGENCY is not required to conduct any further investigations or to search any additional record to ascertain an address for a defendant.

(c) *Unknown owners.*

(1) *“Owner” defined.*

In this subsection, “owner” means the owner of the fee simple, leasehold, or reversionary interest in a real property.

(2) *In general.*

When the owner of a real property cannot be reasonably ascertained:

(i) the unknown owner to the property may be included as a defendant by the following designation:

“Unknown owner of (identify the nature of the interest: fee simple, leasehold, or reversionary) interest in the property (giving a description of the property in substantially the same form as the description that appears on the pre-complaint notice), the unknown owner's heirs, devisees, and personal representatives and their or any of their heirs, devisees, executors, administrators, grantees, assigns, or successors in right, title and interest,”; and

(ii) the unknown owner shall be referred to throughout the proceeding using this designation, and the proceedings shall continue against the unknown owner by publication under order of the court as provided in subsection (e) of this section.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 (3) *Records search required.*

2 In order for the [Department] AGENCY to designate a defendant as described in
3 paragraph (2) of this subsection, immediately before the filing of the complaint, the
4 [Department] AGENCY shall perform a full records search consisting of at least 50
5 years in accordance with generally accepted standards for title examination.

6 (4) *Affidavit.*

7 Any complaint filed under this subtitle against an unknown owner shall attach to it an
8 affidavit by the individual performing the search described in paragraph (3) of this
9 subsection that attests to the individual's efforts.

10 (d) *Summons.*

11 (1) *In general.*

12 On filing of a complaint under this subtitle and in accordance with the Maryland
13 Rules, the Circuit Court shall issue a summons to procure the answer and the
14 appearance of all defendants.

15 (2) *Service of summons.*

16 To the extent practicable and except as otherwise provided in this section, the
17 summons required by this section shall be served on defendants in the manner
18 described in Title 14, Subtitle 8, Part III of the State Tax-Property Article.

19 (e) *Order of publication.*

20 (1) *In general.*

21 (i) At the same time that the summons is issued, as provided by subsection (c) of this
22 section, the Court shall pass an order of publication directed to all defendants,
23 naming them as provided by this subtitle.

24 (ii) The property shall be described in the order of publication as the property is
25 described in the complaint.

26 (iii) The order of publication shall warn any person that has or claims to have an
27 interest in the property:

28 (A) to answer the complaint or to redeem the property on or before the date
29 specified in the order of publication; and

30 (B) that, in case of failure to appear, answer, or redeem the property, an in rem
31 foreclosure judgment will be entered to foreclose all rights of redemption
32 in the property and order ownership of the real property be vested in the
33 Mayor and City Council of Baltimore.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 (iv) The date specified in subparagraph (iii)(A) of this paragraph may not be less than
2 60 days from the issuance of the order of publication.

3 (v) When the order of publication is issued and published, any person that has any
4 right, title, interest, claim, lien, or equity of redemption in the property is bound
5 by the judgment of the court that may be passed in the case as if the person were
6 personally served with process.

7 (2) *Form of order.*

8 The order of publication shall be in substantially the following form:

9 **Order of Publication**

10 “The object of this proceeding is to secure the foreclosure of all rights of
11 redemption in and vest title in the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore to the
12 following property in the City of Baltimore:

13 (Here insert description of property in substantially the same form as the
14 description that appears in the complaint.)

15 The complaint states, among other things, that the real property is a vacant lot or
16 improved property cited as vacant and unsafe or unfit for habitation or other
17 authorized use on a housing or building violation notice, and that the amounts
18 necessary for redemption have not been paid.

19 It is thereupon this day of, 20.., by the Circuit Court for Baltimore City,
20 ordered, that notice be given by the insertion of a copy of this order in some
21 newspaper having a general circulation in once a week for 3 successive weeks,
22 warning all persons interested in the property to appear in this court by the day
23 of, 20.., and redeem the property and answer the complaint or thereafter
24 a final judgment will be entered foreclosing all rights of redemption in the
25 property, and vesting title in the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, free and
26 clear of all encumbrances.”.

27 (3) *Copy of order to defendants.*

28 (i) This paragraph only applies to instances when the [Department] AGENCY has
29 ascertained a defendant’s last known address.

30 (ii) On issuance of the order of publication, the [Department] AGENCY shall send a
31 copy of the order to each defendant, at the defendant’s last known address, by first
32 class mail or certified mail, postage prepaid.

33 (f) *Alternate means of service of summons.*

34 (1) *In general.*

35 Notice to a defendant may be made in any other manner that results in actual notice of
36 the pendency of the action.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 (2) *Affidavit.*

2 If notice is made under this subsection, the [Department] AGENCY shall file an
3 affidavit with the Court certifying the notice with a description of the method service
4 used and the time of service.

5 (g) *Affidavit requirement.*

6 If a defendant has not been served with the summons issued under subsection (d) of this
7 section or if the defendant has not been served by alternative means as described in
8 subsection (f) of this section, the [Department] AGENCY must file with the Court:

9 (1) an affidavit certifying that all provisions of this section have been complied with;
10 and

11 (2) to indicate that a good faith effort was made to serve the summons and complaint
12 on each interested party, a copy of:

13 (i) the receipt obtained from the United States Post Office for the mailing;

14 (ii) the certified mail receipt; or

15 (iii) an affidavit of a process server.

16 **§ 8.1-9. Post-filing notice.**

17 Within 5 days after the filing of the complaint, the [Department] AGENCY shall send a copy of
18 the complaint to each interested party to the action, by first-class mail and certified mail,
19 postage pre-paid, return receipt requested, to the address or addresses identified in the caption
20 of the complaint, if those addresses were found.

21 **§ 8.1-12. Judgment.**

22 (a) *Scope.*

23 This section only applies if the Court finds, after a hearing or on the pleadings and
24 affidavits, that:

25 (1) the [Department] AGENCY sent notice and a copy of the complaint to each
26 interested party in accordance with this subtitle;

27 (2) service of process and other notice requirements have been met; and

28 (3) the information set forth in the complaint is accurate.

29 (b) *In general.*

30 If the Court has made the findings required by subsection (a) of this section, the Court
31 shall:

Council Bill 23-0362

- 1 (1) enter a judgment finding that:
- 2 (i) proper notice has been provided to all interested parties; and
- 3 (ii) the real property is a vacant lot or an improved property cited as vacant
4 and unsafe or unfit for habitation or other authorized use on a housing or
5 building violation notice; and
- 6 (2) order that the ownership of the real property is transferred to the Mayor and City
7 Council pursuant to § 8.1-13 {"Title; Recordation"} of this subtitle.

8 (c) *Effect of judgment.*

9 A judgment in an action under this subtitle is binding and conclusive, regardless of legal
10 disability, on:

- 11 (1) all persons, known and unknown, who were parties to the action and who had a
12 claim to the property, whether present or future, vested or contingent, legal or
13 equitable, or several or undivided; and
- 14 (2) all persons who were not parties to the action and had a claim to the property that
15 was not recorded at the time that the action was commenced.

16 **§ 8.1-13. Title; Recordation.**

17 (a) *In general.*

18 Unless specified otherwise in the Court’s judgment or in this section, the title acquired in
19 an in rem foreclosure proceeding shall be an absolute fee simple title.

20 (b) *Leasehold properties.*

- 21 (1) If the [Department’s] AGENCY’S title search indicates that a property’s title is held in
22 leasehold and the [Department] AGENCY wishes for the property to be awarded in
23 leasehold, the [Department] AGENCY may ask the Court to award leasehold title.
- 24 (2) Service of process having been rendered on the ground rent owner, either directly, if
25 the owner has been identified and located, or by publication or other method approved
26 by the Court, if the ground rent owner has not been identified or located, shall be
27 sufficient for the Court to award fee simple title to a leasehold property.

28 (c) *Recordation.*

29 The [Department] AGENCY shall record a judgment transferring title to the Mayor and
30 City Council under this subtitle in the land records of Baltimore City.

Council Bill 23-0362

1 **§ 8.1-15. Post-judgment sale.**

2 (a) *In general.*

3 (1) After obtaining and recording an in rem foreclosure judgment, the City may retain
4 title to the property or sell the property, pursuant to City Charter, Article V, § 5, and
5 City Code, Article 15, § 2-7, to advance the City’s blight elimination goals.

6 (2) The goals described in paragraph (1) of this subsection include rehabilitation,
7 redevelopment, creation or preservation of open or park space, or other similar uses.

8 (b) *Land bank.*

9 In the event the Mayor and City Council establish a land bank authorized under City
10 Charter, Article II, § 65 {“Land Bank Authority”}, the City may convey the property to
11 the Authority described in the implementing ordinance to be used for the City’s or the
12 Authority’s blight elimination and revitalization goals.

13 (c) *Disposition.*

14 (1) *In general.*

15 (i) At the time the City sells any property obtained under this subtitle, the City shall
16 deposit into the Court registry any excess funds paid by the buyer, either directly
17 for the property or on a pro-rata basis if the property was consolidated with other
18 lots to create a single parcel, beyond the lien amounts owed to the Mayor and the
19 City Council, inclusive of interest, fees, and penalties, at the time of the in rem
20 foreclosure judgement under this subtitle.

21 (ii) In depositing the excess funds, the City shall provide an accounting of the amount
22 of City liens at the time of the in rem foreclosure judgement on the property and
23 detail the price or pro-rata share of the price ultimately paid by the buyer of the
24 property.

25 (2) *Distribution of proceeds.*

26 The amount deposited under paragraph (1)(i) of this subsection shall be distributed to
27 the owner and other defendants, upon their motions, in order of lien priority.

28 **SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED,** That this Ordinance takes effect on the
29 enactment of an ordinance establishing the Land Bank Authority of Baltimore City under the
30 authority of City Charter, Article II, § (65) {“Land Bank Authority”}.