



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
c/o Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary

From: Alice Kennedy, Housing Commissioner



Date: May 5, 2022

Re: City Council Resolution 22-0098R Upkeep and Maintenance of Vacant Lots and Public Green Spaces

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Resolution 22-0098R which calls on the Commissioner of DHCD, amongst other agency heads, to report on the annual cumulative total of calls for service for the upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and green spaces.

DHCD is pleased to participate in an informational hearing on the upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and public green spaces and while we do not directly provide maintenance and mowing services, we work closely with the Department of Public Works (DPW) to ensure the upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots by routing Work Orders to the agency for cleaning and cutting services. Maintenance of public parks and green spaces are the responsibility of the Department of Recreation and Parks or the Department of Transportation.

Background

For the purpose of this informational hearing, DHCD will describe our agency's role in the upkeep and maintenance of City owned vacant lots, privately owned vacant lots, and city owned lots that are a part of the Adopt-a-Lot program.

City owned vacant lots

DHCD's Code Enforcement Division, either by response to 311 calls for service, during routine inspections or while patrolling districts, are charged with identifying properties that are in need of property maintenance attention. Code Enforcement conducts over 200,000 Property Maintenance Code Enforcement inspections annually and responds to over 50,000 Code Enforcement Service Requests. So far in FY22, 99% of those SRs have been completed on time. Inspectors submit work orders for DPW, as appropriate, to perform the required maintenance of City owned vacant lots to include cleaning and mowing.

Privately owned vacant lots

DHCD Inspectors will issue notices and citations to the responsible property owner for a variety of sanitation issues including high grass and weeds and trash and debris. If code enforcement efforts fail to get the desired response from the property owner, in certain circumstances DHCD will submit a work order to DPW to "clean and lien" the property, whereby a lien is placed on

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the property for the cost of the work performed. Unpaid liens can lead some vacant properties to tax sale.

Adopt a lot program

DHCD's Vacants to Value Office of Marketing and Community Outreach manages the Adopt-A-Lot program which allows residents, businesses or neighborhood groups to steward and care for city-owned vacant lots in their community. An Adopt-A-Lot license holder can create community spaces that include, community gardens, clean and green spaces and recreational areas. The maintenance of the adopted lots is the responsibility of the entity that enters into the adopt-a-lot agreement. An interactive map of vacant lots that are available for adoption, lots that are currently adopted and community managed open spaces can be found on DHCD's [website](#). DHCD relies on these partnerships not only to reduce the burden on the City to maintain vacant lots but also to improve living conditions in our neighborhoods.

DHCD Analysis

The Resolution suggests that by consolidating all mowing operations into a single agency it would eliminate confusion in determining which City agency is responsible for mowing which City-owned parcel and create greater efficiency in both cost and response time. The reality is that mowing work is specialized to the needs of each agency. It would be difficult to coordinate individual agency needs, workflows and timelines into one centralized system capable of managing the wide variety of sites within the public and private realm. DHCD will continue to work with sister agencies to improve coordination.

Conclusion

The upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and public green spaces plays a significant role in attracting new residents, businesses, and raising property values. DHCD is supportive of discussions to improve the efficiency of the upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and public green spaces however we would not recommend consolidating all mowing operations into a single agency.

The Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests an **unfavorable** position on City Council Resolution 22-0098R.

AK/sm

*cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
Ms. Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary of the City Council*