
CITY OF BALTIMORE

BRANDON SCOTT – MAYOR

 ZEKE COHEN - COUNCIL PRESIDENT



OFFICE OF COUNCIL SERVICES

NANCY MEAD – DIRECTOR

100 N. HOLIDAY STREET

BALTIMORE MD, 21202

HEARING NOTES

Bill: LO25-0027

Title: Accuracy of Vacant Building Notices (VBN) and the Noncontiguous Tax Increment Financing (TIF)

Committee: Housing & Economic Development

Chaired by: James Torrence

Hearing Date: 9/30/2025

Time (Beginning): 6:25 PM

Time (Ending): 8:15 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

Total Attendance: Approximately 35

Committee Members in Attendance: James Torrence, Odette Ramos, Zac Blanchard, Jermaine Jones

Bill Synopsis in the file?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Attendance sheet in the file?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Agency reports read?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the file?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Evidence of notification to property owners?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Final vote taken at this hearing?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Motioned by:			
Final Vote:			

Major Speakers

(This is not an attendance record.)

Alice Kennedy – Commissioner – Dept of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)

Jason Kessler – Deputy Commissioner – Dept of Housing & Community Development

Michael Mockson – Director - Department of Finance

Major Issues Discussed

- The hearing was opened by Chair Torrence
- The floor was open to opening comments from Chair Torrence

- The floor was open to comments from Vice Chair Ramos
- Commissioner Kennedy made a presentation from DHCD & Finance – see slides
- The floor was open to Committee Questions on TIF. Topics included:
 - How does the City measure how TIF funds reach disinvested communities, legacy residents, and black and brown developers
 - One of the ways that the TIF was created was to focus on disinvested areas
 - Working with minority, small, & emergent developers to see about the properties they own
 - Are we connecting applicants to technical assistance that is being funded by the state (BVRI)
 - BVRI is for developers, not the general public – looking into expanding this with enterprise and with emergent developers (example faith faith-based organizations) to expand the reach
 - Are we connecting them with CDFI (?)
 - Conversation with NIF (?) for getting grants and technical assistance
 - HABC – are we working with them to help cash in their vouchers to buy property?
 - They have their own separate program/counseling program – historically more difficult to complete this program. Needs more housing ownership coaching.
 - Conversation with federal delegation, Lobbyist on HBAC and their relation HUD * 2 Months
- The reimbursement process – can some money from a grant funded by the TIF go to developers as reimbursement as work is progressing instead of at the end of a project.
 - Correct – funds are used on the construction side – can't front money due to IRS regulations, but can do some reimbursement as development goes.
- Is the department going to be tracking permits and making sure that these are transferable and have a use and occupancy?
 - Yes – it's part of the monitoring
- Application process for reimbursement
 - One application for the whole process – as applicants work through, there is a check on budgets. Applicants will enter into a grant agreement, and then reimbursement can happen.
- How many awards are we expecting to give out in the 1st cycle?
 - Can't answer that while applications are being submitted, and we don't know how much funding we will get from the bond market
 - Won't be able to speak on how much money we have until we go to the bond market. Estimating by early 2026.
- How will we know this is working?

- Good signs this is already working – receiving positive feedback is being received from developers.
- Looking for additional use and occupancy permits over year on year from prior to TIF.
 - This is a fair assessment – success will build on each other and help to fund additional tranches.
- The floor was open to a presentation from DHCD on VBNs (slides in file)
- The floor was open to Committee questions – topics included:
 - “Pre-vacant properties” properties that are vacant but without a VBN – what criteria can we take on the nuisance standard to help get these properties into VBN status
 - Commercial Properties – can we include minor damage and graffiti and other items into criteria for declaring commercial buildings abandoned for a VBN?
 - Email to be received about who is responsible for VBN/ Use and occupancy permitting for properties
- How often is VBN list audited and by who?
 - How do we build capacity to address VBN issues
 - How can we have Innovation team to help with the workflow to get these properties grass cut and the need to attend to these properties? Need to build this capacity so that code enforcement can focus on higher priority issues instead of issuing workorders for VBNs
 - How can we get special investigations to address issues at VBNs around construction work, making sure they have permits and are doing stuff like properly disposing of trash ect....
 - Code enforcement is focusing on sanitation
 - Is there a process for people to contest VBN
 - Yes – people can request hearing at initial issuance – also working on a process (see ramos question)
 - Active VBNs – added to the presentation to be updated in Legistar *
 - How many VBNs are active – how that compares year over year. *
 - What impact do inaccurate VBNs have on property values
- How can council and community help move VBNs forward to progress through the system
 - VBNs are only abated by demolition or a use and occupancy permit. Would need to move through one of the tools – i.e. in rem, receivership, ect....
 - Fastest legal tool takes about 8-9 months once it gets to court
- The floor was open to closing Comments from Chair Torrence

Further Study

Was further study requested?

☒ **Yes** ☐ **No**

If yes, describe.

- Asking for a meeting with the federal delegation and lobbyist to discuss partnership with HABC & DHCD on a pipeline to use benefits and resources for residents and others (such as vouchers via HABC, coaching programs, technical assistance and funding that might be available via CDFIs) at 80% of AMI
- Email confirming the point person on the Use & Occupancy permit process
- Memo detailing how often the VBN list is audited and by whom, how can we build capacity in the team that inspects VBNs and maximize their workflow so we don't have to rely on them to approve basic maintenance at VBN locations (example - grass cutting)? Can these services be pre-scheduled to be more efficient?
- Asking for updated presentation with: 1. Active VBNs 2. How many VBNs are active – how that compares year over year. – added to the presentation to be updated in Legistar

Committee Vote:

Chair: Yea
Vice Chair: Yea
Member: Yea
Member: Yea
Member: Yea

Tony Leva, Date: 10/1/2025

Cc: Bill File
 OCS Chrono File