



MEMORANDUM

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

From: Alice Kennedy, Acting Housing Commissioner

Date: August 3, 2021

Re: City Council Resolution 21-0047R Upkeep and Maintenance of Vacant Lots and Public Green Spaces

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Bill 21-0047R for the purpose of requesting the Director of the Department of Recreation and Parks, the Director of the Department of Planning, the Director of the Department of Transportation, the Director of the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Head of the Bureau of Solid Waste, the Sustainability Coordinator, a representative from the Office of the Comptroller, and the Chief of the Bureau of Budget and Management Research to report on the annual cumulative total of calls for service for the upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and green spaces; and recommending to the Administration that a single City agency be charged with the responsibility for mowing all City-owned lots, parcels, parks, and green spaces.

City Council Resolution 21-0047R calls on the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) along with various agency heads, to participate in an informational hearing on the upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and public green spaces.

DHCD supports the intent of this Resolution, 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. Public parks and green spaces are the responsibility of the Department of Recreation and Parks or the Department of Transportation.

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 Code Enforcement (CE) Division, either by response to 311 calls for service, during routine inspections or while patrolling districts, is charged with identifying properties that are in need of property maintenance attention. Code Enforcement acts on requests within three days

and 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/or 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, DHCD submits a work order to DPW to “clean and lien” the property, whereby a lien is placed on 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.

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 upkeep and maintenance of vacant lots and public green spaces.

Mowing work is specialized to the needs of each agency and DHCD welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with sister agencies to improve coordination, however it would be difficult to coordinate individual agency needs, work flows and timelines into one centralized system capable of managing the wide variety of sites within the public and private realm.

The Department of Housing and Community Development **recommends disapproval** of City Council Resolution 21-0047R.

AK/sm

cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, *Mayor’s Office of Government Relations*