

My name is Carrie Baniszewski, I have been working in Community Development for almost 15 years, I am currently the Physical Development Manager at Southwest Partnership and resident of the Mt. Clare neighborhood. The bulk of my career and professional experience has been in dealing with vacant buildings and putting them back to community use as well as back on the City's tax roles in Baltimore and Indianapolis, IN. The biggest hurdle to returning vacant properties to a community asset is acquisition. Working with traditional tax sale processes such as the one Baltimore City currently works under, the process to gain title to a vacant property can take two years or more once they become tax sale eligible. Councilwoman Ramos' proposed bill would significantly reduce the time it takes to acquire vacant properties by allowing the increased fees to accumulate daily and potentially push these properties into eligibility for the In Rem process.

This additional time makes an incredible difference to both the end developer as well as the community. As a building sits vacant, it can start to deteriorate extremely quickly, making the building increasingly dangerous and adding exponentially to the total cost of rehab. As to the effect on the surrounding community, I can speak to that on a personal level. I purchased a home four years ago on a block that had only one other occupied building. I was told by the seller, a non-profit housing developer, that their plan was to acquire the other units in the row and rehab them as they did mine. Four years later, the occupied unit next to me now sits vacant because the elderly homeowner passed away last fall, four of the other vacant homes have caught fire at one point, forcing myself, my young son, and our dog out of our home in the middle of the night, in winter on three separate occasions. One of the homes right next to me is a known drug house. I make 311 calls to have it boarded up and the next day the boards are down and I can watch sales happen from my kitchen window. My initial homeowner's insurance company recently dropped me because I was the only occupied home on the block. The reason the developer who rehabbed my home walked away from the block was because acquisition became too difficult, long, and expensive. This is one story, on one block in Baltimore City, this story is repeated all over the City in many neighborhoods.

I am in support of legislation 22-0207 as both a community development professional and a resident of Baltimore City living with the effects of vacant and blighted housing on a daily basis. Councilwoman Ramos' proposed bill, especially in combination with Judicial In Rem, allows developers, for and non-profit, quicker and less expensive access to blighted properties. This will drastically increase quality of life for 1000's if not 10's of 1,000's of residents across the City. Last but not least, will take properties that are currently eating up City dollars and resources and put them back on the tax roles.

