



MEMORANDUM

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

From: Alice Kennedy, Housing Commissioner

Date: March 28, 2023

Re: City Council Resolution 22-0125R Informational Hearing - Occupancy Permits - Inspections and Code Enforcement

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Resolution 22-0125R for the purpose of requesting that representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Baltimore City Fire Department, and other interested parties appear before the Council to discuss the process of conducting building inspections and code enforcement prior to the issuance of an occupancy permit for a property in Baltimore City, problems that may occur during the process in connection with an unabated vacant building notice, and ways the process can be improved.

The Department of Housing and Community Development is pleased to participate in an Informational Hearing to discuss the process of obtaining an occupancy permit and the associated inspections, code enforcement and processes that take place prior to issuance.

Background

DHCD currently employs 18 staff members that work on permits and plans review. They processed over 40,000 permits in calendar year 2022, working diligently across agencies to get through reviews in a timely manner. In CY 2022 DHCD staff processed 5,752 Use Permit applications and issued 3,330 Use Permits. The length between application and final approval depends greatly on the nature of the permit and the scope of work. There are several steps in the permitting process including application review, processing, approval, payment and inspections.

During the COVID pandemic DHCD successfully transitioned to an online system for all its permits, 100% of applications can now be filed and processed online. Applicants can use the ePermits system to apply for a Use and Occupancy Permit. The applicant creates a new application containing property and owner information and a detailed description of the current and proposed use for the property as well as relevant supporting materials. Correspondence and questions about permits-in-process can be made via the built-in message board.

Our “One-Stop Shop Permit Center” reopened to the public on August 16, 2021 and some customers still prefer to come in person and work with our office service staff. The Information Counter at the One Stop Shop at 417 E. Fayette Street, Room 100 can assist customers in filling out permit applications to ensure that application, plans, and other documentation meet the

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general plans' acceptance requirements. They will also let applicants know if permits require additional review.

Challenges

Some challenges identified by applicants trying to obtain Use and Occupancy permits are situations whereby the purchaser is not aware of the existence of an open vacant building notice on their property. Purchasers of newly rehabilitated vacant properties can find themselves in the unfortunate situation of purchasing a newly refurbished home that they legally shouldn't be residing in. DHCD supported the passage of *City Council Bill 21-0078 Required Real Estate Disclosures - Formerly Vacant Structures* to try to help protect purchasers of vacant properties and help ensure that rehabbed vacant properties were done so in compliance with the code to protect the health and safety of new owners.

DHCD has been working on a one-on-one basis to complete consultations with new owners that unknowingly purchased rehabilitated properties that are subject to an open vacant building notice. This is extremely time-consuming process and can be very expensive to the new homeowner.

Conclusion

DHCD is currently working with the Law Department on a set of Rules and Regulations that will make it easier for victimized purchasers of rehabilitated vacant buildings to obtain a Use and Occupancy permit.

DHCD is committed to improving the permitting process and creating a system that will provide user-friendly workflow with ease of access for homeowners, community development organizations, developers and all those seeking permits in the City of Baltimore.

DHCD has **no objection** to City Council Resolution 22-0125R.

AK/sm

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

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