



BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL HOUSING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Mission Statement

The Housing & Economic Development Committee is dedicated to fostering equitable growth and opportunity across Baltimore while addressing historic injustices, such as redlining and other discriminatory policies. Our goals include eliminating vacant properties, ensuring affordable housing, promoting sustainable development, and driving economic growth, job creation, and community revitalization through equitable policies and targeted strategies. By utilizing transparent governance, collaboration, and innovative solutions, we strive to enhance the quality of life for all residents.

**The Honorable James Torrence
CHAIR**

PUBLIC HEARING

9/30/2025

5:15 PM

CLARENCE "DU" BURNS COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Bill: 25-0014R

*Title: Informational Hearing – Vacant and
Abandoned Garages*

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Meeting: Resolution Hearing

Committee: Housing & Economic Development

Bill # 25-0014R

Title: Informational Hearing – Vacant and Abandoned Garages

Purpose: FOR the purpose of requiring representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development to appear before the City Council to provide insight into the issue of vacant and abandoned garages in Baltimore City and to discuss strategies, including in rem liens or foreclosures, to manage and control the issue and its impact on safety, aesthetics, and community economies.

REPORTING AGENCIES

Agency	Report
Department of Housing & Economic Development	Favorable
Public Works	Without Recommendation
Environmental Control Board	

BACKGROUND

Garages are often a standalone building, and in some cases, a garage behind a rowhome block may not belong to an adjacent homeowner. Rundown garages can present a nuisance or even a threat to public safety if unstable or unsecured. And they can lower property values in a community.

In instances where this is the case, and a garage appears to be vacant or abandoned, the process for moving forward looks much like it does with other vacant properties.

1. The building is reported via 311
2. Code Enforcement from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is dispatched to determine the condition of the building and either cite it for a violation or issue a vacant building notice (VBN).

- a. If the building is unstable, then DHCD may order the building stabilized or demolished. In the case of garages, demolition is the most common recourse as stabilization rarely makes sense.
 - b. If a garage has a water connection, the Department of Public Works (DPW) would work to disconnect the water.
3. In all cases, the building may have liens placed against it, and the building may be placed in receivership or go through the In Rem process.

DPW notes that while they can disconnect a vacant garage from the water service, this is rare, as garages seldom have a connection to the water.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fiscal Note:

Service 745 (Housing Code Enforcement) under DHCD, which would inspect garages as a part of investigating vacant or abandoned complaints, has a FY 26 budget of nearly 10.2 million dollars. Of that, nearly \$400,000 comes from Federal and special funds. Slightly more than \$6 million of the FY26 budget for the service is set for the salaries of the staff, which has 97 members, including 49 Housing inspectors and 16 Senior Housing Inspectors. The service moved 56 positions to Service 751 Building Code Permitting, Inspections, & Compliance, including 13 Code Enforcement Investigator positions. Both Services will perform building inspections; however, in the budget, Service 745 (Housing Code Enforcement) notes its responsibility for VBNs.

Service 745 (Housing Code Enforcement) has a goal of closing 85% of service requests on time and conducting 190,000 inspections per year.

Information Source(s):

Analysis by: Tony Leva
Analysis Date: 9/23/2025

Direct Inquiries to: 410-396-1091

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 25-0014R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Middleton

Cosponsored by: Councilmembers Parker, Dorsey, Conway, Torrence, Gray, Bullock, Porter, Blanchard, Jones, Glover, Ramos, McCray, and President Cohen

Introduced and read first time: March 10, 2025

Assigned to: Housing and Economic Development Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Department of Housing and Community Development, Environmental Control Board, Department of Public Works

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Informational Hearing – Vacant and Abandoned Garages**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring representatives from the Department of Housing and Community
4 Development to appear before the City Council to provide insight into the issue of vacant and
5 abandoned garages in Baltimore City and to discuss strategies, including in rem liens or
6 foreclosures, to manage and control the issue and its impact on safety, aesthetics, and
7 community economies.

8 **Recitals**

9 For multiple decades, the City of Baltimore has struggled with vacant, dilapidated, and
10 abandoned private garages. These garages, located across the city, are generally behind row
11 homes but are not always owned by the adjacent home owner.

12 Just as with other types of abandoned property, these abandoned garages are an inefficient
13 use of potentially useful property, an eyesore that depresses property values, and a safety hazard
14 because of their state of disrepair and unknown contents. As part of its duties and authority, the
15 Department of Housing and Community Development is the primary City agency for addressing
16 this longstanding issue.

17 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE**, That the City
18 Council requires representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development
19 to appear before the City Council to provide insight into the issue of vacant and abandoned
20 garages in Baltimore City and to discuss strategies, including in rem liens or foreclosures, to
21 manage and control the issue and its impact on safety, aesthetics, and community economies.

22 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Housing
23 Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Mayor's
24 Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS indicate matter added to existing law.
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Baltimore City Council



Housing & Economic Development Committee

Bill: LO25-0027

**Title: Accuracy of VBN & Noncontiguous
TIF**

Agency Reports



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Matthew W. Garbark, Director, Department of Public Works <i>Matthew W. Garbark</i>
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	September 30, 2025
SUBJECT	25-0014R Informational Hearing – Vacant and Abandoned Garages

Position: Without recommendation

BILL SYNOPSIS

This resolution requires that the Department of Housing and Community Development appear before the City Council to provide insight into the issue of vacant and abandoned garages in Baltimore City and to discuss strategies, including in rem liens or foreclosures, to manage and control the issue and its impact on safety, aesthetics, and community economies.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is the lead agency in managing the city's process for securing vacant and abandoned garages. When a vacant or abandoned garage is reported to DHCD or through 311, DHCD investigates and determines if it poses a hazard. If the garage is deemed a safety hazard, the owner is cited and required to take corrective action. If the owner fails to take corrective action after notification, DHCD refers the case to the Department of Public Works (DPW) to secure the property and/or shut off water service.

DPW has handled very few cases involving water shutoffs for garages, as such requests are rare in practice. Unlike other vacant property types, garages typically do not have active water service. While DHCD has the authority to request a shutoff, when necessary, this step has not historically applied to garages, which often lack plumbing connections. The process then focuses on securing the garage itself rather than managing water services.

Once DHCD has referred the vacant garage to be secured, DPW boards and secures the garage within six days of DHCD's notice, consistent with city requirements for vacant properties. Securing vacant garages leads to reduced safety hazards, restricts access, and serves as a deterrent for dumping or unlawful activity.

By coordinating efforts, DHCD and DPW ensure that vacant and abandoned garages are managed effectively and in alignment with the city's broader vacant property strategy.



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Alice Kennedy, Commissioner, Housing and Community Development
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	April 24th, 2025
SUBJECT	25-0014R Informational Hearing – Vacant and Abandoned Garages

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Resolution 25-0014R Vacant and Abandoned Garages for the purpose of requiring representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development to appear before the City Council to provide insight into the issue of vacant and abandoned garages in Baltimore City and to discuss strategies, including in rem liens or foreclosures, to manage and control the issue and its impact on safety, aesthetics, and community economies.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

DHCD's handling of vacant garages largely follows the same process as it does for other building types. Our Code Enforcement inspectors are dispatched, usually via referral from 311, to examine reportedly vacant garages and look for conditions such as no roof, being open to casual entry, or risk of collapse. If any of those features are present, the garage may then be issued a violation notice for the specific defects or a Vacant Building Notice (VBN).

If the garage in reference is a stand-alone structure, the inspector may issue a notice of defect or a VBN in the same manner that we would for any other kind of vacant building. In instances where a vacant garage is connected to or part of another structure, we do not issue a partial VBN but would proceed with an itemized violation notice listing any identifiable deficiencies. Both violation notices then proceed through the standard enforcement process, ultimately leading to legal action if all the underlying issues are not fully addressed. It is important to clarify that being unsightly or even in moderate disrepair will not necessarily qualify a garage as a vacant building but may otherwise amount to other citable offenses under the Building, Fire, and Related Codes of Baltimore City.

If the physical integrity of a garage appears to threaten public safety, inspectors will further

assess it for risk of imminent collapse. DHCD has the legal authority to order emergency stabilization or demolition as necessary, and to lien the property owner as appropriate. Given that stabilization does not make sense in the context of a garage, we tend to raze those deemed unsafe. Furthermore, as a risk to public safety is the primary characteristic of vacant garages that have received a VBN, demolition is the most common outcome.

In terms of acquiring vacant garages, both In Rem and receivership are available options. For such acquisitions, those tools would have the same basic requirements that they do when applied to other types of property. In Rem acquisition for a garage parcel is available if it has a VBN (or is razed) and the property meets the lien to assessment requirements. Receivership is available once a property receives a VBN. Regarding receivership, it is worth noting that we do not currently have a record of anyone asking for an individual garage through that process. For that reason, and because we cannot currently guarantee the outcome when employing receivership, we would only move forward with receivership in instances where there was already a plan in place from the community or a nearby owner that pre-qualified with One House At A Time (OHAAT). In Rem is of particular relevance as our Code Enforcement Legal Services (CELS) team is unlikely to pursue injunctions and fines for a vacant garage unless there are already plans in place to move that garage towards In Rem viability.

As with any process under our purview, DHCD is constantly considering areas where our efforts can be improved. For example, due to current demand and staffing levels, 311 Service Requests of this type (excluding emergency cases) are currently addressed within 7 business days when, if we were fully staffed, completion times would be closer to 2 or 3 business days. Equally, community outreach and education play a vital role in helping residents understand what constitutes a violation and the steps involved once a violation has been identified. The better informed our communities are, the more relevant requests for service DHCD will receive. As with other Code Enforcement issues, we cannot address problems which we do not know exist. Finally, it may be helpful, if possible, to explore new ways of capturing data on vacant garages. Currently there is nothing in the Vacant Building Notice or parcel data that effectively identifies whether a property is a garage or not. In some cases, a VBN might be issued on a parcel that includes a house and a garage. In such cases, the structures are not easily distinguishable without examining the inspection notes.

DHCD appreciates the Council's concerns over vacant garages and the problems that they can cause for communities throughout Baltimore City. Their run-down appearance can lower both quality of life and overall property values. Unattended structures in residential neighborhoods can play host to a variety of crimes. Derelict garages may even be at risk of collapse. All these factors and more have contributed to our agency taking this issue seriously and having procedures in place to deal with vacant garages as they arise. We welcome the opportunity to discuss those procedures in greater detail while also cooperatively developing pathways to even greater efficacy.

FISCAL IMPACT

As drafted, this Resolution would have minimal fiscal or administrative impact on DHCD.

AMENDMENTS

DHCD is not requesting any amendments to this Resolution at this time.



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

25-0014R Informational Hearing – Vacant and Abandoned Garages

PREPARED BY
The Department of Housing and Community Development

September 30th, 2025

Overview

- Introduction
- Assessments
- Demolition
- Acquisition
- Challenges
- Conclusion



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Introduction

- **DHCD's handling of dilapidated garages largely follows the same process as it does for other building types.**
- **Our Code Enforcement inspectors are dispatched, usually via referral from 311, to examine reportedly dilapidated garages and look for conditions such as no roof, being open to casual entry, or risk of collapse.**
- **If any of those features are present, the garage may then be issued a violation notice for the specific defects.**



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Assessment

- **Unsightly or unkept garages will not necessarily qualify for a defective garage notice but may still amount to other citable offenses under the Building, Fire, and Related Codes of Baltimore City.**



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Demolition

- **If the physical integrity of a garage appears to threaten public safety, inspectors will further assess it for risk of imminent collapse.**
- **DHCD has the legal authority to order emergency stabilization or demolition as necessary, and to lien the property owner as appropriate.**
- **Stabilization is rarely appropriate for dilapidated garages, so we tend to raze those deemed unsafe.**
- **If the owner does not correct the violations the City may make the structure safe by removing defective features or raze the structure.**



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Acquisition

- **Both In Rem and receivership are available and have the same basic requirements as they do when applied to other types of property**
- **In Rem acquisition is available if a garage parcel has a violation notice (or is razed) and the property meets the lien to assessment requirements.**
- **Our Code Enforcement Legal Services (CELS) team may pursue injunctions and fines for vacant garages if it is likely that there is an owner able to make the corrections.**
- **Receivership is available once a VBN has been issued but we do not currently have any record of individual garages being requested through that process.**



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Challenges

- **DHCD constantly considers areas where our efforts can be improved**
- **Ex. – with current demand and staffing levels, 311 Service Requests of this type (excluding emergency cases) are addressed within 7 business days when ideal completion times would be closer to 2 or 3 business days.**
- **Ex. – Community outreach and education play a vital role in helping residents understand what constitutes a violation and the steps involved once a violation has been identified.**
- **Ex. -Exploring new ways of capturing data on vacant garages. Currently there is not a data point in our violation history or parcel data that effectively identifies whether a property is a garage or not.**



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Conclusion

- **DHCD appreciates the Council's concerns over dilapidated garages and the problems that they can cause for communities throughout Baltimore City**
- **Run-down appearance can lower both quality of life and overall property values. Unattended structures in residential neighborhoods can play host to a variety of crimes. Derelict garages may even be at risk of collapse.**
- **All these factors and more have contributed to why our agency takes this issue seriously and has procedures in place to deal with vacant garages as they arise.**



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

THANK YOU!



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor