



BILL SYNOPSIS

Committee: Economic and Community Development

Bill: 23-0153R

Investigative Hearing – Vacant Building Water Shutoffs

Sponsor: Councilmember Ramos, et al.

Introduced: January 23, 2023

Purpose: For the purpose of inviting representatives from the Department of Public Works, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Real Estate, the Baltimore Fire Department, and the Office of the City Administrator to report on why Section 116.4.6 of the Baltimore City Building Code, which requires the Department of Housing and Community Development to inform the Department of Public Works that there is a vacant building and that the water must be shut off, is not being implemented, the impact of not implementing this section of the Building Code, and a path toward implementation.

Agency Reports

City Solicitor	Favorable
Department of Finance	
Department of Housing and Community Development	
Fire Department	
City Administrator	
Department of Public Works	
Department of Real Estate	

Analysis

The resolution invites agency representatives to report on why Section 116.4.6 of the Baltimore City Building Code is not being implemented, the impact of not implementing this section of the Building Code, and a path toward implementation. Section 116.4.6 states:

Notice to Public Works. Whenever the Building Official determines a structure to be vacant, the Building Official must promptly notify the Director of Public Works of that determination. On receipt of the notice, the Director of Public Works must proceed to cut off water service...

According to the Department of Housing and Community Development, there are nearly 14,000 vacant buildings in Baltimore. The Department issued 1,143 new Vacant Building Notices (VBN) in FY23. However, the resolution notes that no vacant properties with VBNs have had their water turned off unless there were pipes bursting or there were other hazards. The resolution identifies several concerns related to not shutting off water service immediately after VBN issuance, including:

- In cold temperatures these buildings are prone to pipes bursting.
- Water damage in the property can make it less attractive to potential buyers due to additional damage and issues like mold.
- Water damage affects not only the vacant property but can affect adjoining properties.
- Water service may attract unhoused people to squat in vacant buildings illegally.
- Responding to burst pipes can divert city resources needed in emergencies.

Additional Information

Fiscal Note: Not Available

Information Source(s):

- Open Baltimore DHCD Vacant Building Dashboard:
<https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjojOThINTVknGEtMWYyOC00Y2FILTg0ODEtMDRhODEzNTFjMWJmliwidCI6IjMxMmNiMTI2LWM2YWUtNGZjMi04MDBkLTMxOGU2NzljZTZjNyJ9&pageName=ReportSection>
- Reporting Agencies
- Resolution 23-0153R

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Analysis Date: July 7, 2023
