



HEARING NOTES

Bill: 21-0037R

Informational Hearing - Studying Options to Rid Baltimore City of Vacant Properties

Committee: Economic and Community Development

Chaired By: Councilwoman Sharon Green Middleton

Hearing Date: June 29, 2021

Time (Beginning): 3:00 PM

Time (Ending): 5:00 PM

Location: Virtual WEBEX

Total Attendance: ~78

Committee Members in Attendance:

John Bullock Mark Conway Ryan Dorsey Robert Stokes Odette Ramos

Bill Synopsis in the file?.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a
Attendance sheet in the file? .....	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a
Agency reports read? .....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a
Video or audio-digitally recorded? .....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the file? .....	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> n/a
Evidence of notification to property owners? .....	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> n/a
Final vote taken at this hearing? .....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a
Motioned by: .....	Councilmember Ramos		
Seconded by: .....	Councilmember Conway		
Final Vote: .....	Favorable		

Major Speakers

(This is not an attendance record.)

- Councilmember Phylicia Porter
- Ms. Hilary Ruley, Law Department
- Ms. Stephanie Murdock, Department of Housing and Community Development

- Ms. Alice Kennedy Department of Housing and Community Development
- Mr. Pedro Aponte, Department of Finance
- Mr. D’Paul Nibber, Health Department
- Ms. Kathleen Kelleher, Department of Real Estate
- Ms. Nneka Nnamdi, Director Community Development, Living Well Center for Social and Economic Vibrancy
- Ms. Lisa Hodges, Executive Director, Westport Community Economic Development Corporation
- Mr. Peter DuVall, Community Development Services Bree Jones
- Ms. Shana Roth-Gromley, Community Law Center
- Ms. Kim Lane, Director, Pigtown Main Street
- Ms. Hieu Truong, Community Development Network of Maryland
- Mr. Ulysses Archie, Advocate, Adverse Childhood Experiences

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### **Major Issues Discussed**

1. Councilwoman Middleton opened the meeting and read the bill into the record.
2. Councilwoman Porter explained the purpose of the resolution. She spoke about problems created by vacant properties. She emphasized the need to convene representatives from the Office of the Mayor, Office of the City Council President, councilmembers and housing advocates to establish and actualize recommendations and processes in City agencies to remedy vacant housing.
3. Ms. Stephanie Murdock presented the Department of Housing and Community Development’s report. She shared information about sources of funding, blight elimination tools (receivership, tax sales, demolitions, In Rem foreclosure), the posting notices on new constructions, and education of property owners for prevention of vacant properties.
4. Ms. Alice Kennedy emphasized DHCD’s dedication to eliminating vacancies, which have a profound impact on people, especially children. A priority of DHCD is to increase efficiency of processes and move vacancies back to productive use.
5. Mr. D’Paul Nibber presented the Department of Health’s report. He spoke about vacancies as a contributing factor to many other problems in the City.
6. Mr. Pedro Aponte presented the Department of Finance’s report. He stressed the department’s willingness to work in partnership to address vacancies.
7. Ms. Kathleen Kelleher presented the Department of Real Estate’s report. The Department is responsible for approximately 1300 properties and 1400 tax sale properties. She also provided general information about the Legacy Lot Program, Tax Sale Program and Vendor Lien Program.
8. Councilmember Dorsey asked about DHCD’s role in assisting with properties having no will or heirs. Ms. Alice Kennedy pointed out that there is a state program that consists of a collaboration between Maryland Volunteer Legal Services, State Department of Housing and Community Development, and My Legacy Campaign that not only assists residents with the estate planning process, but which also helps prevent blight and offers assistance with repairs.
9. Councilmember Ramos spoke about receivership and residents’ control of the outcome of properties in their neighborhoods. There are challenges with receivership. Ms. Kennedy indicated that receivership helps to abate nuisance properties. The City’s budget only allows for a limited

number of properties to be acquired. The City uses demolitions, acquisitions and receivership to address vacancies. One House at A Time monitors receivership for the City.

10. Councilmember Conway spoke about the future of the housing market in Baltimore City. Ms. Kennedy indicated that older legacy residents and the condition of their properties are a major concern. Supporting legacy homeowners is a priority for DHCD, which has implemented a pilot mortgage program to assist homeowners.
11. Councilmember Kristerfer Burnett asked DHCD about resources and timeframes for vacant housing maintenance. Ms. Kennedy shared information about the need for hundreds of millions of dollars to address the 16,000 vacant properties. She also explained that about 25,000 homes have been occupied for over 25 years, which indicates that without proper deed transfer more vacancies may be created. It takes on average \$20,000 to assist owner-occupied properties. She will follow up with assessment data related to stabilization of properties that are situated next to owner-occupied properties.
12. Councilmember Porter asked DHCD about revitalization of specifically, City Council districts 7, 9 and 10. She also asked about equitable distribution of resources for impact investment areas. Ms. Kennedy explained that DHCD uses the same revitalization tools (i.e. impact investment areas, block level planning, community engagement, process efficiency) across the City in all 14 districts.
13. Chairwoman Middleton wanted to be sure DHCD is working with the Department of Planning and is also familiar with recommendations put forth in masterplans, especially for guiding development.
14. Councilmember Stokes spoke about the role of Community Development Corporations in managing properties, and also Land Disposition Agreements.
15. Public testimony was taken. Speakers pointed out their support of the bill and the need for the City to implement recommendations to remedy vacant properties; safeguard the health, welfare and safety of City residents; abolish tax sales; use of a land bank for equitable distribution of resources; improve DHCD staffing levels; protect generational transfer of property; create pathways to facilitate purchase of newly renovated buildings; require accountability from vacant commercial property owners; address vacant property owners' holdings of property, which can hamper community redevelopment; assess fees for not rehabilitating vacancies; collaborate with courts to improve the process of receivership; and review the In Rem process.
16. The hearing was recessed. A work session will be scheduled at a later date.

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### Further Study

**Was further study requested?**

Yes  No

**If yes, describe.** Ms. Alice Kennedy will provide assessment data related to the Department of Housing and Community Development's stabilization plan for properties located next to owner-occupied properties.

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**Committee Vote:**

Sharon Green Middleton, Chair:..... Yea  
John Bullock: ..... Yea  
Mark Conway: ..... Yea  
Ryan Dorsey: ..... Absent  
Antonio Glover: ..... Absent  
Odette Ramos: ..... Yea  
Robert Stokes:..... Yea

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Jennifer L. Coates, Committee Staff  
cc: Bill File  
OCS Chrono File

Date: July 1, 2021