



**BALTIMORE
HOUSING**

SHEILA DIXON
Mayor

PAUL T. GRAZIANO
Executive Director, HABCD
Commissioner, HCD

MEMORANDUM

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

From: Paul T. Graziano, Commissioner

Date: June 30, 2009

Re: **City Council Bill 09-0135R Informational Hearing - Vacant Property Security, Inc.**

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Bill 09-0135R, which was introduced for the purpose of inviting the Regional Sales Manager of Baltimore-Washington Vacant Property Security, Inc., to make a presentation to the City Council on services to provide temporary security for vacant and abandoned properties that the company offers.

The Department of Public Works (DPW), working closely with Housing Code Enforcement (HCE), is responsible for boarding and securing vacant properties throughout the City. Responding to service requests generated from 311 calls and routine (HCE) inspections, DPW deploys city employees in two person crews to board vacant properties on a daily basis. The average cost for completing a service request to board a property is approximately \$275 and the average lien per property for boarding is approximately \$130. Service requests are completed within 72 hours and DPW estimates that a given property is boarded approximately twice per year.

DHCD previously has reviewed presentations from Vacant Property Services, Inc. (VPS) in the past and remains open to listen once again. However, as with past discussions, DHCD has a number of concerns and questions as to the usefulness and cost effectiveness of contracting for such a product. Price per unit, of course, is the most important issue when considering such a proposal and we believe that the current material used by our city employed crews are effective and cost efficient. Another of our concerns relates to the volume of properties that a private company can reasonably serve. As stated in the recital section of City Council Bill 09-0135R, there are tens of thousands of boarded properties throughout the City and it is unclear that a private contractor has the capacity to meet this demand in a timely fashion and at a reasonable price. According to Washington D.C.'s Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, VPS has only just been awarded a single contract to secure 19 dwelling units at the total cost of \$38,000.

DHCD recognizes that boarded vacant properties may be vulnerable to be breached, illegally reoccupied or vandalized. Consequently, DPW crews often use 2 x 4 interior crossbars bolted to reinforce the boarding in order to make the

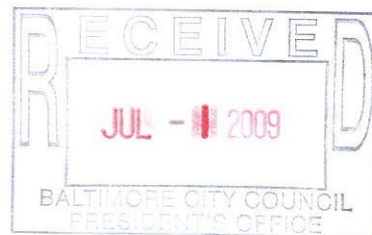


properties further impregnable without incurring an additional cost. Failing this, DPW has also blocked in a property's window and door openings to seal it definitively. This latter method is used sparingly as it is generally discouraged by the Fire Department for potential safety reasons. The Fire Department's need to easily access a building in the case of a fire is another concern that would have to be addressed with wider use of products promoted by VPS.

The Department of Housing and Community Development prefers to reserve further comment on the adoption of City Council Bill 09-0135R until the bill has been heard by the Community Development Committee.

PTG:pmd

cc: Ms. Angela Gibson
Mr. Andrew Frank
Ms. Diane Hutchins



Comment