

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 23-0153R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmember Ramos, Bullock, Burnett, Middleton, Porter

Introduced and read first time: January 23, 2023

Assigned to: Economic and Community Development Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: City Solicitor, Department of Finance, Department of Housing and Community Development, Fire Department, Office of the City Administrator, Department of Public Works, Department of Real Estate

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Investigative Hearing — Vacant Building Water Shut Offs**

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

10 **Recitals**

11 In Section 116.4.6 of the Baltimore City Building Code it states: “Notice to Public Works.
12 Whenever the Building Official determines a structure to be vacant, the Building Official must
13 promptly notify the Director of Public Works of that determination. On receipt of the notice, the
14 Director of Public Works must proceed to cut off water service”.

15 Currently, no vacant properties with Vacant Building Notices (“VBN”) have had their water
16 turned off unless there were pipes bursting or there were other hazards. Refusing to shut off the
17 water immediately when a VBN is issued causes multiple concerns listed below.

- 18 1. In the colder temperatures, these properties are unheated and often pipes burst, causing
19 damage not only within the property, but any adjacent properties as well.
- 20 2. Once a vacant property may be rehabbed, the costs of repairs skyrocket when water
21 damage is present. In fact the property becomes even less desirable when water damage,
22 mold, and other effects of water are present.
- 23 3. Squatters may find these homes more attractive to live in illegally.
- 24 4. When pipes burst, the Department of Public Works and the Baltimore Fire Department
25 are called on to shut off the water, which uses city resources in times when many of these
26 resources are needed in emergencies.

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

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1 While we know keeping the water on in these properties allows us to charge water billing
2 fees and helps us stack the liens to make the property eligible for In Rem Tax Foreclosure, the
3 damage to the property and other adjacent properties where people live do not make this a viable
4 option any longer.

5 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
6 Baltimore City Council invites representatives from the Department of Public Works, the
7 Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department of Real Estate, the
8 Baltimore Fire Department, and the Office of the City Administrator to report on why
9 Section 116.4.6 of the Baltimore City Building Code, which requires the Department of Housing
10 and Community Development to inform the Department of Public Works that there is a vacant
11 building and that the water must be shut off, is not being implemented, the impact of not
12 implementing this section of the Building Code, and a path toward implementation.

13 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Director of the
14 Department of Public Works, the Commissioner of the Department of Housing and Community
15 Development, the Director of the Department of Real Estate, the Chief of the Baltimore Fire
16 Department, the City Administrator, and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.