

# In support of Council Bill 22-0135R

**To Whom It May Concern,**

**Please see my testimony below to support legislation that holds commercial property owners accountable who are not not actively working to lease or sell their properties.**

Baltimore needs legislation that holds commercial property owners accountable who are not actively working to lease or sell these properties. These owners must demonstrate and work towards improving their property to lease, rent the space or sell.

Pigtown, my neighborhood, is an up and coming neighborhood stymied in realizing its full-potential due in large part to commercial buildings that are in various states of deterioration. Passing Council Bill 22-0135R could unleash this potential, not just in Pigtown, but in all of the 250+ neighborhoods throughout Baltimore.

These empty commercial structures contribute to the poor quality of life in Pigtown in obvious — and not so obvious — ways. Off the top of my head I can think of 3-empty commercial structures in a 3-block radius of my home that are deteriorating, nor contributing to improving the quality of life here and these addresses are:

- 1202 Washington Blvd.
- 1300 James Street
- 1276 Glyndon Ave.

Besides attracting squatters who may contribute to making these structures fire hazards — as well as being an eye-sore — they limit Pigtown (or any neighborhood in Baltimore for that matter) to truly flourish.

Part of what attracts people to any neighborhood in Baltimore are the amenities to patronize such as cafes, bars, grocery stores, hardware stores, bagel shops, ice cream shops, and all manner of shops serving a wide-variety of needs. Renters and home owners alike want to have access to these amenities for obvious reasons.

These "third places," (first being your home, second being where you work), as they are often referred to, become places that community members gravitate towards for a meal out on the town, a yoga class, a drink, buying a tool for a home repair to the many 100+ year-old Baltimore rowhouses, a gym to workout in, etc. — but third places have a social element as well.

The social element may in fact be the most important benefit of a third place. If commercial property owners do not rent the space or sell, it puts a ceiling on improvement in quality-of-life of my neighborhood.

Third places are often the locations where residents establish relationships with just not with the owners and employees of an establishment — but other residents. In many cases they attract folks from out of the neighborhood. This diversity adds an added dimension to the fabric of any neighborhood. A vibrancy. The social-ties that are established in these businesses help root people to their home and communities. Residents feel more connected and these social connections contribute to making a house (or apartment) a home, contributing to making a neighborhood become a community. These third places increase the quality of life in any neighborhood. All of my "third places" are in Locust Point or Federal Hill but I'd much rather they be located in Pigtown.

Another important factor is the safety aspect. When there are shops and cafes to walk to, more people are outside — be they residents or visitors. Having more people outside allows people to feel safe (and they are, in fact, safer). With the high-crime rate in Baltimore — any legislation that helps to make a neighborhood safer should be a priority.

Lastly, with the decrease in the population of Baltimore we have a decrease in taxes. Attracting new residents to this city should be a priority. Freeing up empty commercial structures to offer all the aforementioned benefits to allow for attracting and retaining residents can't be overlooked.

This is exactly why Baltimore needs Council Bill 22-0135R legislation that holds commercial property owners accountable and no longer be allowed to leave properties empty.

The cumulative effect of allowing commercial property-owners to leave their properties empty can no longer be ignored — it is inexcusable. Now is the time to pass this legislation that Councilwoman Phylcia Porter is championing. Frankly, I don't think this city can afford not to.

Thank you in advance.

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