



## MEMORANDUM

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

From: Alice Kennedy, Acting Housing Commissioner 

Date: January 23, 2021

### Re: City Council Bill 21-0030 Coordinated Multi-Agency Code Inspections

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Bill 21-0030 for the purpose of requiring that the City Administrator coordinate a multi-agency code inspection after a commercial property has been issued certain environmental citations; requiring that the City Administrator and the Department of Housing and Community Development receive a copy of all environmental citations issued; specifying which agencies must be included in the multi-agency inspection team; requiring that the City Administrator provide certain information to councilmembers; requiring that the City Administrator submit an annual report detailing the work of the multi-agency inspection team; and providing for a special effective date.

DHCD is committed to the cleanliness and the appropriate maintenance of all property in the City of Baltimore to promote the health and safety of our communities. We recognize that cross agency coordination increases efficiency, aligns expenditures, engenders urgency, fosters holistic solutions and provides a forum for problem solving and innovation. However, we have significant operational and fiscal concerns around the implementation of this legislation.

The Social Club Task Force (SCTF) is a good example of long standing, cross-agency coordination with members of the Police Department, Fire Department, Health Department, Liquor Board, and Department of Housing & Community Development's Special Investigations Unit (SIU). The SCTF monitors businesses compliance with local laws including; the Building Fire and Related Codes, Article 19 Police Ordinances, Article 23 Sanitation, and the Health Code. A multi-agency team of inspectors goes out every weekend from 6pm to 2am to investigate business concerns reported from the community through the 311 system, or at the request of elected officials. The SCTF issues citations to those property owners found in violation. DHCD's SIU also frequently coordinates with the Baltimore City Fire Department to conduct day-time business checks to ensure that businesses are in compliance with building and zoning code requirements.

Housing Inspectors and Investigators routinely make referrals to other agencies or coordinate efforts to resolve community nuisances. DHCD's code enforcement inspectors conduct proactive inspections and respond to complaints generated through the 311 system. They issue notices and citations for conditions such as high grass and weeds, trash and debris, vacant

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properties and abandoned vehicles on private property, to give a few examples. Inspectors respond to all code enforcement complaints, including residential, commercial and City owned property. Work Orders that DHCD generates from these inspections go to sister agencies for completion and follow up.

If enacted, City Council Bill 21-0030 would require that the City Administrator coordinate a multi-agency code inspection after a commercial property has been issued certain environmental citations. Based on a review of 2019 citation data there were 816 commercial locations cited by DHCD for violations listed in this Bill and if this legislation is adopted, would trigger a mandatory additional inspection by a multi-agency task force.

The fiscal impact of this legislation on DHCD is estimated to cost \$450,890 annually. This legislation represents an unfunded mandate and the agency would request that the Administration include an additional \$500,000 in the agency's budget to cover estimated and unanticipated costs.

<b>Budget item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
3 full time investigators	\$300,000
1 Attorney	\$120,000
Overtime costs	\$5,000
3 Vehicles	\$5,751
Vehicle maintenance	\$14, 585
Fuel	\$1,474
MOIT - IT equipment fees	\$1,200
Phones	\$2,880
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$450, 890</b>

This legislation also places additional operational responsibilities on the agency. The inspections proposed in this legislation are more in depth and labor intensive than typical code inspections. They require research beforehand on existing violations, violation history and permitted uses; coordinating the inspections with the other agencies; following up on the findings; gathering information from the other agencies; and coordinated re-inspections. In addition to the strain on inspections, this will also increase the workload of DHCD's legal section as it would require them to handle the filing of Code Enforcement cases and incorporating the resolution of the other agencies outstanding violations.

While every complaint deserves an investigation, not every complaint warrants a multi-agency follow-up inspection. Agencies currently coordinate as necessary depending on the type of complaint that is reported. Mandating a Multi-Agency Code Inspection for every environmental citation described in the Bill within 30 days of issuance removes the discretion from the inspectors and may be redundant to inspections and follow up already taking place. Additionally, these required inspections may pull inspectors away from other duties.

DHCD appreciates the opportunity to discuss agency activities around inspections and multi-agency collaboration with the City Council but has concerns that this effort might be duplicative and will add an additional fiscal and operational burden on the agency. **DHCD would like to offer a friendly amendment to page 4 line 3, to replace “shall” with “may” so that it reads, “The City Administrator MAY coordinate a multi-agency, comprehensive code inspection.”** This amendment will allow the City Administrator and City Agencies to use their best discretion to prioritize limited resources in the decision to coordinate multi-agency inspections.

We will continue to work with the Administration and partner agencies in order to improve multi-agency collaboration and communication with the citizens of Baltimore.

DHCD has provided the following **letter of information and recommend amendment** to City Council Bill 21-0030.

AK/sm



cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, *Mayor's Office of Government Relations*