



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Conaway

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Investigative Hearing - Maintenance of City Owned Properties

FOR the purpose of calling on representatives from the Departments of Public Works, Health, Housing, Recreation & Parks, and General Services to appear before the City Council to explain the City's current policies for maintaining City owned vacant lots and other properties; discuss how these properties could be better maintained; and establish a clear and simple method by which neighbors of City owned properties can quickly and effectively get their concerns addressed.

Recitals

As part of its ongoing efforts to address the problem of vacant properties in Baltimore, the City has acquired ownership of hundreds of empty buildings and lots. Many other properties have been obtained by the City for one purpose or another over the more than two centuries of Baltimore's existence. All together, the Baltimore Office of Sustainability estimates that the City owns 11,000 vacant or abandoned properties, as well as hundreds that are still in use. As a result, every neighborhood in Baltimore is dotted with City owned properties.

Regardless of when or why the City came to own a particular bit of land, wherever the City owns property it is, and should be, expected to show the same respect for its neighbors as any other property owner in how it uses its land. In the majority of cases it does, and City owned properties are good neighbors. However, in some cases City owned properties are not as well maintained as they should be. Sometimes conditions even deteriorate to the point where a private landowner would be cited for violating the City's health or property maintenance laws. City owned vacant lots and buildings are a particularly troublesome source of these problems.

Allowing the City as a property owner to fall short of the standards that it holds other property owners to sets a very poor example and can hold back the development of neighborhoods struggling to improve themselves. Having the City occasionally fall behind on regular maintenance for seldom visited properties would be troubling on its own; but perhaps understandable in light of tight municipal budgets and limited numbers of workers able to check up on the hundreds of City owned properties scattered throughout Baltimore. A more serious problem though is the sometimes tortuous process that neighbors must go through in order to get the City to clean up one of its properties when its condition has deteriorated to the point that it is harming their own homes and businesses.

When a community is putting in the hard work necessary to maintain their own properties and keep their neighborhood moving in the right direction it should never be the City owned lot that is the most rundown property on the block, dragging everyone down by making the neighborhood less safe and desirable. Yet, when a City owned property does present a problem, some communities struggle for months just to locate the right person to bring a complaint to. Then, when a lot is finally cleared, a lawn mowed, or a rat's nest destroyed once, the property seems to fade out of the officials' consciousness and a lack of regular maintenance allows it to once again become overgrown or dilapidated - forcing concerned neighbors to start the process all over again.

Understandably, in these neighborhoods the City is not seen as having a clear property maintenance policy or a workable process for getting complaints permanently resolved. The City clearly could, and should, do more as a property owner to be a better and more responsive neighbor and partner in community efforts to improve neighborhoods, rather than being seen as an obstacle to those efforts.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Council calls on representatives from the Departments of Public Works, Health, Housing, Recreation & Parks, and General Services to appear before it to explain the City's current policies for maintaining City owned vacant lots and other properties; discuss how these properties could be better maintained; and establish a clear and simple method by which neighbors of City owned properties can quickly and effectively get their concerns addressed.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Director of Public Works, the Health Commissioner, the Director of General Services, the Housing Commissioner, the Director of Recreation & Parks, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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