



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Holton

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Informational Hearing - Baltimore City Housing Inspectors - Response Time

FOR the purpose of requesting the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, Code Enforcement of the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development to brief the City Council on the Building Permit Center, the efficacy of the QuickTrac permit scheduling phone system, and the response time for inspections of completed building permit projects.

Recitals

The Permits & Building Inspections handbook for Baltimore City residents, published by the Department of Housing and Community Development, advises that “in order to protect both public safety and property values citywide, we issue building permits and perform associated inspections to ensure that projects are completed safely and in compliance with the City’s building code.”

While minor repairs do not usually require permits unless the item is being replaced altogether or significantly altered, renovations, modifications, and reconstructions always require a permit, thus ensuring that “related work is performed by a licensed contractor, when or as required, and that construction be inspected by a City inspector who will verify that the work has been done safely and in compliance with the City’s building code.”

The property owner is responsible for obtaining any applicable building permits - failing to do so will result in administrative fees, application fees for the appropriate permit, and the greater of a fine up to \$1,000 or 5% of the total permit fee. If the work that has been done is code compliant, the permit will be issued and appropriate inspections will be made. If not up to code, construction can be brought into compliance under a newly issued permit or construction can be removed. Work without a permit is a misdemeanor, punishable by up to 90 days in jail and a criminal fine of \$1,000.

The handbook advises that inspection time may vary depending on the project, but that an inspection is required prior to covering up or concealing any part of the construction. Permit holders are required to schedule all necessary inspections to be performed by the Permitting and Building Inspections Division between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Inspections can be scheduled using the automated QuickTrac automated phone system.

On its face, the building permit and inspection program would appear to be transparent and user friendly. However, a significant number of Baltimore City homeowners have complained that scheduling inspections of completed work has been difficult - that inspectors have failed to keep appointments, have shown up at a time not scheduled by the homeowner who was not at home, or the automated system could not be used because of an invalid permit number.

As we seek to stabilize Baltimore City's property tax base and attract new home buyers to invest in our developing neighborhoods, it is imperative that the building permit and inspection process be as user friendly as possible while maintaining program integrity and sustaining the goal of protecting public safety and property values citywide.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, Code Enforcement of the Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development are requested to brief the City Council on the Building Permit Center, the efficacy of the QuickTrac permit scheduling phone system, and the response time for inspections of completed building permit projects.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, Code Enforcement, Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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