

Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Council

January 7, 2025

VIRTUAL

11:00 am - 1:00 pm

Minutes

The meeting recording can be found [here](#).

Council members in attendance:

- Jake Day, Secretary, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (Council Chair)
- Alice Kennedy, Commissioner, Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development (Council Vice Chair)
- Jason Perkins Cohen, Assistant Secretary, Maryland Department of Labor
- Rebecca Flora, Secretary, Maryland Department of Planning
- Ryan Carter, Project Manager, Maryland Stadium Authority
- Tom Sadowski, Executive Director, Maryland Economic Development Corporation
- Jasmin Torres, Assistant Attorney General, Maryland Office of the Attorney General
- Cory McCray, Maryland State Senator, Maryland General Assembly
- Stephanie Smith, Maryland State Delegate, Maryland General Assembly
- Faith Leach, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Baltimore
- Michael Mockston, Director, Department of Finance, City of Baltimore
- John Bullock, Councilman, Baltimore City Council
- Leslie McMillan, Co-Chair, BUILD
- Mark Anthony Thomas, President & CEO, Greater Baltimore Committee
- Matt Gallagher, President & CEO, Goldseker Foundation
- Beth Blauer, Associate Vice Provost for Public Sector Innovation & Associate Professor of Practice, Carey Business School
- Otis Rolley, Baltimore City Resident

1. Call to Order

Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Council Chair Jake Day called the meeting to order.

2. Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Chair Day called for a motion to adopt the minutes from the December 12, 2024 meeting. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the December 12, 2024 minutes were approved.

3. Shared Values

Chair Day presented the revised values and guiding principles, which includes proposed changes from Ms. McMillan on behalf of BUILD as well as changes proposed by Senator McCray.

Ms. McMillan described BUILD's edits to the values, which included deleting Keep Our Neighbors in Baltimore and adding Our Shared Values at the top. Ms. McMillan also proposed that the Community Centered value be renamed as Community Centered and Led and be the first value in the list. These changes were made.

Chair Day presented the next value, which included proposed edits from BUILD to change the value of Retention to No Displacement. Chair Day acknowledged in the last meeting that redevelopment efforts will cause some displacement no matter how well intentioned. Vice Chair Kennedy reiterated her statement from the previous meeting that there are communities where relocation will occur where the community has made the decision with resident choice to relocate residents. Chair Day recommended changing the first sentence following this value to "we will maximize resident retention in order to prevent resident displacement as we reduce vacancy" and stated that it is a strong sentence about the council's intentions. Ms. Millan recommended changing No Displacement to Prevent Displacement. Secretary Flora recommended not using the word displacement and to focus on the positive aspect of what the council is trying to accomplish. Mr. Rolley suggested using Protect and Preserve or Protect and Preserve the People as the value word. The value was changed to Protect and Preserve.

Chair Day moved to the Equity value and asked Senator McCray to describe his proposed additions to this value. Senator McCray noted his expectation that the vacancy geography be inclusive of neighborhoods within the geographic footprint of his district. He also stated that a main challenge of growing the city is government inefficiencies with the permitting system and that should be part of the values conversation. CAO Leach stated that the council should come back to the conversation on neighborhoods and decide as a body if they are the right collection of communities. She also noted that the BVRC will be exploring inefficiency around permitting and will make recommendations to improve the delivery of the work. CAO Leach suggested that the values mention government efficiency.

CAO Leach recommended making Senator McCray's edits to the Equity value a separate value. Ms. Blauer stated that the council's process will improve government services and address longheld barriers to doing the work to grow the city. Chair Day asked Senator McCray for his position on having a separate value about improving government process. Senator McCray agreed. Vice Chair Kennedy suggested Excellence as the value word. Chair Day stated that it is both efficiency as well as transparency and process improvement. Ms. McMillan suggested Efficiency and Pursue Excellence as the value. Vice Chair Kennedy recommended Efficiency and Excellence. A new value was created called Efficiency and Excellence.

Chair Day moved to the Inclusivity value. Ms. McMillan asked if the council would consider changing the term "complete neighborhoods" to "whole blocks complete neighborhoods." Chair Day stated that whole blocks as a strategy for redevelopment is different from building complete neighborhoods, which have all the amenities that can help a resident feel safe, valued and comfortable where they live. It was agreed to keep the value as written.

Chair Day moved to the values of Opportunity and Growth. Mr. Rolley recommended replacing the term job development with wealth creation and leadership development. This change was made.

Chair Day moved to the Transparency value and asked Senator McCray about his proposed edits. Senator McCray explained that he wants the council to set and communicate timetables and goals. Chair Day suggested reducing the sentence in the Transparency value to “we will streamline interagency communication and publish measurable timelines for permitting and other processes critical to revitalization efforts.” CAO Leach suggested changing the value to “we will operationalize this value through public council meetings; annual reporting; publishing measurable timelines for permitting and other processes critical to revitalization efforts; and producing public-facing data dashboards that provide real-time updates on achieving Reinvest Baltimore goals and outcomes.” Chair Day asked for further comments on the Transparency value. The change was made.

Chair Day moved to the value of Conservation of Community Culture and History. CAO Leach asked for revisions to the second sentence to explain how the council is approaching best practices. Chair Day suggested changing the sentence to “we will employ best practices.” The change was made.

Chair Day moved to the council's guiding principles and noted the additions proposed by Senator McCray that align with the edited values. Senator McCray's changes were incorporated.

Chair Day called for a motion to adopt the revised values and guiding principles. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the values and guiding principles were adopted.

4. Vacancy Reduction Geography

Vice Chair Kennedy presented the vacancy reduction priority geography, noting that 70% of vacant properties are represented within this area. She shared that this geographic area has been in the making for many years and was the basis for the city's Framework for Community Development. She noted that the geography includes Impact Investment Areas, middle market neighborhoods and community asset building neighborhoods.

Vice Chair Kennedy invited Henry Waldron, Director of Research and Analytics from Baltimore City DHCD, to present a vacant building notice mapping tool.

Mr. Waldron stated that the mapping tool helps to visualize vacancy within the priority areas and to understand the block level detail about how vacancy is changing over time. Mr. Waldron completed a brief demonstration of how the tool works. Mr. Waldron stated that as the tool is revised and developed further, it will include block outlines and be able to distinguish if vacant building notices were abated by rehab or demolition. He stated that the mapping tool will eventually tie to block-level strategies.

Ms. McMillan asked how much detail the map shows about each property. Mr. Waldron responded that it includes the date the vacant building notice was issued or abated.

Ms. Blauer stated that it would be helpful to see other strategic initiatives in each area that contributed to a reduction in vacancy to evaluate programmatically what is working.

Councilman Bullock asked how lots are incorporated into the mapping tool. Mr. Waldron responded that the green squares represent an abated vacant building notice but do not currently distinguish the abatement method, which is a demolition or a rehab, but that the map will be revised to include that information. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that the city is embarking on a six-month process to survey vacant lots.

Mr. Waldron stated that the map will eventually indicate the type of intervention on each property, such as acquisition or disposition, even if the property still has a vacant building notice.

Chair Day asked Mr. Waldron if demolition or stabilization or some other activity undertaken on a property is already in a database for a resolved vacant building notice and the feasibility of including that information on the map. Mr. Waldron said that is possible to do.

Next, Mr. Waldron demonstrated the different functions of the vacant building notice page on the vacancy dashboard. Chair Day noted that in Mr. Waldron's presentation one neighborhood showed a 40% vacancy rate and one showed a 0.9% vacancy rate and asked why a neighborhood with a 0.9% vacancy rate is included in the vacancy reduction geography. Vice Chair Kennedy explained that when Impact Investment Areas were selected, the area in southwest Baltimore incorporated all of the neighborhoods in the focus area of the Southwest Partnership and includes neighborhoods with less vacancy to build from areas of strength. She also noted that areas with low vacancy were selected as a focus for code enforcement efforts and to prevent new vacant buildings.

Mr. Waldron addressed questions in the virtual meeting chat room. The first question was a request to see how many properties the city acquired, disposed of, and demolished last year. Mr. Waldron noted that the city has those baseline numbers and will be adding more precise goals and tracking to the dashboard.

Chair Day reiterated the importance of seeing the number of vacant building notices, and also what the city has on hand, what it acquired, disposed of, demolished, and stabilized during a year and to add that information to the dashboard. Chair Day noted that the dashboard needs to include goals and measure change in the smallest time increment possible.

5. Constraints and Obstacles Strategy Session - Vacant Building Notices

Vice Chair Kennedy opened the constraints and obstacles strategy session on vacant building notices by asking members of the council to share their understanding or experiences with vacant building notices and for barriers, obstacles or constraints. Chair Day noted that this discussion is the first of a series around constraints and obstacles in the redevelopment process.

Councilman Bullock noted that there are buildings that should have a vacant building notice but do not have one and asked Vice Chair Kennedy to talk about the complaint driven process of

calling 311 to report a vacant building. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that she would share that information in the slide deck.

Vice Chair Kennedy noted a comment in the virtual meeting chat from Mr. Gallagher asking if a vacant building notice comes off of a property when a permit is pulled or when the rehab is completed. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that a vacant building notice is formally abated when the property receives its use and occupancy permit after the rehab work is completed and inspected.

Mr. Gallagher asked Vice Chair Kennedy what Baltimore City DHCD defines as current in terms of vacant building requests in 311. Vice Chair Kennedy responded that DHCD is typically able to meet a 72-hour inspection period for 311 requests for service and is current on responding to 311 requests.

Mr. Gallagher asked if the dashboard includes the level of housing inspection in the city and if DHCD is inspecting as much housing as it was five or seven years ago pre-COVID. Vice Chair Kennedy responded that DHCD has had some reduction in total inspections for code enforcement. She noted that DHCD is adding ways to identify vacant buildings and issue notices through other ways than just the code enforcement team.

Mr. Gallagher asked Vice Chair Kennedy how many vacant building notices are being generated by 311 citizen service request calls and how many are generated by the department's housing inspections or other intake options. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that she would report back with that information.

Vice Chair Kennedy noted that over the course of the 15 year vacancy reduction plan the goal is to issue over 16,000 new vacant building notices.

Mr. Gallagher asked how many whole blocks the city controls now. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that the city doesn't control very many whole blocks, but that is a key piece of the city's strategy for acquiring vacant buildings.

Senator McCray asked if there are a set of top 10 blocks where the city can acquire the whole block over a period of time. He also asked for the timeline to acquire a whole block. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that there is a two to three month pre-filing period for in rem foreclosure cases when the city completes the title examination and then another five to eight months to complete the process. She stated that donated sales take less than three months and negotiated acquisitions take around six months. Condemnation cases take one to two years depending on the legal case.

Ms. McMillian asked about the criteria for selecting priority blocks and who decides the priority blocks. Vice Chair Kennedy stated that priority blocks are selected through block-level planning with communities that determine the priority blocks for investment. She noted that BVRC can look more in depth at block selection during the obstacles and constraints session at the next BVRC meeting.

Vice Chair Kennedy shared the definition of a vacant building, which is available on the vacancy dashboard. She noted that a vacant structure is unsafe and unfit for human habitation or other authorized use or is also a nuisance property and stated that a vacant building notice is abated by receiving a use and occupancy permit or through a demolition.

Vice Chair Kennedy shared the process for how the city issues a vacant building notice. She shared the city's strategies for identifying and preventing vacant buildings, including housing and homeownership preservation home repair grants; partnerships with communities on code enforcement action; using AI assisted roof detection; and using data on water usage and undelivered mail.

Vice Chair Kennedy shared a slide showing 2024 production data and noted that Baltimore City DHCD will work on presenting monthly performance data comparison to baseline data. Vice Chair Kennedy recommended BVRC members use the dashboard and provide comments, questions or suggestions about the dashboard to Baltimore City DHCD.

Chair Day noted a request in the virtual meeting chat from Ms. Blauer for a block-level analysis that shows the number or percentage of blocks with a certain concentration of vacancy. Chair Day stated that then viewing that block-level analysis as part of the vacancy dashboard would be valuable to the council.

6. Working Groups

Chair Day presented the process for developing working groups. He noted that working groups should be small (no more than nine members) and be able to meet between regular council meetings. Working groups should have three BVRC members, and the remaining members will be selected by the working group's BVRC members to include practitioners and partners who are not on the council. BVRC members will self-nominate to participate in a working group. MD DHCD will establish an online form on the Reinvest Baltimore website where the public may express their interest in joining a working group.

Chair Day shared a list of working group topics and asked the council for additional ideas.

Mr. Gallagher recommended redefining the fundraising working group as financing. He stated that it will be important to see private philanthropy side by side with investment from public sources. He also noted that the working groups will have data and reporting elements to each and recommended a data and reporting working group or a specific directive to each work group to put in place metrics that they can report to the council. He recommended creating a process to make data requests in advance to the city and state to support the work of the working groups.

Mr. Thomas suggested that the city's Innovation Team support the data work.

CAO Leach asked if the council will appoint chairs of the working groups. Chair Day responded that he envisioned self-nominations from BVRC members to join working groups who would then select the chair, and the chair would be responsible for reporting back and coordinating with staff.

CAO Leach recommended that the BVRC come up with a set of broad goals and/or objectives for the working groups. She asked how the working groups will interface with the council. Chair Day responded that the council can set some parameters and objectives for each working group to get them started and then the working groups can manage their tasks.

Ms. Blauer recommended that the council create another working group to study innovations and complete a regulatory and policy review to determine barriers to implementing more innovative approaches to the work.

Chair Day noted that the delivery chain could be split into two groups with one group looking at processes for queuing up properties for redevelopment and another to look at processes for disposing of property and permitting.

CAO Leach noted that the working groups, as proposed, have autonomy to determine what they focus on. She requested that the BVRC have an opportunity before the working groups develop to provide input on each working group's focus. Chair Day stated that by the next BVRC meeting the state and city DHCD teams will develop a set of proposed working groups with a task statement for each that provides clarity on their scope and function.

Chair Day reminded the BVRC members of the next council meeting on February 3.

7. Closing

Chair Day adjourned the meeting.