Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Council (BVRC)
Minutes
June 29, 2026
Greater Baltimore Committee
111 S Calvert St., Suite 1700
Baltimore, MD 21202, USA
11:00 am - 1:00 pm

The meeting recording can be found here: June 29 BVRC Meeting Recording

BVRC members in attendance:
- Jake Day, Secretary, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (Council Chair)
- Timothy Keane, Acting Commissioner, Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development (Council Vice Chair)
- Rebecca Flora, Secretary, Maryland Department of Planning
- Faith Leach, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Baltimore
- Leslie McMillan, Co-Chair, BUILD
- Mark Anthony Thomas, President & CEO, Greater Baltimore Committee
- Matt Gallagher, President & CEO, Goldseker Foundation
- Beth Blauer, Johns Hopkins University
- John Bullock, Councilman, Baltimore City Council
- Gary McGuigan, Executive Vice President, Maryland Stadium Authority
- Casey Tiefenwerth, Maryland Department of Labor
- Jasmin Torres, Assistant Attorney General, Maryland Office of the Attorney General

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

Adoption of Meeting Minutes
Chair Day called for a motion to adopt the minutes from the April 20, 2026 meeting. Upon a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes were approved.

Dashboard Update
Chair Day stated that city and state teams are collaborating on data reporting for priority geographies. Commissioner Keane presented Vacant Building Notice data for fiscal year 2026 and the future of the VBN dashboard aimed at shared visibility across City and State lines. Commissioner Keane cautioned against drawing premature conclusions, emphasizing the need for continued analysis to understand drivers of activity.

Commissioner Keane emphasized the goal of strategic investment to strengthen resident stability and support existing homeowners. He reviewed a chart detailing VBN abatements by neighborhood, with high activity areas including Broadway East, Sandtown, Winchester, and Central Park Heights. Participants noted that data is being analyzed to understand specific unit outcomes and the impact of public versus private market interventions.

Ira Kowler, Chief Investment Officer at the Maryland Community Investment Corporation, introduced a new production model developed to track Community Development Organization performance. This model uses a year of data to identify constraints, such as capital availability and permitting timelines, that prevent faster production.

Participants discussed capacity constraints, noting that Community Development Organizations may acquire many properties but face limitations in scaling construction due to project management or contractor availability. The goal is to identify these bottlenecks to improve property movement through the pipeline.

Kari Snyder, staff, noted that the team is tracking acquisitions to ensure properties are obtained in reasonable timeframes, with the city and Community Development Organizations coordinating to determine the best acquisition pathway. When private acquisition attempts by Community Development Organizations fail, the city discusses potential interventions for key properties.

To address scaling challenges, Secretary Flora discussed mirroring strategies used in other cities, such as Pittsburgh, where Community Development Organizations partnered with real estate developers to grow capacity. Ms. Snyder noted that many of the Community Development Organizations work with for-profit and non-profit housing developers now and mentioned that the program aims to use production models to determine when engaging additional developers to boost production is required for specific geographies. Participants noted the need to categorize obstacles, such as heirs' property issues or private developers holding properties, to provide precise community-level program support.

CAO Leach flagged research from the innovation team regarding vacancy contagion, which tracks how vacancies beget new vacancies, and noted that interventions are being piloted in neighborhoods like Mandamin, Wallbrook, and Carrollton Ridge.

Mr. Kowler noted that of properties that are abated but not yet reoccupied, most have pending contracts for sale, with some interest rate reduction and down payment assistance programs helping to pre-sell units. A small number of properties are being considered for rental use while the market stabilizes.

Tochi Okeke, the Reinvest Baltimore Data Analyst, introduced a prototype production dashboard. This dashboard aims to provide a dynamic view of progress in neighborhoods where the Community Development Organizations are redeveloping vacant property.

Ms. Okeke presented the dashboard elements. The proposed dashboard includes tabs for performance, acquisition, production, and neighborhood health, visualizing the transition of properties from VBNs to abated and ultimately occupied properties. Ms. Snyder discussed how to best represent vacancy rates and the phasing of development work, with a focus on making the dashboard reflect specific BVRI-supported neighborhoods rather than just citywide data.

There was a discussion on the difficulty of establishing accurate penetration rates given that Vacant Building Notice counts fluctuate. Ms. Blauer discussed using technology, such as the vehicle-based monitoring models used in Detroit that incorporate utility data and physical observables to identify actual vacancy status. The group discussed having a follow-up conversation with officials in Detroit.

Ms. Leach discussed the difficulty in hiring and retaining code enforcement officers and the potential to use support specialists for administrative tasks to keep officers in the field. A pilot program for technology in code enforcement exists, and the team intends to present these findings to a working group.

Participants discussed connecting the 21st Century Cities Initiative and service year participants with Community Development Organizations to create housing-related career pipelines. Ms. Tiefenwerth noted potential for apprenticeship certifications to address capacity issues.

Ms. Snyder highlighted the need to incorporate the tracking of positive reuse of vacant land into the data strategy. The committee discussed eventually integrating city spending, including Tax Increment Financing, into the dashboard. The July 20 meeting of the data workgroup was identified as a next step for a more detailed discussion of the dashboard.

BVRI Neighborhoods: Designing for Place

Commissioner Keane emphasized a transition toward holistic neighborhood design, aiming to build environments where residents want to stay. This approach involves aligning city resources—including Tax Increment Financing, Community Development Block Grant, and capital budget funds—with Community Development Organization efforts over a three to five-year timeline.

Commissioner Keane highlighted the importance of moving beyond transactional conversations to align all city investments and community goals. The committee noted an unevenness in neighborhood planning and agreed on the necessity of re-engaging with community partners to ensure aligned execution.

Secretary Day initiated a discussion regarding the disconnect between neighborhood engagement and the practical tools required for implementation, such as capital plans, municipal budgets, and procurement. They emphasized the need for a more holistic, city-wide approach to planning that facilitates broader community-wide discussions about infrastructure and development.

Reinvest Baltimore Action Plan Implementation

Mr. Thomas provided an update on the creation of a private loan fund, announcing a new partnership between the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) and Enterprise Community Partners. This partnership aims to develop a long-term investment strategy and launch a funder consortium by the fall. The scope includes assessing current market needs and creating a framework to support the existing pipeline of development projects.

Mr. Thomas discussed the collaborative structure for the upcoming funders consortium, with Mr. Thomas highlighting the "Invest Atlanta" model as a reference. The goal is to provide a structured pipeline for projects rather than having individual funders compete for the same investments.

Victoria Olivier, Baltimore City Innovation Team, discussed strategies to streamline the property donation process, which currently takes between 9 and 12 months. She noted that while they are evaluating options to address municipal liens and potentially refer non-municipal lien issues to legal resources, they are also considering expanding outreach through door-to-door efforts, radio advertisements, and assessing properties for Vacant Building Notice eligibility to further increase the pipeline of acquisitions.

Dekonti Mends-Cole, Baltimore City Innovation Team, discussed legislative efforts to eliminate redundant mailings currently required by state rules. While they successfully updated state code to align with Maryland rules, these rules still require a "five-day mailing" of two pieces of certified and regular mail, which the team views as unnecessary given their existing robust "in rem" service process. They requested assistance in approaching the Rules Commission to eliminate this specific requirement to improve efficiency.

The need for technology modernization to handle the roughly 100,000 pages of documentation required to maintain due process in property acquisitions was discussed. They proposed utilizing a third-party service for document production and real-time tracking to reduce human error and ensure compliance with court-mandated timelines. This would allow staff to transition away from manual administrative tasks toward high-level case management.

Joe Kershner, Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, provided an update on property acquisition, noting that the "in rem" process currently takes approximately 185 days from filing to title acquisition. This is the time frame for “full due process” required to obtain a clean title at the end. Despite an increase in case filings, hearings remain on schedule. The team is exploring a "piggyback" procurement strategy to leverage existing third-party contracts for mail services and also noted the importance of monitoring recent federal legal developments related to tax sale foreclosures and fair market value compensation.

David Birkenthal, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and Mary Colleen Buettner, Baltimore City DHCD, detailed the management of 1,487 approved properties for BVRI funding across BVRI Community Development Organizations. Maryland and Baltimore City DHCDs have formalized quarterly coordination meetings where city staff and partners review data for each property. This process ensures that every property has an identified "next step" or strategy, whether through direct abatement by BVRI Community Development Organization or private-market actor. Mr. Birkenthal outlined the agenda for the upcoming quarter, which focuses on establishing clearer timelines for receivership and abatement processes.

Closing
Chair Day adjourned the meeting.