

Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Council (BVRC)

Minutes

August 17, 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: [August 17 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
- Michael Mockstein, Director, Department of Finance, City of Baltimore

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.

BVRI Neighborhoods: Designing for Place

Commissioner Keane introduced the "designing for place" agenda item, emphasizing the goal of achieving holistic neighborhood revitalization and aligning a wide range of city and non-city resources to reach community outcomes within three to five years. Commissioner Keane acknowledged the collaboration with the Baltimore City Departments of Housing and Community Development and Planning, noting that while the Southwest Partnership is the current focus, the Council plans to highlight different areas of the city in future meetings.

Tony Scott, Executive Director of the Southwest Partnership and Commissioner Keane outlined the focus on Hollins Market, which serves as a central hub for the neighborhood. The strategy identifies key

anchors surrounding the area, including Franklin Square to the north, Union Square to the east, the BioPark at the University of Maryland on West Baltimore Street, and the museum and Mount Clare Junction area to the south, aiming to produce visible, positive changes over the next three to five years.

Tony Scott and Nick Mayr provided an overview of the Southwest Partnership, describing it as a community-controlled coalition that acts as a convener to coordinate nonprofit and private sector resources. The organization has shifted its approach from simply passing through subsidies to taking a lead role in strategic planning, resulting in the organization increasing their property ownership from one property to 14 within the past year, supported by expanded staff capacity and the hiring of a new public space manager.

Tony Scott detailed the organization's "whole block" strategy, which involves canvassing neighborhoods, knocking on doors to connect residents to resources, and implementing quality-of-life improvements such as string lights and stump grinding. The Partnership utilizes the expertise of organizations like Rebuilding Together Baltimore to support existing residents, ensuring that Vacant Building Notice interventions benefit the entire community rather than focusing on a single property.

The Southwest Partnership identified a \$19 million project development pipeline along the Hollins Market and West Baltimore Street corridor involving both housing and commercial uses. Nick Mayr explained that integrating commercial elements increases financial complexity, particularly within a historic district, and noted that the organization works to support property owners and businesses through various stages of investment, including activities such as identifying resources, navigation of city permits and trash removal.

Nick Mayr discussed the long-term project involving the historic Lord Baltimore Theater, which was previously acquired to prevent speculation. Because the theater site alone is not large enough for a viable housing development, the strategy involves land consolidation with city-owned lots and adjacent partner land to reach a development capacity of 120 or more units, with ongoing coordination with the Department of Public Works regarding necessary water infrastructure and sprinkler requirements.

Beth Blauer discussed the gap in 21st-Century Schools investment within the Southwest Partnership area, noting that strong schools are essential for attracting and retaining families. Tony Scott and other attendees highlighted the need to focus on educational options as a "demand asset" and mentioned that while the partnership supports school events and communicates with coordinators, more deliberate planning is required to ensure schools can support the incoming population from new housing developments. Secretary Day highlighted "Hats In the Belfry" as a great small business in Southwest Baltimore.

Faith Leach highlighted the City's efforts to synchronize capital improvements, such as road repairs, with the completion of new facilities like recreation centers. Additionally, the city is deploying a multi-agency inspection task force that uses a place-based approach to address public safety, housing, and other quality-of-life challenges in specific communities undergoing intensive investment.

Data & Reporting

Secretary Day announced that the City is overhauling the Vacant Building Notice dashboard to improve data transparency and accuracy regarding demolition, stabilization, code enforcement, and property dispositions. This updated tool is intended to provide a clearer picture of the pipeline and the impact of both private and public interventions.

Commissioner Keane presented data from FY2026, noting a total of 1,620 abatements, of which 1,481 were rehabilitations. Key findings included that 170 blocks reached zero vacancies, the median time a building remained vacant before renovation was 8.4 years, and rehabilitation activity was highest in the most distressed market segments. Data indicated that the city had programmatic involvement in 28% of rehabilitation abatements in fiscal year 2026. Commissioner Keane and other officials observed that city-involved projects were more likely to result in homeownership (over 40%) compared to purely private-market interventions, and discussions emphasized a desire to increase this percentage and better understand the demographics and assistance needs of these new buyers.

Faith Leach and other officials discussed the financial challenges of rehabilitating properties, particularly where the cost of renovation exceeds the potential market value. The discussion included potential considerations for demolition versus renovation for properties in severe disrepair and the need for more data to determine how to optimize public subsidies and encourage private investment in these high-cost projects.

Commissioner Keane reported on the ongoing relationship with the Maryland Stadium Authority, noting that 91 properties are currently in process for stabilization and of those 13 of those properties are currently under analysis for stabilization by the Stadium Authority. The City and the Maryland Stadium Authority are working to establish full cost estimates for four of these properties by early September to help determine prioritization and clarify procurement requirements for future stabilization efforts.

Commissioner Keane reported that 46 demolition properties have been sent to the Maryland Stadium Authority, with an additional 30 nearly ready, 26 in medium-ready status, and 60 in development. The city recognizes the need to prioritize resources and establish a "full universe of need" to better manage these buildings, which can become significant nuisances. Commissioner Keane stated that the city faces challenges regarding its capacity to advance properties to the Maryland Stadium Authority for execution. The Commissioner emphasized that while the Maryland Stadium Authority executes the work effectively, the significant "lift" of preparing properties—whether for stabilization or demolition—requires dedicated staff resources on the city side to maintain pace with the stadium authority's requirements. The current difficulties in moving properties into the demolition or stabilization pipeline are primarily operational, not regulatory. The bottleneck stems from the organization of personnel; there is a need for staff members whose primary responsibility is solely focused on this process, rather than individuals with split roles.

Matt Gallagher emphasized the need for systemic fixes while simultaneously addressing "low-hanging fruit," such as demolitions that could clear a whole block or complement existing rehabilitation and school projects. The city plans to present a more specific pipeline and stabilization cost estimates from the Maryland Stadium Authority at the next meeting to facilitate faster decision-making.

Ira Kowler was acknowledged for completing his tenure with MCIC and transitioning to the position of Director of Baltimore Revitalization Programs at the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Faith Leach and Kari Snyder discussed the necessity of defining a comprehensive list of demolition-eligible properties within the Vacance Reduction Priority Geographies (VRPGs). Establishing this "denominator" is essential for the Maryland Stadium Authority to effectively plan procurement based on consistent property flow rather than the 160 properties identified in the original BVRI award.

Kari Snyder distinguished between "target blocks" and "whole blocks" to ensure consistent reporting. "Target blocks" are the specific geographic areas selected for CDO intervention with BVRI funding, whereas "whole blocks" represent the desired outcome where every property on a block has a productive use.

Ira Kowler presented the quarterly performance dashboard, noting that Q4 saw 46 new acquisitions (site control), with approximately 60% resulting from private market acquisitions. Abatement numbers have increased, with 44 total abatements in FY26, 32 of which occurred in the final quarter.

The group discussed the evolution of processes since the program's inception. While FY26 was primarily a "site control year" focused on building a pipeline, FY27 is expected to see faster funding deployment. The participants noted that future meetings should also address capacity constraints regarding how many rehabs or projects a single developer or project manager can realistically oversee. The group discussed utilizing the same metadata framework currently used for BVRI data to track TIF-funded efforts. This consistency will enable better comparisons and ensure lessons learned from one effort are applied to the other.

Reinvest Baltimore Action Plan Implementation

Kari Snyder updated the group on the FY27 BVRI round, which was announced on July 1. The program continues work in existing neighborhoods while expanding into three new areas: Brooklyn, Broadway East, and Penn North. Additionally, three existing organizations—NHS, Southeast CDC, and Rebuild Metro—received approval to expand into adjacent neighborhoods where they already maintain traction.

Ira Kowler noted that financing products are evolving for FY27, including "active phase funding" where initial subsidies are repaid upon sale. There is also interest in exploring how BVRI funding can support commercial mixed-use investment.

Krystle Okafor, Chief Operating Officer at MCIC explained that the \$1.675 million BVRI Support Fund acts as a flexible grant pool for capital-enabling expenses, such as bookkeeping, construction management, and marketing. Lessons learned include the necessity of matching operating support with capital infusion and the realization that developer fees were sometimes insufficient liquidity for borrowers due to project scaling. Krystle Okafor reported that to assist borrowers in reaching and maintaining scale, the program is planning a convening series facilitated by the Neighborhood Design Center. Upcoming sessions will cover private acquisition strategies, marketing, sales, and organizational growth.

Justin Williams, Baltimore City Director of Permitting and Development Services, reported that the average residential permit review time has improved from 38 days to 14 days since the implementation

of a manual tracking list for BVRI-funded projects in September 2025. Justin Williams noted that while building permits are moving efficiently, challenges persist with other requirements like utility connections and water pressure. Efforts are underway to create clearer guides and training for developers, as well as to improve coordination with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Department of Transportation (DOT). To prevent projects from stalling, the City has implemented a proactive intervention where specific liaison staff monitor the list of BVRI-funded permits weekly to ensure nothing falls through the cracks due to assignment errors.

Dan Ellis, Executive Director of NHS Baltimore described the Reinvest Baltimore down payment assistance program, noting it offers high flexibility with no income or first-time home buyer requirements, provided the homeowner remains in the home for five years. Early data shows that approximately 47% of participants are new to the city, and 88% are first-time home buyers. Dan Ellis introduced Sandy Mitchell, NHS's Senior Lending Manager.

Ben Glover, Director Capital Programs at Healthy Neighborhoods, introduced the "Reinvest Baltimore Rate Savings" program, which provides a fixed 3.5% interest rate over a 30-year term by using state grant proceeds to buy down the interest rate. This program significantly reduces monthly mortgage costs compared to conventional market rates. To resolve inefficiencies in directing potential buyers to available homes, Healthy Neighborhoods has established a centralized, public-facing repository of BVRI-funded properties on their website.

Closing

Chair Day adjourned the meeting.