

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, President, Baltimore City Council
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COUNCIL LEADERSHIP PROPOSES AMMENDMENTS TO LAND BANK BILL

First Series of Amendments will Improve Oversight, Effectiveness of Legislation

BALTIMORE—Today, members of the City Council proposed the first series of amendments to Mayor Sheila Dixon’s Land Bank legislation in an effort to improve independent oversight and to better ensure that the initiative is effective in addressing the crisis of abandoned vacant properties in Baltimore. The administration’s Land Bank Authority (LBA) proposal would create a singular quasi-governmental agency with the authority and primary responsibility for acquiring, maintaining, and selling vacant property.

“There are approximately 30,000 vacant properties in our city. It is a serious challenge that affects almost every neighborhood and that’s why I’m completely committed to working to solve the problem,” said City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. “However, as we work together to solve one problem, we must be careful to not create new problems. We need to make sure that this initiative will work and that there are appropriate accountability measures in place.”

“The Council President and I agree that if the Land Bank is the best way to address vacant abandoned properties, there must be measures in place to ensure effectiveness, transparency and oversight,” said Councilman William H. Cole, IV (District-11), who serves as acting chairman of the City Council’s Taxation, Finance and Economic Development Committee. “We believe that the proposed legislation will need to be significantly amended to accomplish these goals.”

Council President Rawlings-Blake and Councilman Cole suggested the following amendments for consideration:

- Performance Measurement Requirement: Would require the development of specific metrics for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the Land Bank Authority in addressing the crisis of vacant properties in Baltimore. The legislation could require the creation of a “LandStat” statistic-driven reporting process to report performance outcomes to the Mayor and City Council on a quarterly and annual basis.
- Reauthorization and Reversion Requirement: Would require that the Land Bank Authority be reauthorized by the Mayor and City Council on a bi-annual basis. The legislation would require that LBA-controlled property revert back to the control of city government if the Land Bank Authority is not reauthorized.

- City Residency Requirement: Would require that the Executive Director and Board of Directors of the Land bank Authority reside in the City of Baltimore. Such a provision would help to ensure that the leadership composition of the land bank would have the best interests of the City at heart.

“It is my hope that this first series of proposed amendments will begin a constructive dialogue during the legislative process that will ultimately enhance the Land Bank Authority legislation,” Rawlings-Blake said.

“This is just a start and we will continue to look for new ideas to improve the Land Bank Authority legislation,” Cole said.

The administration’s Land Bank Authority (LBA) legislation was introduced to the City Council in January and was referred to the Council’s Taxation, Finance and Economic Development Committee. Since introduction, several city agencies have submitted reports on the legislation. Tomorrow, The City Planning Commission will hold a hearing on the legislation.

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