



Strengthening Neighborhoods

HOUSING CODE ENFORCEMENT

A Handbook for Baltimore City Residents

Flip over to view Permits and Building Inspections



Information Is Just A Click Away

To keep residents and neighborhood associations informed about code enforcement, we have designed several web-based tools. To see them, visit our web site www.baltimorehousing.org and click on "Housing Code Enforcement."

At www.baltimorehousing.org you can:

View Violation Notices

View all outstanding notices, by neighborhood or property.

Track Cases

Check the status of cases that have been forwarded for prosecution and read any court order deadlines.

Search the Court Docket

Identify which properties are scheduled for court.

Find Your Housing Code Enforcement District Office and Superintendent

Look up contact information for your district office and superintendent by typing an address into our search tool at www.baltimorehousing.org.

Locate TEVO Properties

See which properties are included in the TEVO program (Targeted Enforcement toward Visible Outcomes). TEVO applies intensified code enforcement and legal action to the owners of over 6,000 vacant properties that lie on highly occupied blocks, where the rehab or sale of those properties will result in significant neighborhood improvements.



Introduction

We know that your home and your neighborhood are very important to you. We also know that the condition of the houses and apartments around you greatly affect your family's investment, safety and quality of life. That's why Baltimore's Housing Code Enforcement Division works hard every day to enforce the housing code in communities like yours.

This handbook will help you understand what we do and how we do it in simple terms. It is our goal to inform and empower you with a clear understanding of the code. This handbook will show you what's required of both homeowners and tenants and will help you spot code violations in your neighborhood. You will understand how our inspectors and attorneys investigate and prosecute code violators and what an important role residents and community groups can play in enforcing the code and strengthening Baltimore's neighborhoods.

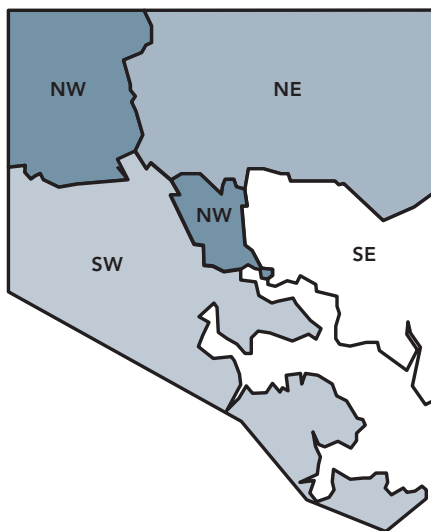


Who We Are

The Housing Code Enforcement Division exists to ensure that citizens have safe housing and decent neighborhoods, through enforcement of the code. The division headquarters and four area offices are staffed with superintendents, assistant superintendents, field inspectors, and administrative personnel.

To ensure that inspectors are aware of and responsive to local priorities, all of our inspectors are deployed from district offices, each led by a superintendent. Districts are further divided into “subdistricts” – each of which has a dedicated inspector. This model fosters local accountability, improves cooperation and communication, and forges close relationships between superintendents, inspectors, residents, property owners, tenants, and community groups. You can identify your district office and superintendent by visiting our web site www.baltimorehousing.org or by calling the district office number in the *Phone Number* tab of this booklet. The district office will assist you in obtaining the name and phone number of your subdistrict inspector.

Housing Code Enforcement Districts



Housing Code Enforcement

Resident Complaints

Our Housing Code Enforcement office receives over 25,000 complaints every year. Once we receive a complaint, an inspector responds within 15 days. For emergency complaints, we attempt to respond immediately. Each complainant who provides a name, address, and number will receive a courtesy response call or card from an inspector.

If you have a complaint about a property in your neighborhood, please call **311**. The City's 311 call center tracks housing complaints and other residential concerns. The complaints are then electronically forwarded to the correct agency. When you call 311, the operator will provide you with a tracking number. Keep it handy in case the condition of the property worsens or you want to check the status of your complaint. You can also submit complaints and check their status by using the 311 online system at: www.baltimorecity.gov. Each complaint is confidential.

Violation Notices

When a complaint is received, a housing inspector will inspect the property. If a housing code violation is found, a violation notice will be sent to the property owner via certified mail. The complaint will then be "closed" in the 311 system. However, the violation will be monitored until it has been resolved or has been forwarded to the Code Enforcement Legal Section for prosecution.

The time allotted for resolving violations varies, depending upon the severity of the problem. For example, a rental property cited for insufficient heat in January may receive a 24-hour notice while a defective gutter may warrant a 30-day notice. Owners may request extensions providing that progress is being made.

Once the violation notice has expired, the inspector will reinspect the property. If the responsible owner or occupant corrects the violation within the allotted time, the violation notice will be abated. If not, the violation may be referred to our Code Enforcement Legal Section, where it will be reviewed for prosecution in Housing Court. Resulting fines may be up to \$500 a day for each uncorrected violation.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1) **There is a property causing problems in my neighborhood. Whom should I call?**
 Call 311 to initiate action by filing a complaint. You can check the status of any 311 requests by calling 311 and providing the operator with your tracking number. Likewise, you can file and/or track a complaint through the City's 311 web site: www.baltimorecity.gov.
- 2) **How can I contact Housing Code Enforcement?**
 You can find your district superintendent's name, as well as the address and phone number of your district office by typing an address in the search tool at: www.baltimorehousing.org. If you do not have access to a computer, call 410-396-4170.
- 3) **How can I determine who owns a property?**
 You can find the owner of record for any property by visiting the Maryland State Department of Assessment and Taxation's web site www.dat.state.md.us or by visiting the Abel Wolman Building at 200 N. Holiday Street.
- 4) **How long does the responsible party have to correct a violation?**
 All notices are orders for the recipient to correct the violation within a specified time, usually no longer than 30 days. If the responsible party fails to comply with the notice in a timely manner, that person may be prosecuted in Housing Court. You can check Baltimore Housing's web site at www.baltimorehousing.org to see if a notice was referred for prosecution, and if so, if there were any court order deadlines. Please remember that some problems cannot be resolved through code enforcement. You are encouraged to contact your housing inspector for any information about a property under notice.
- 5) **Can I come to Housing Court?**
Where can I find the trial date?
 Housing Court is open to the public, and community residents are encouraged to attend. Find out what properties in your neighborhood are scheduled for trial by searching the docket inquiry on our web site

at: www.baltimorehousing.org. Before attending Housing Court, we suggest contacting our Legal Section at 410-396-4140 so that they may notify you of any last minute changes.

- 6) **Are landlords required to provide garbage cans?**
In a single-unit building, the occupant is responsible for providing garbage cans. For all other dwellings, the landlord is responsible for providing a sufficient number of garbage cans for tenants.
- 7) **The occupants of the property next to me are disruptively noisy. Whom should I call?**
Noise complaints are handled by the Police Department and should be reported by calling 311 or submitting a complaint through the City's online 311 Complaint Center at www.baltimorecity.gov.
- 8) **Does the Housing Code Enforcement Division issue building permits?**
Permits for rehab work, construction, and demolition are issued by the Permits and Building Inspections division (also part of Baltimore Housing). Permits are applied for and issued in the One Stop Shop in the Charles L. Benton, Jr., Building at 417 E. Fayette Street, Room 100. To learn more about permits, see the "Permits and Building Inspections" section of this book; visit: www.baltimorehousing.org; or call the permit counter directly at 410-396-3360.
- 9) **I live near a college and have concerns about the number of renters living in a nearby house?**
The code stipulates that a "group of not more than four people not related by blood, marriage, or adoption, can live together as a single housekeeping unit in a dwelling."
- 10) **How can I find out if there is a violation notice on a property?**
You can find all active Housing Code violation notices by visiting www.baltimorehousing.org.

Useful Phone Numbers

Housing Code Enforcement Offices

Headquarters 417 E. Fayette St., Room 202	410-396-4170
Northeast District Office 5225 York Road	410-545-7550
Northwest District Office 3939 Reisterstown Road	410-396-7736
Southeast District Office 3411 Bank Street	410-545-6521
Southwest District Office 501 N. Athol Avenue	410-545-1851

Other Baltimore Housing Numbers

Demolitions 417 E. Fayette St., 3rd Floor	410-396-3512
Code Enforcement Legal Section 417 E. Fayette St., Room 202	410-396-4140
Multiple Family Dwelling License 417 E. Fayette St., Room 202	410-396-3575
Permits & Building Inspections 417 E. Fayette St., 3rd Floor	410-396-3470
Permit Inquiries "One Stop Shop" 417 E. Fayette St., Room 100	410-396-3360
Property Registration 417 E. Fayette St., Room 202	410-396-3575
Vacant Lot Registration 417 E. Fayette St., Room 202	410-396-3575

Phone Numbers for Other City Services and Agencies

Abandoned Vehicles	410-361-9600
Adult Protective Services	410-361-5000
Baltimore Neighborhoods (mediates landlord/tenant concerns)	410-243-6007
Business Licenses	410-333-3790
Child Protective Services	410-361-2235
Commission for Historical & Architectural Preservation (CHAP)	410-396-4866
Environmental Control Board	410-396-6909
Eviction Prevention	410-878-8650
Homeless Services	410-396-3757
Home Ownership Programs	410-396-3124
Land Acquisition	410-396-4114
Land Development	410-396-4114
Land Disposition (to purchase property owned by the City)	410-396-4109
Lead Poison Prevention	443-984-2480
Lien Review	443-396-3513
Minor Privileges	410-396-3346
Property Location	410-396-3634
Property Management	410-396-6522
Public Works (bulk trash, sidewalks, street lighting, etc.)	410-361-9333
Rat Rub Out (Vector Control)	443-984-3175
Rent Escrow Court	410-878-8640
Sanitation Enforcement	410-545-6497
Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8)	443-984-2200
Weatherization Assistance Program	443-984-1066
Zoning Enforcement	410-396-4126

Housing Code Requirements

Vacant Buildings

A “vacant building” is one that is unoccupied and unsafe or unfit for human habitation or other use. A common misperception is that an unoccupied building is synonymous with a vacant building. An unoccupied property, properly maintained, is not a code violation. An unoccupied property meeting the following criteria, however, qualifies as a “vacant” building and warrants a violation notice: Open to casual entry; boarded windows or doors; or lacks intact windows sashes, walls, or roof surfaces to repel weather entry

When a vacant building violation notice is issued, the owner is required to clean and secure the building and to maintain the building in a clean and secure state at all times, until the building is either rehabilitated or razed. Additionally, where an owner fails to timely comply with the violation notice, he may face fines of up to \$500 per day in Housing Court. In situations where the owner cannot be found or prosecuted, the City has the authority to clean and secure the building, placing a lien on the property for the cost of the work performed.

Minimum Standards for Dwelling Units

A dwelling unit is defined as a single unit that provides or that is designed to provide complete, independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation.

Space and Occupancy Standards

Only by meeting all of the minimum space and occupancy requirements, does a unit become defined as a “habitable space.” These requirements govern: ***light, ventilation, minimum room size and minimum ceiling heights.***

Every dwelling unit must contain:

- A kitchen with space and connections for a stove and refrigerator. There must be a sink and space for storage and preparation of food.
- A private bathroom with a toilet, lavatory basin, a tub or shower and ventilation (Ventilation must be a window or a mechanical vent that is vented to outside air).

- Access to a habitable room: The only access to a habitable room cannot be through a bathroom.
- Hot water facilities capable of heating water to 120 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Adequate light and ventilation in all habitable spaces and bathrooms.
- Adequate trash cans and a place to store the cans. (Section §305.6 of the BFRC states: “trash cans should be metal or some durable material approved by the Code Official, water tight with a tightly fitting cover.”)
- A smoke detector located near the sleeping area and on every story of the building, including the basement and cellar. A tenant in a single-family dwelling is responsible for obtaining smoke detectors, if they are not provided.

Requirements for Heating of Rental Units

(During the months of October 1st to April 30th)

- 70 degrees Fahrenheit in all habitable rooms, bathrooms and toilet rooms with no room to be less than 65 degrees Fahrenheit during the hours of 5 a.m. to midnight and
- 65 degrees Fahrenheit in all habitable rooms, bathrooms and toilet rooms with no room to be less than 60 degrees Fahrenheit during the hours of midnight to 5 a.m.

Owner and Occupant Responsibilities

Structural Maintenance

Owners are responsible for maintaining the structure in a structurally sound and sanitary condition and must make any repairs accordingly. **Owners** are responsible for ensuring the following (this list is representative but not all-inclusive):

- Windows and doors fit and function properly and are not broken
- Stairways are structurally sound
- Chimneys and towers are structurally sound
- Decks are structurally sound
- Roof drains and gutters are attached to the structure and free of debris

- Downspouts discharge water away from the foundation and do not create a public nuisance
- Interior walls and woodwork are in good repair
- Plumbing is in good repair

Occupant must give the owner or operator access to the premises at all reasonable times in order to make necessary repairs or alterations. In addition, the **occupant** must keep his or her unit, as well as any other areas he or she occupies or controls, in a clean and sanitary condition.

Maintaining Exterior Premises

Owners are responsible for ensuring that all lots and exterior premises including abutting sidewalks, gutters, and alleys, are maintained in a clean, safe and sanitary condition – unless the areas are exclusively controlled by a tenant, such as in a single-family dwelling.

Occupants are responsible for keeping their unit and any other part of the premises that they occupy or control in a clean and sanitary condition. If one **occupant** has exclusive control of the rear yard, that occupant is responsible for maintaining the yard. However, in most situations with more than one dwelling unit, the owner is responsible for the exterior sanitary maintenance, as no one tenant has exclusive control of the exterior premises.

Examples of common exterior maintenance:

- **Grass and Weeds**
Keep grass, weeds, or plant growth below eight inches and remove all noxious weeds.
- **Trees and Shrubbery**
Prune or remove all trees and shrubbery if they are dangerous to life and property, create a fire or traffic hazard, or encroach on an adjacent property.
- **Motor Vehicles**
No motor vehicle may be parked, kept, or stored on any premises if: 1) It is inoperative, unregistered, or fails to display current registration tags; or 2) It is in a state of disassembly or disrepair. Motor vehicles must be parked on a dustless surface. The vehicle may not be parked on grass, dirt, or crushed stone.

- **Trash, Garbage, and Debris**

All premises including abutting sidewalks, gutters, and alleys as well as the interior of every structure must be kept free of any accumulation of trash, garbage, and debris, including animal waste, construction material, equipment, furniture, appliances, and similar objects and materials.

- **Storage Receptacles**

Trash, garbage, and debris may not be placed out for collection unless contained in proper storage receptacles, and not earlier than the day of collection. Storage receptacles must be promptly returned to premises after collection. Trash cans should be metal or some durable material approved by the Code Official, water tight with a tightly fitting cover.

- **Bulk Trash**

If too large for the storage receptacle, bulk trash must be conveyed to an appropriate landfill or other approved site or put out the day before a bulk trash pick-up (appointment needed). To schedule a pickup appointment, call 311 or (443) 263-2220.

- **Boats, Trailers and Recreational Vehicles**

A permit and Zoning Board Approval is required to store a boat and/or trailer on a property.

Interior Maintenance

The owner must maintain shared, common or public areas within each multi-unit building in a clean and sanitary condition. The owner must repair or replace defective and damaged items in all units. Note that the owner may hold an occupant accountable for damaging interior property due to negligence, per the terms of a signed lease. Occupants must keep their unit and any other areas that they occupy or control in a clean and sanitary condition.

Common examples of interior maintenance:

- Floors, furniture, countertops, and surfaces must be clean and free of trash, garbage, and debris; including human and animal waste and any other unsanitary matter.

- Walls, ceilings, windows, and doorways must be clean and free of dirt, grease, soot, and any other unsanitary matter.
- Plumbing fixtures must be clean and free from any foreign objects or materials that could obstruct a fixture or a line connected to a fixture.
- Rat-proofing and pest extermination follow specific rules, as follows:

The **owner** is responsible for rat-proofing the building and maintaining rat-proof condition. Rat-proofing methods include:

- Preventing entrance by blocking passages with rat-resistant material; and
- Paving basements and any other areas that are in contact with the soil.

An **occupant** of a multiple-family dwelling is responsible for extermination if the occupant's unit is the only unit infested. The **occupant** of a single-unit building is responsible for extermination of insects, rodents, and all other pests, other than wood destroying insects.

Licensing and Registration

Responsibilities for Property Owners

Multiple Family Dwelling Licensing (MFDL)

Owners of multi-family dwellings are required to pay an annual license fee of \$35 per dwelling unit plus \$25 per rooming unit. There is no charge for units occupied by the owner. Failure to maintain a current and complete Multiple Family Dwelling license (MFDL) may result in the suspension of license and prosecution.

To receive or renew a MFDL, the **owner** must:

- Remit the license renewal Application Fee every January
- Register or renew Registration of Residential Property
- Provide the housing inspector entry to the building to receive an annual inspection.

Renewal fees must be received within 30 days of the due date. Delinquent accounts are assessed 1% interest and 1% penalty each month, the sum of which is applied to the property as a lien. All owners of MFDs must renew their license, however the following are not required to pay the application renewal fee: (a) charitable entities and (b) governmental entities that both own and operate the property.

Residential Property Registration

Every non-owner-occupied dwelling unit in Baltimore City, whether or not occupied, fit for human habitation, or revenue producing must be registered. An annual registration fee must be paid of \$30 per dwelling unit, with a maximum of \$5,000 per owner. The fee must be paid at the time of registration and every September 1st thereafter. Failure to file a current registration may result in criminal prosecution and fines of up to \$500 per day.

No fee is charged for any dwelling unit that is:

- In a building with more than two-dwelling units (any building with more than two units requires an MFD license, see p.14),
- An unoccupied, habitable dwelling unit last occupied by its current owner as his or her residence,
- Owned by a non-profit religious, charitable, or educational institution or organization; or
- Owned by a governmental entity or an instrumentality or unit of a government entity.

The residential registration renewal fees must be received within 30 days of the date on which it is due. Delinquent accounts are assessed 1% interest and 1% penalty each month, the sum of which is applied to the property as a lien.

Vacant Lot Registration

Every owner of a vacant lot is required to file a registration statement and pay an annual fee of \$25 per lot each September, not to exceed \$5,000 per owner. "Vacant lot" is defined as land "unimproved by an assessed building used or intended for sheltering any use or occupancy." The annual vacant lot registration

renewal fee must be paid within 30-days of the due date. Delinquent accounts are assessed 1% interest and 1% penalty each month, the sum of which is applied to the property as a lien.

For more information about registrations and MFDL, visit our web site at **www.baltimorehousing.org** and click on “Property Registration” in the “Quick Link” section.

The Baltimore City Housing Code

This booklet is intended to provide highlights of the code in easy-to-understand language. Although every attempt has been made to maintain accuracy, this section is merely a brief summary of applicable laws or regulations for quick reference. Baltimore Housing follows the Building, Fire and Related Codes of Baltimore City (BFRCBC), which can be found in its entirety at: <http://cityservices.baltimorecity.gov/charterandcodes>.

All fees noted in this booklet are subject to change.



www.baltimorehousing.org

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Baltimore Housing reflects the combined efforts of the Housing Authority of Baltimore City and the Baltimore City Department of Housing & Community Development.

