

Most Frequently Asked Questions About Vacant Buildings in Baltimore City

Q. How did we get here? Why are there so many vacant properties?

The issue of vacant houses in Baltimore city is largely rooted in population decline. Baltimore, like many of America's older cities has experienced major economic and demographic changes over the past half century plus. Since 1950, Baltimore City has lost over 350,000 residents as the population of surrounding counties has grown. The city declined from being 40% of the State's population to 10%. This decrease in effective demand for housing resulted in disinvestment, abandonment, and a dramatic increase in vacant housing units.

Q. Who owns the vacant properties?

Most of these properties are privately owned. As of February 15, 2022, there are 14,989 vacant properties and only 1245 of those are owned by the City government. Properties that are privately owned must go through due process before the City can act to demolish those properties or make plans to take ownership and bring them back into productive use.

Q. How do you hold private property owners of nuisance properties accountable?

Before DHCD pursues legal action to address privately-owned, blighted properties, we take several code enforcement measures, issuing violation notices and citations, and creating work orders for cleaning and boarding. If vacant property owners don't respond to these code enforcement measures in neighborhoods where there are interested buyers, DHCD pursues receivership. Receivership is an action filed in court where property owners and all others with a secured interest in a nuisance property are served as defendants. The court can appoint a receiver to sell the property to abate the nuisance.

Q. For those properties that the City government does have control of, what is the plan for the vacant properties?

Baltimore currently uses a variety of methods to redevelop vacant properties and combat urban blight. We also utilize the private market to maximize the repair and rehabilitation of blighted properties. Various strategies we use to support blight elimination include:

- Streamline the disposition process
- Facilitate investment in community development clusters near areas of strength
- Targeted homebuyer incentives
- Support development/major redevelopment activity, including affordable housing development
- Provide coordinated green, healthy and sustainable homes, and neighborhood improvements

Q. Why can't you just demolish the vacant structures that are no longer useful?

The scale of the need for demolition in Baltimore is far larger than available resources. While we work to readily demolish those buildings that pose a public safety hazard, our broader goal is to facilitate reinvestment and help stabilize neighborhoods. To maximize available public resources, our demolition programs strategically select targets that will stabilize existing communities, leverage new investment, and create usable greenspace. Through our Framework for Community Development, we've set strategies in motion to stimulate market demand, support our existing residents and build and preserve affordability.

Q. What does it cost to demolish a vacant building?

Baltimore's housing stock is composed primarily of attached rowhouses. Strategic demolition often entails relocating one or more residents from an otherwise vacant block in order to raze the block in its entirety, improving outcomes for residents, eliminating wholesale blight, and enhancing reuse opportunities. The acquisition of these houses and relocation of occupants average \$85K for a renter and \$170K for an owner-occupant. This is in addition to the cost of demolition itself, which averages about \$25K.

Q. Have there been successes with vacant buildings put back into productive use in communities?

DHCD has multiple examples of projects where that is exactly what has transpired. Recent examples include:

- The 800 block of Harlem and Edmondson – a total of 38 city-owned vacant properties are being redeveloped as affordable single-family townhomes
- Hoen Building Redevelopment – large scale old vacant building the City sold to developers for \$200K. Resulted in a \$26 million redevelopment project.
- 1900 Block of Etting Street – sold vacant buildings to Black Women Build for rehabilitation. Project has received national attention for training Black women in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing.
- 2000 E. North Avenue – The Columbus School Renovation – 50 affordable units were created.
- 2600 Loyola Northway - five vacant properties were demolished and 15 houses on the block were renovated along with another 15 properties targeted for private investment
- Park Circle – DHCD is rehabbing 25 vacant properties on Park heights Avenue between Druid Park Lade Drive and Springhill.

Q. Why can't vacant properties be rehabbed and used to house the homeless?

The City is not equipped to administratively manage individual houses as shelter spaces for the homeless. There is work being done, however, to establish many of these properties as affordable housing opportunities. We've stood up an Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and we are funding Community Land Trusts, providing "permanently" affordable housing. We are also strengthening Inclusionary Housing laws, which date back more than a decade, to ensure that all projects receiving any subsidy make a percentage of units affordable.

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