

**Baltimore City Tax Sale Task Force**  
Meeting Minutes  
November 18, 2021

**Date:** Thursday, November 18, 2021

**Time:** 1:00PM – 3:00PM

**Location:** Webex

**Work Group Attendees:**

City Staff: Natasha Mehu, Daniel Ramos, Pedro Aponte, Stephanie Murdock, Rebecca Woods, Mira Green, Mara James, Lauron Thomas, Julie Day, Janelle Mummey, Councilwoman Odette Ramos, Bob Cenname, Michael O’Leary, Zhenya Egorova, Janice Adamo

Other Notable Attendees: Shana Roth-Gormley, Nneka Nnamdi, Margaret Henn, Joseph Kershner, Heidi Kenny, Edward Scrivener, Dan Ellis, Claudia Wilson Randall, Carla Nealy, Bernie Knauer

Agenda:

**I. Welcome**

Dan Ellis and Daniel Ramos welcome the work group attendees and public participants.

**II. Reminder of Priorities from Mayor**

The creation of an equitable and transparent tax sale process to particularly aid legacy City residents.

**III. An Equity Lens for Tax Sale Reform—Nneka Nnamdi**

Presentation: Tax Sale by the Numbers

Addressing misconceptions of the tax sale, who is vulnerable, and what is necessary.

The tax sale has impacted the Black Butterfly very specifically and it’s vital that we keep this context front and center.

**IV. Testimony from Current Ombudsman, Michael O’Leary**

Michael explains that from his experience, systemic changes will have the most impact as all of the short-term changes have been maxed out. His office promotes annual tax sale clinics, the Homestead Credit, and facilitates communication between those with citations and the City. He is gearing up to promote a tax sale exemption program that goes live in February 2022. The lack of funding, transparency for homeowners, availability of information, and lack of staff also contribute to the effects of tax sale. He suggests there should be one central phone number and website for residents to start with. If we want to improve people’s health, we must bring health to them. He suggests that the

Homeowner's Property Credit should be automatic, and that the Tax Sale process should be lengthened so when someone gets a notice, they have time to figure it out before it's too late.

Daniel Ramos says it might be worth going through the systems involved and the upgrades that are on the way.

Shana Roth Gormley asks if Mike has seen change for as long as he's been ombudsman. He has seen small changes in top-level awareness of what tax sale is, but feels he has reached a plateau that the number of people falling into tax sale has not changed all that much.

#### **V. Testimony from Baltimore City Departments**

Bernie Knauer says the new systems are usually SQL based and the main hurdle is finding a system that will handle the processes and procedures that the City has established. Everything we do is governed by the law- if we want to change something, the law will have to change.

Rebecca Woods provides that the Environmental Control Board is trying their best to be accommodating with hearings, communication with those with delinquent bills, etc.

Councilwoman Ramos adds that citations above \$1000 go to tax sale, which would be a charter change.

Other discussion: there are asks about property deeds and recording errors. Who should we discuss this with? Carla at Bureau of Revenue Collections says the dept of recordation at the Department of Transportation, as well as Director Raymond from the Department of finance to attend.

Joe Kershner: managing attorney at Department of Housing and Community Development, responsibility is to acquire vacant properties for the city. The first criteria are: are they vacant and abandoned. If they're unsure, they send code enforcement out to check. DHCD is a customer of the tax sale in a way. They take the certificates of the properties and foreclose on them- a cost effective way to acquire the properties.

Julie Day, Chief Administrative Officer of Department of Public Works: Committed to having accurate billing because the water billing system interacts with the tax sale process.

#### **VI. Public Testimony**

There were no members of the public present.

#### **VII. Adjourn**

No final questions. Dan Ellis thanks all who attended and presented.