



Government of the District of Columbia
Advisory Neighborhood Commission
Box 75115
Washington DC 20013



March 15, 2010

The Honorable Tommy Wells
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 408
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Councilmember Wells:

As you know, vacant properties threaten the public safety and well-being of the communities that surround them, often becoming havens for criminal activity, rodent infestation, and unkempt yards that are littered with debris. According to DCRA Director Linda Argo, Ward Six and ANC6A have been acutely affected by vacant properties with 340 such properties in Ward Six alone.

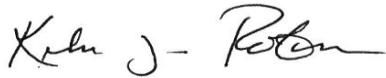
Unfortunately, the Council recently amended the vacant property law to dramatically limit its reach. As a result, only 7 of the 340 properties that had been classified as vacant are currently subject to the Class 3 tax rate, which had been an effective incentive to encourage occupancy and appropriate maintenance of properties in recent years. ANC6A believes strongly that the legislative status quo, which provides no incentive to occupy vacant properties, is unacceptable. Furthermore, the vacant property tax was our only tool to discourage land speculation on H Street NE and encourage the sale or productive use of vacant properties on the Corridor.

The Economic Development and Zoning Committee of ANC6A has reviewed the pending vacant property legislation – Bills 18-448 and 18-546 -- and believes that neither bill adequately addresses the problems posed by vacant properties. The Committee proposed, and the Commission approved, a detailed solution to this problem that will be provided under separate cover. Accordingly, we hereby request that you withhold support from either measure or any bill that does not address the following principles:

1. Vacant properties pose significant problems for their surrounding communities regardless of whether or not they reach the current overly restrictive definition of “blighted.”
2. The current vacant property system is untenable because it does not create financial incentives for owners of vacant properties to lease, rent, occupy or sell these properties. Any legislative correction should include occupation incentives for vacant properties regardless of whether they qualify under the “blighted” definition and should require registration of vacant properties to ease the administrative burden.
3. The complexity of the prior vacant property system with its numerous and permissive exemptions led to too many vacant properties not being taxed at the vacant property rate. This problem should be resolved by eliminating or significantly restricting exemptions.

4. Occupation of vacant properties should be encouraged through use of the property tax code with the strength of the incentives tied to the assessed value of the property and to the length of the period that the property has been vacant. Incentives that are not tied to the assessed values of the properties are unlikely to prove adequate in many instances.
5. The definition of “blighted” should be reexamined as the current definition is too narrow as evidenced by the paucity of properties that are currently classified as such.

On behalf of the Commission,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelvin J. Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelvin J. Robinson
Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A

cc: Linda Argo, Director, DCRA
Kwame Brown, Councilmember, At-Large
Michael Brown, Councilmember, At-Large
David Catania, Councilmember, At-Large
Phil Mendelson, Councilmember, At-Large
Reuben Pemberton, Director, Vacant Property, DCRA