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August 17, 2015

Henry J. Raymond  
Director, Baltimore City Department of Finance  
454 City Hall  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Mr. Raymond:

As you know, the Baltimore City Charter requires the Department of Finance to issue the lien certificates<sup>1</sup> necessary to complete real estate transactions. Recent events have made it more important than ever that we ensure continued investment in our City. To accomplish this, we must do all in our power to shore up a healthy real estate market.

I was disappointed to learn of recent issues with the City's lone printer capable of producing lien certificates. According to the Baltimore Sun, and a spokesman from the Mayor's Office, the printer broke down on July 7, 2015. This breakdown resulted in a backlog of over 1,000 lien certificates, and brought the City's real estate market to a grinding halt. This impacted several of my constituents in Bolton Hill and Druid Heights, who had to postpone their closings and scramble at the last minute to acquire all of their documentation in order to close on rescheduled dates. In one case, this malfunction endangered the prospective home buyer's financing.

Until the time that the Baltimore Sun reported this news, the public did not know much—if anything—about this printer, the process by which the City issues lien certificates, or any contingency plans which exist should the printer fail. If contingency plans do not exist, the City should develop them immediately. Without such plans, we risk hampering our real estate market during a crucial time. The City must meet the aforementioned Charter requirement and restore the public's confidence in the role local government plays in the real estate market.

To restore this confidence and to ensure the seamless continuity of real estate transactions in our City moving forward, I ask you for detailed responses to the following questions:

1. How many lien certificate printers does the City own and / or lease?
2. If the City leases this equipment, what are the terms of the lease(s) (including length of time, cost, and warranty)?
3. Independent of any existing warranties, is there a service contract for maintaining the printer?
  - o If so, what are the terms of this contract (including length of time and cost)?

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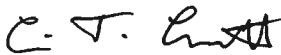
<sup>1</sup> Charter of Baltimore City, Article VII, § 13 (a) requires: "The Department shall keep a record of all municipal charges and assessments and shall provide for the issuance of a lien certificate stating whether any, and, if so, what municipal charges or assessments exist against any particular property. The Department shall make such charge for the issuance of a lien certificate as may be fixed by the Board of Estimates."



- o Did the service contractor meet their terms of this contract during the down time?
- 4. What is the City's contingency plan should the lien certificate printer fail again?
- 5. Is it possible to use another jurisdiction's printer through an MOU agreement, or to use another printer that the City has access to?
- 6. If a contingency plan does not exist, how long will it take to develop one, and will you commit to the plan's development?

Please provide a written response to the above questions by no later than August 31, 2015. I look forward to hearing back from you and working with you on this important issue. If you have questions about my request, please do not hesitate to contact me at [eric.costello@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:eric.costello@baltimorecity.gov) or (410) 396-4816.

Sincerely,



Eric T. Costello  
City Councilman, 11<sup>th</sup> District

**CC:**

City Council President Bernard C. "Jack" Young  
All City Council Members  
Kara Kunst, City Council Legislative Director  
Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake  
Kaliopé Parthemos, Mayor's Chief of Staff  
Andrew Smullian, Deputy Mayor of Government Relations and Labor