

General Assembly

Substitute Bill No. 1070

January Session, 2019

AN ACT CONCERNING ABANDONED AND BLIGHTED PROPERTY STEWARDSHIP.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective January 1, 2020*) (a) As used in this 2 section:

3 (1) "Abandoned property" means any building that meets the 4 conditions described in subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section;

5 (2) "Actively marketed" means (A) a sign has been placed on a property advertising sale of such property, (B) the owner of such 6 7 property has (i) hired a real estate broker or salesperson, licensed 8 pursuant to section 20-312 of the general statutes, to include the 9 property in the multiple listing service or to otherwise market the 10 property, (ii) placed advertisements weekly, or more frequently, in 11 print or electronic media, or (iii) distributed printed advertisements, 12 and (C) such sign contains accurate contact information for such owner 13 or real estate broker or salesperson;

(3) "Building" means a residential, commercial or industrial
structure and the land appurtenant to such structure, including any
vacant lot on which such structure was demolished;

17 (4) "Municipal code" means any building, housing, blight, property

maintenance, fire, health or other public safety ordinance enacted by amunicipality;

(5) "Competent entity" means a person or entity, including a
governmental unit, with experience in the rehabilitation of buildings
and the ability to provide or obtain the necessary financing for such
rehabilitation;

(6) "Costs of rehabilitation" means each expense for construction,
stabilization, restoration, maintenance, operation or demolition of a
building, or any action reasonably associated with the rehabilitation of
a building, including, but not limited to, environmental remediation
and architectural, engineering, legal, financing, permit and steward's
or developer's fees;

(7) "Historic property" means a property listed on the National
Register of Historic Places, a contributing property in a national
register historic district or a property located in an historic district
established pursuant to section 7-147c of the general statutes;

34 (8) "Immediate family" means a parent, spouse, child or sibling;

(9) "Lienholder of record" means a lienholder owning a valid
interest in the abandoned property, which interest is recorded in the
land records of the municipality in which such abandoned property is
located;

(10) "Development organization" means a nonprofit corporation
established, in part, to carry out the purposes of blight remediation,
community development, economic development, historic
preservation or promotion or enhancement of affordable housing
opportunities;

(11) "Owner" means the holder or holders of title to, or of legal or
equitable interest in, a building, and shall include, provided any such
interest is a matter of public record, any heir, assignee, trustee,
beneficiary or lessee of such building;

48 (12) "Party in interest" means any person or entity with a direct and 49 immediate interest in a building, including (A) an owner of such 50 building, (B) a lienholder or other secured creditor of such an owner, 51 (C) a resident of or business owner in the municipality in which such 52 building is located, provided such resident's residence or such owner's 53 business is located less than two thousand feet from such building, (D) 54 a development organization (i) in the municipality in which such 55 building is located, and (ii) that has participated in a project in line 56 with such organization's purpose within a five-mile radius of such 57 building, or (E) the municipality or school district in which such 58 building is located; and

(13) "Substantial rehabilitation" means (A) the costs of any repair, replacement or improvement to a building exceed fifteen per cent of the value of such building after the completion of all such repairs, replacements or improvements, or (B) the replacement of two or more of the following: (i) Roof structures, (ii) ceilings, (iii) wall or floor structures, (iv) foundations, (v) plumbing systems, (vi) heating and air conditioning systems, or (vii) electrical systems.

(b) (1) A party in interest may file a petition for the appointment of a
steward to take possession and undertake rehabilitation of a building,
which petition shall be filed in the superior court for the judicial
district in which such building is located. The proceeding in such court
on such petition shall constitute an action in rem.

71 (2) (A) Any such petition shall include a sworn statement of the 72 petitioner that, to the best of his or her knowledge, such building 73 meets the conditions described in subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of 74 this section. Such petition shall also include, to the extent available to 75 such petitioner after his or her reasonable efforts to obtain the 76 following information, (i) a copy of any citation or order charging the 77 owner of such building with being in violation of municipal code 78 requirements or determining such building to be a public nuisance, 79 blighted or unfit for human occupancy or use, (ii) a recommendation 80 for appointment as steward for such building, (iii) a preliminary plan

detailing (I) initial cost estimates of rehabilitation of such building for purposes of compliance with the applicable municipal code and plan for the area adopted by the municipality in which such building is located, and (II) anticipated funding sources, and (iv) a schedule of each mortgage, lien or other encumbrance on such building.

(B) Such petition may include any other property adjacent to such
building, provided (i) such other property is owned by the same owner
as such building, and (ii) such building and each such property are
used for a single or interrelated purpose.

90 (3) Such petitioner shall file a notice of lis pendens with the clerk of91 such municipality.

92 (4) (A) Not less than fourteen, but not more than sixty, days prior to 93 the filing of such petition, such petitioner shall send by first-class mail 94 notification to the owner of such building and each lienholder of record, including such municipality unless such municipality is such 95 96 petitioner, in accordance with section 52-57 of the general statutes 97 regarding service of process, and shall include in such notification the 98 original hearing date for adjudication of such petition and a statement 99 that such owner or lienholder may seek permission from such court to 100 intervene in such action.

101 (B) If such petitioner is unable to provide such notification, such 102 petitioner shall submit a motion for order of publication of such 103 petition, in accordance with section 52-52 of the general statutes, which 104 publication shall state the original hearing date for adjudication of 105 such petition.

(c) (1) Such court shall, not later than sixty days after receipt of such
petition or of an officer's return of service by publication, whichever is
later, hold a hearing on such petition and issue a decision not later
than thirty days after completion of such hearing. Any other party in
interest may seek permission of such court to intervene in such action
and be heard with respect to such petition, the relief requested in such

petition or any other matter that may come before such court in connection with such petition. At such hearing, the petitioner and any other party in interest may present evidence to support or oppose such petition, including the schedule of each mortgage, lien or other encumbrance on such building.

(2) Such court may appoint a steward for such building if, as of thefiling of such petition, each of the following conditions apply:

(A) Such building has not been legally occupied for at least thetwelve months immediately preceding such filing;

(B) Such owner fails to present compelling evidence, as determined
by such court, that such owner has (i) actively marketed such building
during the sixty days immediately preceding such filing, and (ii) made
a good faith effort to sell such building at a price reflective of
circumstances and market conditions;

126 (C) Such building is not subject to a pending foreclosure action by127 an individual or nongovernmental entity;

128 (D) Such owner fails to present compelling evidence, as determined 129 by such court, that such owner acquired such building during the six 130 months immediately preceding such filing. For the purposes of this 131 subparagraph, "compelling evidence" does not include evidence that 132 (i) the prior owner is a member of the immediate family of such owner, 133 unless the change in ownership resulted from the death of the prior 134 owner, and (ii) such owner or the prior owner is a corporation, 135 partnership or other entity of which an interest in excess of five per 136 cent is held by a principal, or a member of the immediate family of 137 such principal, of such owner or the prior owner; and

138 (E) Such court finds at least three of the following:

(i) Such building is a public nuisance, blighted or unfit for humanoccupancy or use pursuant to the applicable municipal code;

(ii) Such building requires substantial rehabilitation, and no effort to
rehabilitate such building has been made during the twelve months
immediately preceding such filing;

(iii) The condition and any vacancy of such building materiallyincrease the risk of fire to such building and any adjacent property;

(iv) Such building is susceptible to unauthorized entry and resulting
potential health and safety hazards, and (I) such owner has failed to
take reasonable and necessary measures to secure such building, or (II)
such municipality has secured such building as a result of such failure
by such owner;

(v) Such building is an attractive nuisance to children as a result of
the presence of abandoned wells, shafts, basements, excavations and
other unsafe structures;

(vi) Such building is an attractive nuisance for illicit purposes,including, but not limited to, prostitution, drug use and vagrancy;

(vii) The presence of vermin or the accumulation of debris, uncut
vegetation or physical deterioration of such building creates potential
health and safety hazards, and such owner has failed to take
reasonable and necessary measures to remove such hazards; or

(viii) The appearance or other condition of such building negatively impacts the economic well-being of residents or businesses in close proximity to such building, which impact may include decrease in property values or loss of business, and such owner has failed to take reasonable and necessary measures to remedy such appearance or other condition.

(3) (A) Except as provided in subdivision (4) of this subsection, if
such court determines that such building is an abandoned property
and appoints a steward pursuant to subdivision (2) of this subsection,
such court shall certify the schedule of each mortgage, lien or other
encumbrance on such abandoned property and may grant other relief

as such court deems just and appropriate. Such certification shall be
binding with respect to each mortgage, lien or other encumbrance,
including any municipal lien, arising or attaching to such abandoned
property prior to the date of such petition.

(B) Such court shall give the most senior nongovernmentallienholder of record on such abandoned property first considerationfor appointment as steward.

178 (C) If such lienholder is found not competent, declines such 179 appointment or did not intervene in such action, such court may 180 appoint a development organization or other competent entity as 181 steward, which organization or entity agrees to serve as such. In 182 appointing a steward pursuant to this subparagraph, such court shall 183 (i) consider any recommendation contained in such petition or 184 otherwise presented by such petitioner or other party in interest, and 185 (ii) give preference to a development organization or governmental 186 unit over an individual.

187 (4) If such court determines that such building is an abandoned 188 property and such owner represents that the conditions described in 189 subdivision (2) of this subsection will be remedied in a reasonable 190 period, such court may permit such owner to remedy such conditions 191 by issuing an order that if such conditions are not remedied by the 192 date set forth in such order, or if other specified remedial efforts have 193 not occurred by the date or dates set forth in such order, the relief 194 requested in such petition shall be granted. Such order shall further 195 require such owner, in order to retain possession of such abandoned 196 property, post a bond in the amount of the repair costs estimated in 197 such petition.

(5) Upon a finding that such building is an abandoned property in
accordance with subdivision (3) or (4) of this subsection, or that such
owner is electing to sell such building, such owner shall reimburse
such petitioner for (A) all costs incurred in the preparation and filing
of such petition, and (B) a steward's or developer's fee, which fee shall

be the greatest of (i) two thousand five hundred dollars, or such amount adjusted upward by two per cent for each year of stewardship, (ii) an amount equal to the costs of rehabilitation as described in the plan approved by such court under subdivision (3) of subsection (d) of this section, adjusted upward by twenty per cent, or (iii) twenty per cent of the sale price of such building.

(6) Such steward (A) shall promptly take possession of such
abandoned property and exercise the powers described in subsection
(d) of this section, and (B) may file a lien against such abandoned
property in an amount based on the costs incurred during the
stewardship, including, but not limited to, costs of rehabilitation,
attorneys' fees and court costs, which amount may be adjusted as
necessary.

(7) Such court may remove such steward at any time upon request
of such steward or showing by such petitioner or any party to such
action that such steward is not carrying out the duties described in
subsection (d) of this section.

(d) (1) A steward appointed pursuant to this section shall have all
powers necessary and appropriate for the efficient operation,
management and improvement of such abandoned property in order
to bring the same into compliance with municipal code requirements
and fulfill all duties described in this subsection. Such powers and
duties shall include, but not be limited to:

(A) Taking possession and control of such abandoned property and
any personal property of such owner used with respect to such
abandoned property, including any bank or operating account for such
building;

230 (B) Collecting outstanding accounts receivable;

(C) Pursuing all claims or causes of action of such owner with
respect to the property described in subparagraph (A) of this
subdivision;

(D) Contracting for the repair and maintenance of such abandoned 234 235 property, provided such steward shall make a reasonable effort to 236 solicit three bids for any contract valued at more than twenty-five 237 thousand dollars unless such contractor or developer provides or 238 obtains financing for the stewardship, and each of which contract shall 239 be appropriately documented and included in the reports and 240 accounting required to be submitted or filed by such steward pursuant 241 to this section;

242 (E) Borrowing money and incurring credit in accordance with 243 subsection (f) of this section;

244 (F) Contracting and paying for the maintenance and restoration of 245 utilities to such abandoned property;

246 (G) Purchasing materials, goods and supplies to repair and operate 247 such abandoned property;

248 (H) Entering into rental contracts and leases for periods not to 249 exceed twelve months, provided such court shall approve any such 250 contract;

251 (I) Affirming, renewing or entering into contracts providing for 252 insurance coverage on such abandoned property;

253 (J) Engaging and paying legal, accounting, appraisal and other 254 professionals to assist such steward in such stewardship;

255 (K) If such building was designated an historic property prior to 256 determination by such court as an abandoned property, consulting 257 with such municipality's historical commission or board of historical 258 and architectural review, or a local historic preservation organization, 259 for any recommendation on preserving the historic character of such 260 abandoned property;

261 (L) Applying for and receiving public grants and loans; 262 (M) Selling the building in accordance with subsection (g) of this 263 section; and

(N) Exercising any right a property owner would have to improve,
maintain and otherwise manage such property, including to the extent
necessary to carry out the purposes of this section.

267 (2) While in possession and control of such abandoned property,268 such steward shall:

269 (A) Maintain, safeguard and insure such property;

(B) Apply all revenue generated from such property consistent withthe provisions of this section;

272 (C) Develop a final plan for abatement of the conditions described 273 in subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section or, if no such plan can 274 feasibly be developed, a final plan for alternatives such as the closing, 275 sealing or demolition of all or part of such abandoned property, 276 provided (i) if such building was designated an historic property prior 277 to determination by such court as an abandoned property, such final 278 plan for abatement shall provide for the rehabilitation of architectural 279 features that define the historic character of such property, and (ii) if 280 demolition of an abandoned property located in an historic district is 281 necessary, such final plan for alternatives shall provide for the design 282 of any replacement construction on the site of such demolition to 283 comply with law;

(D) Implement the final plan developed pursuant to subparagraph
(C) of this subdivision, provided such court shall approve such plan;
and

(E) Annually, or more frequently if such court deems appropriate,
submit a status report to such court and each party to such action,
which report shall include (i) a copy of any contract entered into by
such steward regarding the rehabilitation of such abandoned property,
(ii) an account of the disposition of all revenue generated from such

property, (iii) an account of all expenses, repairs and improvements,
(iv) the status of developing and implementing the final plan described
in subparagraph (C) of this subdivision, and (v) a description of any
proposed action to be taken in the next six months to rehabilitate such
property.

297 (3) (A) At the time such court appoints a steward pursuant to 298 subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, such steward may 299 present for such court's approval a final plan described in 300 subparagraph (C) of subdivision (2) of this subsection. If no such plan 301 is presented at such time, the hearing date on such plan shall be set not 302 later than one hundred twenty days after such appointment and such 303 steward shall submit such plan to such court and each party to such 304 action not later than thirty days prior to such hearing.

(B) Such plan shall (i) include a cost estimate, a financing plan and either (I) a description of the rehabilitation to be done for such abandoned property, or (II) if such rehabilitation is not feasible, a proposal for the closing, sealing or demolition of such property, and (ii) conform with the applicable municipal code, plan for the area adopted by the municipality in which such building is located and historic preservation requirements.

312 (C) At the time of such hearing, each party to such action may 313 comment on such final plan and such court shall consider all such 314 comments when assessing the feasibility of such plan and proposed 315 financing. In making its determination for approving such plan, the 316 costs of such stewardship or sale of such abandoned property, such 317 court shall give reasonable regard to such steward's assessment of the 318 scope and necessity of work to be done for rehabilitation or 319 demolition, as applicable, of such property.

(D) Not later than fifteen days after such hearing, such court shall
issue a decision approving such final plan or requiring that such plan
be amended, in which case another hearing date shall be set not later
than sixty days after such issuance.

(4) Upon complete implementation of such final plan approved by
such court, such steward shall file with such court a full accounting of
all income and expenditures during the time from approval of such
plan to such complete implementation.

(e) (1) Such steward appointed pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section shall be deemed to have an ownership interest in and legal control of such abandoned property for the purposes of filing plans with any public agency or board, seeking or obtaining construction permits or other approvals and submitting applications for financing or other assistance to public or private entities.

335 (2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (1) of this 336 subsection, nothing in this section shall be construed to relieve the 337 owner of a building that has been determined to be an abandoned 338 property pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section of 339 any civil or criminal liability or of any obligation to pay any tax, 340 municipal lien or charge, mortgage, private lien or other fee or charge 341 incurred before or after the appointment of such steward, and no such 342 liability shall transfer to such steward.

(3) Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes, such
steward shall not be liable for any environmental damage to a building
that has been determined to be an abandoned property pursuant to
subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, which environmental
damage existed prior to such determination and the appointment of
such steward. The owner of such building shall be held liable for such
environmental damage.

(f) (1) Such steward may borrow money or incur indebtedness in
order to cover the costs of rehabilitation or otherwise fulfill any duty
described in subsection (d) of this section.

353 (2) For the purpose of facilitating the borrowing of moneys for the 354 costs of rehabilitation, such court may grant priority status to a lien 355 given to secure payment on a debt incurred for the purposes 356 authorized under this section, provided (A) such steward sought to 357 obtain the necessary financing from the most senior, nongovernmental 358 lienholder and such lienholder declined to provide financing on 359 reasonable terms for any reasonable improvement or other costs of 360 rehabilitation, and (B) lien priority is necessary to induce another 361 lender to provide financing on reasonable terms.

(3) If the most senior, nongovernmental lienholder agrees to provide
financing for the costs of rehabilitation, any moneys lent to cover such
costs shall be deemed added to such lienholder's preexisting first lien.

365 (4) Such court may approve financing for the costs of rehabilitation, 366 the terms of which may include deferred repayment and use 367 restrictions. Such terms may remain with the rehabilitated property 368 after the termination of the stewardship and be assumed by (A) the 369 owner of the building that was determined to be an abandoned 370 property pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, if 371 such owner regains possession of such rehabilitated property, or (B) a 372 purchaser of such rehabilitated property pursuant to subsection (g) of 373 this section.

(g) (1) If an abandoned property is sold by such owner or foreclosed
upon by any lienholder, or if any interest in such property is
transferred, such sale, foreclosure or transfer shall be subject to such
stewardship.

378 (2) Upon application of such steward, such court may order the sale 379 of such abandoned property if such court finds that (A) notice and an 380 opportunity to provide comment to such court was given to each 381 record owner of such property and each lienholder of record, (B) such 382 steward has been in control of such property for more than three 383 months and such owner has not successfully petitioned to terminate 384 such stewardship pursuant to subsection (h) of this section, and (C) the 385 terms and conditions of such sale are acceptable to such court and the 386 purchaser of such property is reasonably likely to maintain such 387 property.

388 (3) Such court may authorize such steward to sell such abandoned 389 property free and clear of any lien, claim and encumbrance, provided 390 the proceeds of such sale are distributed at settlement pursuant to 391 subdivision (4) of this subsection. If such proceeds are insufficient to 392 pay each such lien, claim and encumbrance, such proceeds shall be 393 distributed according to the priorities set forth in said subdivision and 394 each unpaid lien, claim and encumbrance that has not been assumed 395 pursuant to subdivision (4) of subsection (f) of this section shall be 396 extinguished.

397 (4) The proceeds of any such sale shall be distributed as follows, in398 order of priority:

399 (A) Court costs;

(B) Except as provided in subparagraph (G) of this subdivision, liens
of the state, liens for unpaid property taxes and properly recorded
municipal liens, except as to any such lien that has been sold or
transferred;

404 (C) Costs and expenses of sale;

(D) Principal and interest on any borrowing or incurrence of
indebtedness that was granted priority over existing liens and security
interests pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (f) of this section;

(E) Costs incurred by such petitioner in preparing and filing such
petition in accordance with the requirements of subsection (b) of this
section;

(F) Costs of rehabilitation and any fee or expense incurred by such
steward in connection with such sale or the safeguarding of such
abandoned property for which the lien authorized under
subparagraph (B) of subdivision (6) of subsection (c) was filed;

(G) Liens of the state, liens for unpaid property taxes and properlyrecorded municipal liens that have been sold or transferred;

(H) Valid liens and security interests in accordance with the priorityof such liens and interests;

419 (I) Unpaid obligations of such steward; and

(J) The owner of the building that was determined to be anabandoned property pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) ofthis section.

423 (5) If at the time of such distribution such owner cannot be located, 424 the proceeds of such sale that belong to such owner shall be (A) 425 presumed unclaimed and forfeited, (B) subject to the custody and 426 control of the municipality in which such sold property is located, and 427 (C) used for all associated costs to such municipality for the security 428 and remediation of blight and enforcement of any regulation enacted 429 pursuant to subparagraph (H)(xv) of subdivision (7) of subsection (c) 430 of section 7-148 of the general statutes.

(h) Upon request of such steward or any party in interest, such court
may order the termination of a stewardship of an abandoned property
if such court finds:

(1) The purposes of such stewardship have been fulfilled, such as
the remediation or abatement of the conditions described in
subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section and the payment of or
provision for each obligation, expense and improvement of such
stewardship, including any fee or expense incurred by such steward;

(2) Such owner, a mortgagee or a lienholder has requested such
stewardship to be terminated and has provided adequate assurance to
such court that the purposes of such stewardship will be fulfilled, such
as the remediation or abatement of the conditions described in
subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section and the payment of or
provision for each obligation, expense and improvement of such

stewardship, including any fee or expense incurred by such steward;

(3) Such abandoned property has been sold by such steward and the
proceeds of such sale have been distributed in accordance with
subdivision (4) of subsection (g) of this section; or

(4) Such steward has been unable, after diligent effort, to (A)
develop a final plan pursuant to subparagraph (C) of subdivision (2) of
subsection (c) of this section of which such court could approve, (B)
implement any such court-approved plan, or (C) for any reason, fulfill
the purposes of such stewardship.

454 (i) The provisions of this section shall not apply (1) to any 455 commercial or residential building, structure or land owned by or held 456 in trust for the United States government and regulated under the 457 United States Housing Act of 1937, as amended from time to time, and 458 regulations promulgated under such act, and (2) if the owner of a 459 building that would be determined by a court to be an abandoned 460 property pursuant to this section has vacated such building to perform 461 military service in time of war or armed conflict or to assist relief 462 efforts during a declared federal or state emergency as a member of the 463 United States armed forces or any reserve component of such armed 464 forces.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	January 1, 2020	New section

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:

In Subsec. (b)(2)(A)(ii), "steward of such building" was changed to "steward for such building" for clarity; in Subsec. (c), "has been taken" was changed to "has been made" in Subdiv. (2)(E)(ii) and "such steward's or court-approved plan" was changed to "the plan approved by such court under subdivision (3) of subsection (d) of this section" in Subdiv. (5)(B)(ii) for clarity, "the abandoned property" was changed to "such abandoned property" in Subdiv. (6)(A) for consistency, and "party in action" was changed to "party to such action" in Subdiv. (7) for accuracy and consistency; in Subsec. (d)(1), "action on such owner" was changed to "action of such owner" in Subpara. (C) for accuracy, "accomplish repairs" was changed to "repair" in Subpara. (G) for clarity, and "by such court" was inserted after "determination" in Subpara. (K) for accuracy; and in Subsec. (h)(4), "that" was changed to "of which" for clarity and grammar.

PD Joint Favorable Subst.