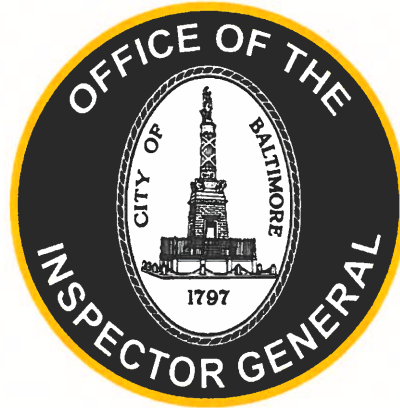


OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 19-0084-I

Issued: February 5, 2020



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202



February 5, 2020

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The OIG investigated a complaint from a Baltimore City resident regarding the November 1, 2017 sale of fifteen City of Baltimore (City)-owned vacant lots to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Bethel AME). The complaint alleged that residents of the communities surrounding the area affected by the sale did not receive timely notification of the deal to allow for proper community input. The complaint also alleged that Comptroller Joan Pratt's vote to approve the sale to the church was a conflict of interest because of her longstanding membership of Bethel AME. The complaint went on to state that Bethel AME no longer allowed residents to use the lots for additional parking as they had done before the sale.

The mission of the OIG is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste and abuse. The OIG investigation revealed that the necessary meetings to present the proposed sale and land development plans to the impacted communities were not held in a timely manner. While community outreach for City land deals should be completed prior to approval by the Board of Estimates (BOE), the Bethel AME sale was not presented for community engagement until after the sale was finalized by the BOE.

The OIG determined Comptroller Pratt voted in favor of approving the sale of City property to Bethel AME, a church in which she has maintained membership of and leadership in for decades. The investigation found administrative oversights in the Office of the Comptroller during the pre-BOE process led to Comptroller Pratt's vote in favor of the deal. The OIG found a reliance by the comptroller on her staff to properly vet BOE items for recusal. However, the comptroller acknowledged to the OIG that she should have abstained from the vote because it was a conflict of interest.

The OIG interviewed representatives of Bethel AME who stated that access will remain for residents to use the lots for additional parking, except on Sundays when the lot is needed for the influx of church members arriving for services. The OIG did not find any evidence contradicting Bethel AME's statement regarding resident access.

Property Sale to Bethel AME

On November 1, 2017, the BOE voted to approve a Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) between the Department of Community and Housing Development (DHCD) and Bethel AME for fifteen vacant lots located between 1301 and 1325 Etting Street and 505 and 509 West Lafayette Avenue, in the Upton community (Exhibit 1).

DHCD received an application from Bethel AME to purchase the properties through the Vacants to Value (V2V) program in May of 2017.¹ Some properties the City desires to sell are advertised on the V2V website; however,

¹ The V2V program aims to spur growth and reinvestment in Baltimore City by attracting new residents and businesses to develop vacant and abandoned City-owned property.

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DHCD officials said none of the lots the church applied to purchase were posted on the website at the time of their submission. The OIG received conflicting information regarding why the church applied if the City was not offering to sell the properties. The church stated that the City inquired with them if they would be interested in purchasing the land; however, DHCD employees said the church voluntarily contacted DHCD indicating an interest in buying the land. A DHCD official said the agency does not approach private parties to initiate the sale of vacant lots. Comptroller Pratt confirmed what DHCD employees told the OIG.

The lots had been vacant for over a decade and were used as auxiliary parking for residents of the surrounding community and members of Bethel AME. The baseline assessment value for a vacant lot in Baltimore City is \$1,000; however, the lots were sold to Bethel AME for \$1 each, \$15 in total. As justification for the price, Bethel AME submitted that the church had assumed a custodial role of the lots for 20 years and performed upkeep services, incurring over \$35,000 in expenses. The OIG interviewed representatives from DHCD and the Department of Real Estate who confirmed it is not unusual for the City to sell property for less than the assessed value, especially when the proposed buyer has paid expenses directly related to the property before the purchase.

The church proposed to develop the lots by changing them from unpaved, unofficial parking spaces into more formal and secure spaces by adding pavement and fencing. According to the LDA executed on November 1, 2017, the church was to commence construction within 90 days of the agreement and fully develop the parking lot within 12 months.

The OIG visited the lots on October 15, 2019 and found that construction has yet to take place. DHCD officials told the OIG that property ownership typically reverts to the City if development of the land is not completed within the 12-month period. Bethel AME officials told the OIG they cannot begin construction until ground rent issues are resolved. DHCD offered no explanation why Bethel AME has kept the land after acquiring it more than two years ago and failing to satisfy the terms of the agreement.

Community Meetings

Before a land deal goes before the BOE, the Real Estate Committee (Committee), which is comprised of members from Real Estate, DHCD, the Office of the Mayor, and the Office of the Council President, must vote to move the sale forward. One of the factors that the Committee considers is community input. Before City-owned land is to be sold for development, there must be community outreach and input to gauge how the sale will affect residents. Typically, community meetings are held for residents to speak out in favor of or against the proposed sale. Representatives from both the City and the buyer are usually present to address any concerns residents have. Committee members told the OIG that a sale will not move forward if community meetings have yet to take place.

In the case of the Bethel AME sale, the OIG found that the Committee approved the proposed sale without any community meetings taking place. The OIG located a checklist for the Committee's meeting on the sale and found an item labeled "Community Support" with the response as "N/A" (Exhibit 2). The OIG spoke with Committee members who said it was strange that the sale was able to move out of the Committee without confirming community meetings had taken place. In addition, the OIG met with representatives of Bethel AME, including the pastor, and the local leaders of the Upton and Marble Hill community associations. The OIG found community meetings were held on November 21, 2017, December 1, 2017 and January 17, 2019. All three meetings were held after the BOE had already voted to approve the sale on November 1, 2017.

Interviews with DHCD and Upton community officials revealed that Bethel AME was invited to present their development plans to the Upton Planning Committee on June 2, 2017. According to community officials, representatives from Bethel AME attended the meeting and expressed their interest in the vacant lots. However, the community official told the OIG that Bethel AME failed to submit finalized development plans and renderings of the desired parking lot for the meeting. Due to the lack of preparation, Bethel AME was told to

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

return and present the plans to the UPC and Marble Hill Community Association at later dates, after they submitted the necessary documentation. The OIG was told that Bethel AME submitted their development plans in October of 2017 and presented those plans on November 1, 2017 and December 1, 2017. The investigation found that neither the community associations nor DHCD listed the June 2nd meeting as an official development presentation meeting for residents to provide feedback. In fact, the OIG found that the June 2nd meeting was not listed on official community association letters to the City or in DHCD memorandums about the sale.

Representatives from the church and community associations told the OIG that it is the responsibility of the City to ensure the community meetings take place before the sale can go before the BOE. The DHCD employee responsible for attending the community meetings in Upton did not recall why the meetings took place after BOE approval and confirmed that was out of the ordinary. Not one member of the Committee that the OIG spoke with recalled the question of community input being raised during their meeting. The investigation found that one community association distributed surveys to residents on November 21, 2017, three weeks after the deal was done. Surveys provided to the OIG indicated several residents opposed the deal; however, one community association leader stated that a majority supported the deal.

BOE Process in the Office of the Comptroller

Personnel in the Office of the Comptroller manage and administer the BOE processes and procedures. According to those interviewed, the majority of BOE preparation is a manual process. Employees type and re-type the agenda multiple times to make corrections. Several employees involved in the BOE process told the OIG that given the number of people creating, editing and reviewing the agenda, they believe there is ample opportunity to catch items that pose conflicts of interest for Comptroller Pratt.

The OIG interviewed members of the Comptroller's staff who work exclusively on BOE meeting preparation. The staff indicated the office follows the same weekly routine for each meeting, with the work cycle beginning on Thursdays after BOE submissions from City agencies are submitted by 11:00 a.m. Once all submissions are received, staff begins re-typing what was submitted by agencies into the BOE agenda format. All staff who work directly on the BOE are required to work until at least 6:30 p.m. to help get the agenda completed. On Friday, staff members clarify questions they have regarding agency BOE submissions. The draft agenda is completed and sent out to BOE members and senior staff (including staff of the Mayor and City Council President) by 4:30 p.m.

Over the weekend, the draft agenda is reviewed by multiple employees in the Office of the Comptroller including: the comptroller and her executive assistant; the deputy comptroller; two employees of the Department of Real Estate (Real Estate); the head of the Municipal Telephone Exchange (MTE); and two employees of the Department of Audits (Audits). On Monday, the Office of the Comptroller has two separate pre-BOE meetings. In the first meeting, staff goes over issues with or corrections to the draft agenda. Attendees in the first meeting include: the Lead BOE Technician (Lead Tech); and multiple employees of Audits, Real Estate and MTE.

The second meeting on Monday is attended by the comptroller and the same employees in the first meeting. In this meeting, Comptroller Pratt typically verbalizes to the Lead Tech on which items she will abstain from voting. After the meeting, the Lead Tech provides the comptroller's abstentions to the deputy comptroller to be announced the day of the BOE meeting. After edits and corrections to the draft agenda are finalized and retyped by the staff, it is then sent to be printed by the City's print shop so that hard copies can be given out to BOE attendees. The finalized agenda is also posted online for public view. Tuesdays are reserved for the staff to catch up on work and to accept protests the public may file against items on the agenda.

Finally, on Wednesday, the BOE meeting begins at 9:00 a.m. After the meeting, one employee uses an audio recording of the meeting and begins manually typing the minutes to be published online. Several employees

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involved in the BOE process told the OIG that given the number of people creating, editing and reviewing the agenda, they believe there is ample opportunity to catch items that pose a conflict of interest to Comptroller Pratt.

Oversight

Comptroller Pratt has been a member of Bethel AME since 1976. She is a member of the church's board of trustees, and her personal business, Joan M. Pratt, CPA & Associates, has prepared the church's tax returns in the past. Comptroller Pratt readily acknowledges that she has a conflict of interest with any vote involving Bethel AME that may come before the BOE. However, on November 1, 2017, the comptroller did not abstain from voting to approve the sale of City property to Bethel AME. The OIG reviewed the BOE minutes and video recording to confirm that the comptroller voted in favor of the sale.

In an article published in the *Baltimore Fishbowl* on July 19, 2019 (Exhibit 3), Comptroller Pratt spoke about the vote stating, "I always abstain on things that relate to Bethel because that's my church." According to the comptroller, her vote was an oversight because the BOE agenda listed Bethel AME with periods in the acronym and her staff did not include the periods in a search of a separate document. Comptroller Pratt told the OIG that she relies on members of her staff to ensure she has properly abstained from BOE items that present a conflict of interest. The comptroller also said that her staff should recognize items on which she is conflicted based upon those organizations and individuals she abstained from during previous BOE meetings.

Until April of 2019, the Lead Tech maintained a running list of individuals and businesses with whom BOE members held conflicts. This list was referred to as the "abstentions list" and was maintained by the Lead Tech who told the OIG they were responsible for checking the comptroller's abstentions list against BOE agendas. The Lead Tech flagged items the comptroller should abstain from and passed the information along to the deputy comptroller to announce during the BOE meeting. The Lead Tech was solely responsible for maintaining the abstentions list.

According to the Lead Tech, the abstentions list is no longer utilized because the abstentions became too varied. The Lead Tech found that the comptroller, and other BOE members, might have abstained from voting on an item involving a certain individual or organization during one BOE meeting; however, the member would not abstain from voting on a separate item, involving the same individual or business, during a subsequent BOE meeting. The Lead Tech now relies on all BOE voting members to provide a list of abstentions specific to each individual BOE meeting.

Comptroller Pratt told the OIG that she abstains from voting on items involving individuals, businesses, or other organizations for whom she has personally performed work, past or present, including any clients of her accounting firm. She went on to include organizations of which she is a member and any fellow members of those same organizations, past or present. The Lead Tech provided the OIG with a copy of the abstentions list (Exhibit 4). The OIG was able to corroborate the comptroller's statement regarding the church being listed as "Bethel AME" with no periods.

Comptroller Pratt told the *Baltimore Fishbowl* that her vote was an oversight due to her staff failing to search the abstentions list for "Bethel A.M.E." with periods in the name. However, several employees of the Office of the Comptroller told the OIG that even when the abstentions list was being utilized, the comptroller, and her staff, went page-by-page through the agenda during the Monday pre-BOE meetings. The OIG learned that the comptroller would verbally announce items she planned to abstain from during those meetings. Comptroller Pratt confirmed to the OIG that she regularly reads the agendas over the weekend and tells her staff in the Monday meetings from which items she planned to abstain.

The OIG learned that during the Monday meetings, the Lead Tech typically takes note of the items the comptroller will be abstaining from voting on; however, the Lead Tech was absent the Monday prior to the

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November 1, 2017 BOE meeting. The comptroller said she told an employee filling in for the Lead Tech that she was abstaining from the vote to sell the properties to Bethel AME; however, the employee did not properly notate the abstention and the information never made it to the deputy comptroller.

The OIG confirmed that the Lead Tech was on leave the Monday in question. The OIG interviewed employees who attended the meeting, none of whom recalled whether the comptroller proclaimed her desire to abstain from the vote.

Comptroller Pratt told the OIG that she did not have any influence over the property sale and no reason to vote in favor of it because BOE approval was never in doubt. Comptroller Pratt stated that because DHCD was the agency responsible for the sale, the comptroller said her office had no bearing on the sales price or the structure of the agreement with Bethel AME.

Residential Parking Concerns

The OIG spoke with one local resident who alleged that after acquiring the land from the City, Bethel AME no longer allowed the residents who live adjacent to the lots to use them for additional parking and rear access to their homes. The OIG spoke with representatives from Bethel AME and the community associations who said there is no issue with allowing residents to use the space to park their own vehicles.

The church only requested that residents move their vehicles on Sundays so church members could use the parking lots because it is difficult to find street parking in the area. Bethel AME officials expressed the desire to work together with the community for the mutual benefit of both residents and the church. The OIG did not find any indication that the church was no longer allowing residents to use the space for their personal needs.

Conclusion

The investigation found that the necessary community meetings used to gather input and address concerns of residents did not take place until after the BOE finalized the sale to Bethel AME. Because the meetings did not take place before BOE approval, any opposition or community concerns were not addressed before the deal was completed. The OIG found that the City never raised the issue of community support prior to the proposed sale going before the BOE.

The OIG's investigation determined that Comptroller Pratt voted in favor of selling City-owned land to her church, Bethel AME, and that it was a conflict of interest. The investigation revealed the comptroller relies on her staff to identify from which BOE items she should be recused. Comptroller Pratt agreed she should have abstained and that the responsibility for the voting oversight ultimately rests with her.

The investigation further found the comptroller's explanation to the *Baltimore Fishbowl* regarding her vote for the item be unclear. The comptroller said it was due to a failure by her staff to search a document for periods between the acronym "AME" that led to her vote. The OIG confirmed that the BOE agenda for the November 1, 2017 meeting had periods in-between "AME" and that the "document" Comptroller Pratt referenced was an abstentions list maintained by the Lead Tech, which did not have periods within the acronym. The Lead Tech told the OIG that the abstentions list has not been used since around April of 2019. Instead, members of the BOE must send the Lead Tech abstentions specific to a each BOE agenda.

Additionally, the comptroller told the OIG she verbally announced her intention to abstain from the BOE item during a pre-BOE staff meeting. Employees in the meeting did not recall the comptroller's proclamation. The confusion around the process by which abstentions are to be made and to whom the responsibility falls to ensure the comptroller abstains from conflicts of interest, led to the comptroller's vote for the sale of City property to Bethel AME. The OIG found that there is no abstentions list currently in place for members of the BOE. The

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absence of such a record creates confusion regarding which items a member of the BOE should recuse themselves from and could lead to more votes cast by mistake. The OIG recommends that a central list of abstentions be maintained for members of the BOE.

The OIG also found the allegation that Bethel AME would ban residents from using the lots for personal parking to be inaccurate. Community leaders and church officials told the OIG that no such ban has taken place and residents continue to use the parking lot when it is available. The church expressed the desire to work in unison with the community to ensure the parking lot remains an asset to residents and church members alike.

All OIG exhibits as well as responses from the Office of the Mayor and the Office of the Comptroller, as well as the OIG response to the Comptroller are attached to this letter.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General

Cc: Hon. Bernard C. "Jack" Young, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Brandon Scott, President, City Council
Hon. Joan M. Pratt, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Andre M. Davis, City Solicitor

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Exhibit 1

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Honorable Bernard C. "Jack" Young, President

Honorable Catherine E. Pugh, Mayor

Honorable Joan M. Pratt, Comptroller and Secretary

Rudolph S. Chow, Director of Public Works

Andre M. Davis, City Solicitor

S. Dale Thompson, Deputy Director of Public Works

Bernice H. Taylor, Deputy Comptroller and Clerk

President: "Good morning. The November 1, 2017 meeting of the Board of Estimates is now called to order. In the interest of promoting the order and efficiencies of these hearings, persons who are disruptive to the hearing will be asked to leave the hearing room immediately. Memb -- meetings of the Board of Estimates are open to the public for the duration of the meeting. The hearing room must be vacated at the conclusion of the meeting. Failure to comply may result in a charge of trespassing. I will direct the Board members attention to the memorandum from my office dated October 30, 2017, identifying matters to be considered as routine agenda items together with any corrections and additions that have been noted by the Deputy Comptroller. I will entertain a Motion to approve all of the items contained on the routine agenda."

MINUTES

City Solicitor: "Mr. President, I so MOVE."

Comptroller: "Second."

President: "All those in favor say AYE. All opposed, NAY. The Motion carries. The routine agenda has been adopted."

* * * * *

MINUTES

Department of Housing and - Land Disposition Agreement
Community Development

ACTION REQUESTED OF B/E:

The Board is requested to approve and authorize execution of the Land Disposition Agreement with Bethel A.M.E. Church, Developer, for the sale of the City-owned properties located at 1301, 1303, 1307, 1309, 1311, 1313, 1315, 1317, 1319, 1321, 1323 and 1325 Etting Street and 505, 507 and 509 W. Lafayette Ave. in the Upton Community.

AMOUNT OF MONEY AND SOURCE:

\$15.00

BACKGROUND/EXPLANATION:

The Developer has assumed a custodial role in caring for the City owned lots for 20 years. Its Sextons, Security Staff and an outside contractor employed by the Developer have maintained the properties on a consistent basis. In addition, the Developer has kept the lots free and clear of debris, performed snow removal, and security for the properties at an expense that exceeds \$35,000.00. The Developer's plans are to consolidate and pave the lots for off-street parking for its congregation.

The City received authority to dispose of the properties by virtue of Article 13, 2-7(h)(ii)(c) and Article 28, Subtitle 8 pf the Baltimore City Code (2010 Edition).

Several of the aforementioned properties were journalized and approved for sale on 10/18/2014, 10/24/2014, and 10/27/2014.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR SALE BELOW THE APPRAISAL PRICE:

The properties were valued based upon the assessed value for each lot of \$1,000.00. The lots will be conveyed to the Developer for \$15.00.

MINUTES

Department of Housing and - Land Disposition Agreement
Community Development

The properties are being sold to Bethel A.M.E. Church below the assessed value because the sale will:

- stabilize the immediate community,
- eliminate blight, and
- add to the local economy by providing jobs on a temporary basis.

MBE/WBE PARTICIPATION:

The Developer will purchase the property for a price that is less than \$50,000.00 and will receive no City funds or incentives for the purchase or rehabilitation; therefore, MBE/WBE is not applicable.

UPON MOTION duly made and seconded, the Board approved and authorized execution of the foregoing Land Disposition Agreement with Bethel A.M.E. Church, Developer, for the sale of the City-owned properties located at 1301, 1303, 1307, 1309, 1311, 1313, 1315, 1317, 1319, 1321, 1323 and 1325 Etting Street and 505, 507 and 509 W. Lafayette Ave. in the Upton Community.

Exhibit 2

Real Estate Meeting Checklist

REO Sign: Karon Moore Asst Director Sign: Patrick Clayborn, Pastor and Brett McAlily, Officer

Developer: Bethel AME Church (Business Entity is Active and in Good Standing
(Entity, name of principal & SDAT Good Standing printout if a business)

Project / Property: 1301, 1303, 1307, 1309, 1311, 1313, 1315, 1317, 1319, 1321, 1323 and 1325 Etting Street. 505, 507 and 509 W. Lafayette Avenue

Prior to meeting

- ☒ E-mail BOE Memo & Summary to Tony & Mandy by Wednesday for Friday's meeting (they must get these to Jim Majors by Thursday, 12:00 Noon)
- ☐ Send Waiver Valuation or Appraisal to Tom Jacobs prior to meeting. Date sent N/A.
(Reviewed for current market applicability and confirmed)
- ☐ Info for comparables used in pricing – N/A
- ☒ SDAT - Real Property Data Sheet
- ☒ Citi-Map print-out with VBN layer on (color). Highlight relevant property(ies)
- ☒ Update CoBlam (confirm your name as App Staff) milestones & applicable notes
- ☒ Photo of subject property

Presentation at meeting (Director to present)

- ☒ Brief description of project from the BOE Summary
- ☐ Homeownership or rental; affordable, medium-income, etc. N/A
- ☒ Assessed Value \$1,000.00 per property
- ☒ Good Standing Status (if applicable) Yes
- ☒ Appraisal or Valuation Price N/A
- ☒ Prepare handouts - BOE Summary, Photos, Plat Maps, other handouts (10 copies)
- ☒ Offer / Purchase Price \$1.00 per property for a total of \$15.00

State Rationale for price if below Waiver Valuation or Appraisal (See Appraisal Policy)

1. Stabilize the Immediate Community
2. Elimination of Blight
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

- ☒ Estimated Rehab Cost \$30,020.00 Sale price (post rehab) N/A
- ☒ Funding Sources: Bethel AME Church
- ☐ Community support: N/A

List of Properties in the City owned/rehabbed by this developer (applicable to new buyers):

500 Dolphin Street

1232 Druid Hill Avenue – Vacant House Notice Registration

1234 Druid Hill Avenue – Registration Balance \$237.80 (open)

1300 Druid Hill Avenue – False Alarm Fee \$16,825.00, from 12/13/2013; Fence installed did not conform to permit

1301 Druid Hill Avenue – Vacant Lot Registration

1303 Druid Hill Avenue

2104 Elsinore Avenue – Vacant Lot Registration

2106 Elsinore Avenue – Vacant Lot Registration

1304 Etting Street – Vacant Lot Registration

1305 Etting Street – Vacant Lot Registration

1306 Etting Street – Vacant Lot Registration

511 W. Lafayette Avenue – Vacant Lot Registration

505 W. Lanvale Street – Not Registered

1302 McCulloh Street – Vacant House Notice

1429-1431 McCulloh Street – Sanitation Citation issued 2/27/2017

Descriptive Lot – Block 0396, Lot 075 – Vacant Lot Registration

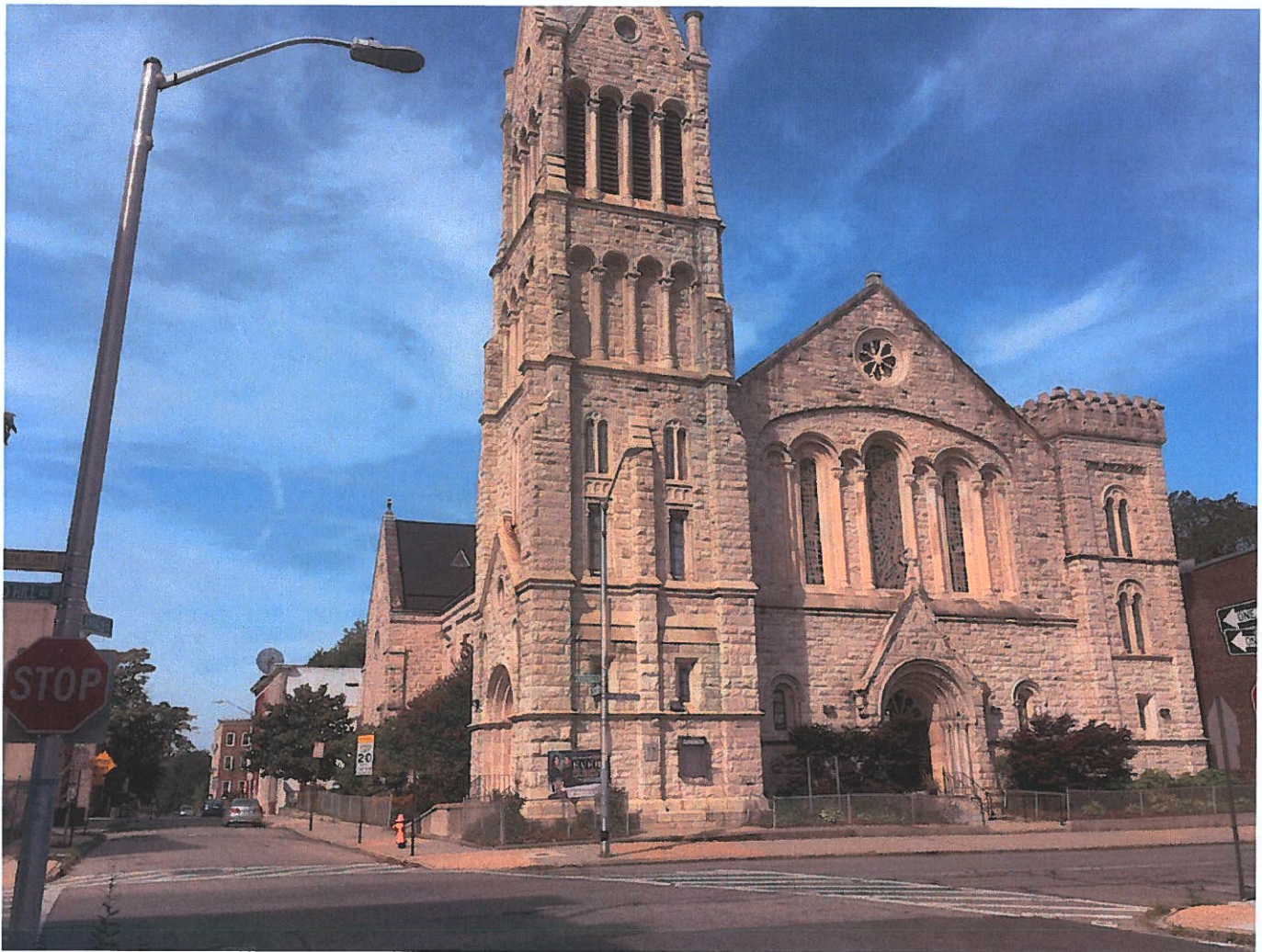
Exhibit 3

OIG investigating Comptroller Pratt's role in 2017 vote that gifted city-owned lots to her church

By **Ethan McLeod** - July 19, 2019

Share the News

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The front of Bethel A.M.E. Church at 1300 Druid Hill Ave. Photo by Ethan McLeod.

Baltimore's inspector general is reviewing a vote cast by city Comptroller Joan Pratt that helped facilitate the sale of 15 city-owned lots to an influential church where she has long been a leading member.

Pratt cast the vote approving a land disposition agreement between the city and Bethel A.M.E. Church for the lots on Nov. 1, 2017, as one of five members of Baltimore's Board of Estimates, which approves

various city spending decisions each week. She did not abstain from the vote, board minutes show.

Pratt has been a member of the church for more than four decades, is one of its trustees and has done taxes pro bono for its non-profit community center, [Bethel Outreach Center](#), for at least four years.

The church, whose congregation has included other high-profile Baltimoreans, including former mayors Kurt Schmoke and Sheila Dixon, received the lots at a steep discount. The spending board agenda said the appraised value for the 15 properties on Etting Street and W. Lafayette Avenue, behind the church, was \$1,000 apiece, or \$15,000 total. But the city was offering to sell off each one for just \$1–\$15 in all—so the church could “consolidate and pave the lots for off-street parking for its congregation.”

The board agenda noted Bethel has been caring for the lots for 20 years, with its caretakers, security staff and an outside contractor clearing debris, removing snow and monitoring them at a cost of more than \$35,000 to the church. It made the case that selling them would “stabilize the immediate community... eliminate blight, and... add to the local economy by providing jobs on a temporary basis.”

The voting members—Pratt, then-Mayor Catherine Pugh, then-City Council President Bernard C. “Jack” Young, Department of Public Works Director Rudy Chow and City Solicitor Andre Davis—moved to approve the deal as part of the board’s routine agenda, a list of items that don’t receive individual attention or discussion at board votes. The sales were finalized about three months later, according to property records.

The move effectively eliminated any potential tax revenue the city could recoup on the 15 lots, since they were gifted to a tax-exempt religious organization.

A neighbor who lives nearby on Druid Hill Avenue, who asked to remain anonymous so as not to compromise the investigation, said they were also contacted by OIG investigators about the transaction and Pratt’s involvement with the church last week.

A source at City Hall familiar with the matter, but not authorized to speak on it publicly, also confirmed the inspector general’s office is investigating the sale.

A mistake, the comptroller says

The Board of Estimates regularly approves spending decisions en masse on the routine agenda without discussing them individually; matters that do receive individual attention are categorized “non-routine” and are often discussed publicly when the board meets Wednesday mornings.

Pratt said in January that her staff regularly flags items in the routine agenda that may pose a conflict of interest for her, and which she should therefore abstain from voting on. But in this case, she said her team did not catch the proposed sale to Bethel A.M.E.—they failed to search for “A.M.E.” with periods in the acronym, she said—and it slipped by her team unnoticed.

She chalked it up as an honest mistake.

“I always abstain on things that relate to Bethel because that’s my church,” Pratt said. “It was just an oversight. I always abstain. Somehow it didn’t get caught.”

The OIG's review of the parking lot sale comes amid a broader investigation of contracts that came before the Board of Estimates over a roughly two-year period when Pugh was at the helm, which the *Baltimore Brew* reported in April. That review requested details on spending board members' outside employment, business ownership and board memberships with private, educational and religious organizations.

A spokesperson for the comptroller said Wednesday that Pratt has not been contacted by the OIG about the parking lot deal, specifically. For the larger investigation, "the inspector general's office asked for board affiliations, and she is in compliance with that request," the spokesperson said.

Pratt's role at Bethel is well-documented. A 2015 story in *The AFRO* said that year marked her 40th as a member. She's also served as a *steward* there in the past, and her spokesperson divulged that she is one of the church's trustees.

The city's comptroller of six terms has also volunteered her financial services for Bethel A.M.E. regularly. Tax filings for *Bethel Outreach Center*, listed at the same address as the church itself, indicate her accounting firm Joan M. Pratt CPA & Associates has done the organization's taxes annually from 2014 through at least 2017, the latest year for which documents were available. Pratt said she volunteered those services.

Pratt and Dixon are among the powerful group of Baltimoreans connected with the 234-year-old institution on Druid Hill Avenue, which Janette Smith, steward and director of church growth, said has an active membership of 1,331. Typical Sunday service attendance ranges from 650 to 750 between Bethel's two morning services.

(Previous estimates of *as much as 17,000* were not "reflected in church attendance or other engagement," Smith said she found when she began working for Bethel in 2016. Those former members are still honored by being listed in an "archived historical roll," she said.)

The church for years has been a battleground for *political endorsements* from its leadership. Through its relationship with developer The Cordish Cos., it was able to *secure a cut* of the profits from Pier Six Pavilion's overhaul in 2006. Bethel's influential longtime pastor, Rev. Frank M. Reid III, who gave endorsements in major elections and helped broker that deal with the Cordish Cos., *left to become a bishop* for the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2016.

As of 2017, its subsidiary Bethel Outreach Center counted Councilman Eric Costello (11th District), Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Cynthia Jones, since-*retired* Baltimore Police commander Lt. Melvin Russell, Upton Planning Committee executive director Wanda Best and Cordish Cos. COO Zed Smith as members of its board, per tax filings.

Pratt in January noted the likelihood that the transaction would have gone through even if she had abstained from the vote.

“It was gonna pass anyway. It wouldn’t have made a difference,” she said. “I didn’t have to vote on it. It was on the routine agenda, so it just kind of got approved with everything else.”

Inspector General Isabel Mercedes Cumming said she could not confirm nor deny whether her office is looking into the sale of the parking lots.

Rev. Patrick Clayborn, who took over as Bethel A.M.E.’s pastor after Reid left, said Monday that he has “no knowledge” of the investigation into Pratt’s vote and has not been contacted by the OIG.

Word of the broader review by Cumming’s office surfaced in April after Pugh’s infamous “Healthy Holly” scandal, which began with *The Sun*’s exposé on her sales of what turned out to be nearly \$800,000 worth of her self-published children’s books to the University of Maryland Medical System and politically connected businesses and nonprofits.

Reporters eventually dug up that Pugh had voted to approve lucrative contracts for organizations and companies that purchased copies of her literature promoting children’s fitness and nutrition.

The unpaved lots at Etting Street and W. Lafayette Avenue, located behind the church. Photo by Ethan McLeod.

Upset neighbors

Some of the church's neighbors along Druid Hill Avenue were upset to learn about the property deal—namely that it had already been approved by the city before they learned of it.

In a letter signed by about a dozen people sent to the council president's office in November 2018, they voiced concerns about Pratt's role in the vote, and about losing the city-owned lots that they've used as auxiliary space for years—parking during street-cleaning days, storing vehicles used for commercial businesses, hosting birthday parties and more.

The neighbors had asked that the spending board review the prior approval of the sale, but they said the council president's office responded that it was already a done deal.

As for their concerns, church officials maintain parishioners were already parking in the lots during Bethel's well-attended Sunday services and other events, and that the sanctuary has already been caring for them for years.

And neighborhood groups pushed back against the claim residents weren't informed about the sale, saying they did the proper outreach. At a community meeting at the church this past January—roughly 15 months after Board of Estimates approved the deal—Marble Hill Community Association president Atiba Nkrumah said his organization had surveyed neighbors about the project in 2017.

Upton Planning Committee member Jules Dunham Howie (also an elder at Bethel and a Bethel Outreach Center board member, per its most recent available tax filing) made a similar argument, saying Bethel had shared its plans for community review on multiple occasions in 2017. Both the Upton Planning Committee, which serves as an umbrella group for six community associations, and the Marble Hill Community Association thus gave the project their blessing.

Addressing individual concerns about parking, Bethel officials said they would let neighbors park there during street-cleaning days and snow emergencies. (Abandoned cars and commercial vehicles would be prohibited moving forward, they said, noting they “should not be parked there even now.”)

Rev. Clayborn concluded the gathering by characterizing the conflict as “growing pains” that they could move past. He preached the need for both sides to work together.

“I do believe that the church does not want to inhibit the growth of the residents, and I do believe that the residents don't want to inhibit the growth of the church. We all want to grow. The question is, *How do we grow together?*”

Bethel A.M.E. officials detailed the plans to neighbors at the January meeting, showing a paved parking lot with squat, brick walls around two sides and no gate restricting access to the front.

Nearly a year and a half out from when the \$15 sale was finalized, the church hasn't moved on its construction plans. Smith said Bethel has been raising funds for the project, which is “in progress.” As of this morning, the properties behind the Druid Hill Avenue church remain unpaved, albeit used for their intended purpose as parking.

This story has been updated with additional comment from Bethel A.M.E. steward and director of church growth Janette Smith. A previous version of this story incorrectly said Kurt Schmoke is an active member

Exhibit 4

Board Member	Entity	Page/Item
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems, Inc.	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Office of the City Council President	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	City Council Bill	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	City Council Travel	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Elected Officials Salaries	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Elected Officials Retirement System	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Living Classrooms Foundation	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Office of Councilman James B. Kraft	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Office of the President	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Ordinance of Estimates	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Supplementary Appropriation Bond	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Supplementary Appropriation General Capital	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Supplementary Appropriation General Operating	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Supplementary Appropriation Loan	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Supplementary Federal Fund Operating Appropriation	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	Supplementary Special Fund Operating Appropriation	
President Bernard C. "Jack" Young	William B. Henry II, Councilman	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	A.M. & Son Electric, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Addie Connor	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	AEGIS Security	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Allen & Son Moving & Storage	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Alston & Byrd	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	AM & Son Electric, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	American Contracting and Environmental Services, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Anthony Kalloo	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Associated Black Charities	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Associated Building and Maintenance, Co. Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Ball & Breckenridge Trucking, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Baltimore Street Holdings, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Banks Contracting Co., Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Barbara A. Robinson	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Benjamin L. King Jr.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Benedetto, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Bethel AME	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Bethel Outreach	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Black and Veatch	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Blue Ribbon Committee (BRC)	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Boyd Transportation, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Brenda Thompson	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Brighton Development Group, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Brighton Manor	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Casi, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Channel 75	

Comptroller Joan Pratt	Charles Runkles	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Christian Yother	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Chukuemeka Okora	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	CMMD Enterprises, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Colles Corprew	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Coppin Heights Community Development Corporation, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	D & L Foreclosure Cleanup, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	David Neverdon	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	D & T Welding Contractor, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	David S. Sutton	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Denise Lowery	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	DeQuan's I Enterprise, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	E&J Developer Management Services, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	EA Engineering, Science and Technology	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	East Baltimore Street Holdings, LLC.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Echo House Multi-Service Center, Inc.	
Economic International Construction Co., Inc.		
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Eddie and Sylvia Brown, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Elected Officials Salaries	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Elected Officials Retirement System	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Employees' Retirement System	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Empowerment Academy	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Empowerment Center	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Empower U, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	The Empowerment School	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	East Harbor Family LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Eric Booker	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Etta Services	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Fannie R. Thomas	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Fire and Police Employees' Retirement System	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Fred Wright Contract	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Gayle Guilford	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Gladney Transportation	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Greater New Hope Baptist Church	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Harrison Egebirmolen	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Harrison Healthcare	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Heavenly Grace Assistant Living Facility, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Henry Ford, II	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Horton Mechanical Contractors, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Integrity Realty and Investment, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	J.A.M. #13 Corporation	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	J.M.E Details	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	James Hurtt	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Jayfus Doswell, Ph.D	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Jose M. Elizdalde	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Joseph Forrest	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Jul Enterprise	

Comptroller Joan Pratt	Kayco Environmental	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Kendra Ausby	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Kenneth Banks	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Kevin Butler	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	KIS Systems, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	L.E. Blue & Associates, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	L&J Waste Recycling, LLC	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	LaRian Finney	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Law Office of Leronia Josey and Associates, LLP	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Legal Aid Bureau, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Lennox Dingle	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Little Dimples II Corporation	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Marcel Umphery	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Marilyn Harris-Davis	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Marlaa Reid	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Maxine Boone	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Media Support Services, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Melvin A. Brown	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Merit Building Contracting Services	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Michael Lloyd	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Michael Moore	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Midtown Special Benefits District, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Ms. Toby Cooper	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Morgan Construction Services, Inc	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Multi-Cleaning and Maintenance Systems, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Muhammad Khan	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	National Coalition of 100 Black Women	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Noel Liverpool	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Office of the Comptroller	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Office of the Comptroller Travel	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Office of the Comptroller Audit	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Ogaoma Winkey	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Okora Development	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Parktown Associates, LLC.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Patricia Barber	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Paula Hackett	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Peter Contracting, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Prencella J Hall	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Proper Staffing, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Queen E. Hardy	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Replay Sports	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Rho XI Omega Charities	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Rising Zion Baptist Church	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Roberta's House, Inc.	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Romaine Williams	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	Samantha Brogden-Dowell	
Comptroller Joan Pratt	S & D Services	

[illegible]

Mayor's Response

CITY OF BALTIMORE

BERNARD C. "JACK" YOUNG
Mayor



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

100 Holliday Street, Rm 250
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

January 30, 2020

Ms. Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
100 Holliday Street, Suite 640
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Inspector General Cumming,

Thank you for your detailed Report of Investigation (OIG Case #19-0084-I) involving the disposition of city property to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.

I am writing in response to the actions of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) employees involved in this matter. I have reviewed the report with the Housing Commissioner and several members of his team and requested the following actions:

1. Review the current SOP's for the land disposition process and ensure that city employees are working in accordance with the procedures.
2. Determine the point of failure in the Real Estate Committee process that allowed the purchase to proceed to the Board of Estimates (BOE) without community impact.
3. Draft new SOP's to shore up that point of failure.
4. Review the Land Disposition agreement and determine the appropriate action to take concerning the church's failure to comply with the terms of the agreement.
5. Mayor concurs with a central public abstentions list of members of the BOE.

Once again, thank you for your hard work on behalf of the citizens of Baltimore City.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Morton
Chief of Staff
Mayor's Office

cc: Mayor Bernard C. "Jack" Young
Michael Braverman, Housing Commissioner
Files

Comptroller's Response

COMPTROLLER

JOAN M. PRATT, CPA
Room 204, City Hall
Baltimore, Maryland 21202-3461



OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER

Department of Audits
Department of Real Estate
Municipal Post Office
Municipal Telephone Exchange
Harbor Master

Revised Response

January 30, 2020

Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General
Room 635, City Hall
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland

Dear Ms. Cumming:

Thank you for providing me an opportunity to respond to the Report for OIG Case #19-0084-1 (Report). I have reviewed the Report. I do not disagree that the vote on Bethel A.M.E. Church was a conflict as the result of an administrative oversight. However, some of the statements in the Report are inconsistent or inaccurate and result in findings with which I do not agree.

Community Support

I strongly advocate for transparency. Therefore, I support and encourage community input on matters that affect a community, prior to Board of Estimates approval. However, as stated in the Report on page 2, the Land Disposition Agreement was between the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Bethel A.M.E. Church. Consequently, I did not participate in the DHCD process. I had no influence over the property sale or the involvement of the community in the process. I will not respond further, as you have informed me that this finding does not pertain to me but to the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Reliance on staff to determine abstentions

This finding is not supported by the statements in the Report that were correctly attributed to me and staff members of the Office of the Comptroller. On page 5 of the Report it reads in the fourth full paragraph, "...However, several of the employees of the Office of the Comptroller told the OIG that even when the

Isabel Mercedes Cumming

January 30, 2020

Page 2

abstentions list was being utilized the comptroller, and her staff, went page-by-page through the agenda during the Monday pre-BOE meetings. The OIG learned that the comptroller would verbally announce items she planned to abstain from during the meetings. Comptroller Pratt confirmed to the OIG that she regularly reads the agendas over the weekend and tells her staff in the Monday meetings from which items she plans to abstain." On page 6 of the Report, in the first paragraph it reads, "...The OIG interviewed employees who attended the meeting, none of whom recalled whether the comptroller proclaimed her desire to abstain from the vote."

The pre-Board meeting occurred on October 30, 2017, more than two years after the OIG interviewed staff. With the attenuation of time, it is unrealistic to expect persons to recall what I said or did not say about any abstention on that date. However, it is of great significance that overwhelmingly and without equivocation it was reported by staff and me that it was my pattern and practice that we "went page-by page through the agenda during the Monday pre-Board meetings..." Further upon these undisputed facts, the Report states the OIG learned as quoted above that I verbally announced items I planned to abstain from during the Board of Estimates meeting. Clearly, this undisputed pattern and practice supports my statement that I announced that I was abstaining on Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Further on the same page in the fifth full paragraph it reads, "...The OIG learned that during the Monday meetings, the Lead Tech typically takes note of the items the comptroller will be abstaining on..." My reliance upon staff was limited to an administrative process to ensure that I properly abstained on items on the Board of Estimates agenda. The administrative reliance was solely for the staff to confirm the abstentions based upon my having previously or at the most recent pre-BOE meeting identified an organization or person as a conflict (and was therefore listed as an abstention for me). Since I am ultimately responsible for my vote, even if there is an administrative oversight as in the instant matter, I have and continue to identify items on the Board of Estimates agenda that are a conflict that are to be announced at the Board of Esti-

Isabel Mercedes Cumming

January 30, 2020

Page 3

mates meeting. There is no confusion about the process as asserted in the Report or whose responsibility it is to ensure that I abstain on conflicts of interest.

Based upon the undisputed facts in the Report that describe in detail the pattern and practice by which I identify conflicts of interest, the investigative finding (page 6, paragraph 2) "...the comptroller relies on her staff to identify from which items she should be recused..." is unsupported. This finding is contradicted by numerous cited statements in the Report for OIG Case #19-00841, as referenced above in this response. Therefore, this finding should be removed from the Report.

Explanation to the Baltimore Fishbowl regarding the vote not clear

When I responded to the inquiry of the Baltimore Fishbowl, it was early in 2019 and I am not able to recall exactly what was said or how my response was misunderstood. I do recall however that my response referenced that the name of Bethel AME, as it appears in the list of abstentions that was developed from my prior abstentions did not have periods between the initialism "A.M.E". Bethel A.M.E. (with periods) was named in the November 1, 2017 Board of Estimates agenda. This inconsistency resulted in Bethel A.M.E. not coming up, when the agenda was searched against my list. Simply stated, since the names were not identical. There was not a match between the list and the agenda.

In support of the administrative error, I submit:

Pratt Exhibit 1 - Statement from the Lead Tech

This statement describes the process used by the Lead Tech to confirm abstentions for members of the Board of Estimates. As described in step 1, the final agenda is copied and converted to a PDF. In step 12 of the process, "...File will now scan the entire agenda searching Abstentions as they are entered on the current Abstention list for the Mayor, President, Comptroller, City

Isabel Mercedes Cumming
January 30, 2020
Page 4

Solicitor and Director of Public Works. Step 13 describes the results of the search as follows: "Abstentions will appear by name of Board member, page number, name of entity or person."

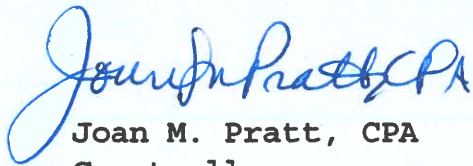
This statement supports that my explanation to the Baltimore Fishbowl as recounted above was clear on how my vote was the result of an oversight and not intentional. Abstentions will be found during the search when the entity or person name is keyed in the agenda in the exact manner in which it was entered on the Abstention list.

Actions taken to prevent occurrence of a conflict

Not abstaining on Bethel A.M.E. Church was unintentional and the result of the administrative oversight and not the result my failing to identify this item as an abstention. Since I became aware of this administrative oversight, I have increased controls to assure compliance with conflict of interest requirements. These include my continued review of the agenda in conjunction with affirmatively informing staff during pre-Board meetings, which items I will abstain on; prior to the Board meeting confirming that staff have correctly identified my abstentions and the page/item number on which they appear; and to check during the Board of Estimates meetings that the abstentions I confirmed have been reported and announced by the Clerk at the beginning of each Board meeting.

I appreciate the Office of the Inspector General's review of this matter and the opportunity to respond to the Report.

Very truly yours,



Joan M. Pratt, CPA
Comptroller

Enc. Pratt Exhibit 1

ALLEGED PROCEEDINGS

PRATT EXHIBIT 1

ABSTENTION PROCESS

The process I used for verifying/checking abstentions in 2017 is as follows:

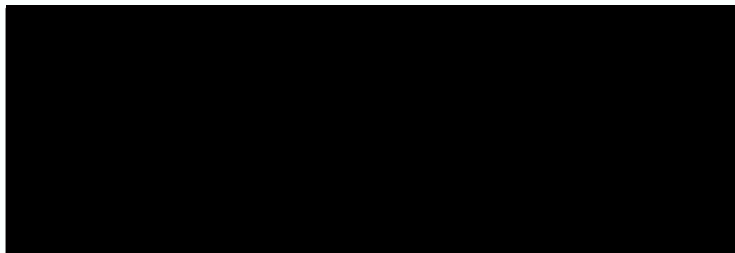
1. Once the Final Agenda has been corrected and submitted to the Print Shop for printing and uploaded to the Website, open PDF to Word program.
2. Go to the Final Agenda Folder. Locate Agenda to be copied.
3. Hit open PDF and Hit Add Folder.
4. Hit Start.
5. Document will start to copy and convert to PDF macro.
6. Once converted to PDF close file.
7. Close folder.
8. Go to View on Task Bar.
9. Hit macros. File will open.
10. Hit view macros.
11. List of Agenda's will appear. Locate Agenda that was just converted.
12. Open file. File will now scan entire Agenda searching Abstentions as they are entered on the current Abstention list for Mayor, President, Comptroller, City Solicitor and Director of Public Works.

Page 2 - cont'd

13. Abstentions will appear by name of Board member, page number, name of entity or person.
14. Once completed. Close file.
15. Once Final Agenda has been printed and delivered to Comptroller's Office, use printed Agenda and compare Abstentions that were found by the Macro.

Affirmation

I [REDACTED] solemnly affirm under the penalty of perjury that this statement is true to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.



OIG Response to the Comptroller



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General
City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, MD 21202



February 4, 2020

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Response to the Comptroller

The OIG acknowledges that the Comptroller does not agree with some of the report's findings. However, the OIG affirms its findings and conclusions after considering the evidence and testimony presented in this matter in totality.

It was noted during the Comptroller's interview with the OIG that at no point in her interview did the Comptroller claim to be misunderstood by the author of the *Baltimore Fishbowl* article. As stated in the OIG report, and confirmed by the Comptroller and the interviewed staff, the only person with access to the list of abstentions is the Lead Tech. The OIG confirmed that the Lead Tech was out of town and the Lead Tech reiterated several times during their interview with the OIG that they were not involved in the abstention process for this meeting. The OIG was told no other member of the Comptroller's staff had access to the list of abstentions. The OIG reaffirms its finding that the explanation regarding the vote was unclear.

The OIG agrees the matter was an oversight and stands by the recommendation in the interest of transparency and accountability that a centralized list of abstentions be maintained.

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

HOTLINE: 443-984-3476/800-417-0430 EMAIL: OIG@BALTIMORECITY.GOV

WEBSITE: OIG.BALTIMORECITY.GOV