Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Zane Desilva, JP, MP

Minister of Housing and Municipalities

Friday, 20th November 2026

Public Consultation on Derelict and Abandoned Buildings

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to update this Honourable House on the Government's public consultation regarding a proposed framework for addressing derelict and abandoned properties in Bermuda.

This consultation supports the objectives of the Affordable Housing Strategy 2025-2035, which this House debated and passed in early October, and recognizes the rehabilitation and productive re-use of derelict and underutilized housing stock as an important element in addressing Bermuda's housing challenges.

Mr. Speaker, while increasing new housing supply remains a priority, we must also acknowledge the significant number of existing residential properties across our Island that remain vacant, derelict, abandoned, or otherwise underutilized. In many cases, these properties are not simply empty. Rather, they are tied up in complex circumstances involving unresolved estates, ownership disputes, title uncertainty, absentee ownership, financial constraints, or even family disagreements that have persisted for years.

These circumstances can leave homes vacant for extended periods, reducing housing availability and contributing to community decline, even though those properties may have the potential to once again provide housing for Bermudian families.

The consultation paper was developed to encourage discussion of these issues, and to seek public views on practical and balanced approaches that may help return suitable properties to productive use. The ultimate objectives are to increase housing opportunities for Bermudians, strengthen our communities, and make better use of our existing housing stock. We can only build so much.

Among the matters under examination are support for families dealing with inheritance and probate matters, opportunities for mediation and dispute resolution, potential incentives for rehabilitation, and examples of how other jurisdiction have

approached long-term vacancy and dereliction. The paper also seeks public views on the safeguards that should accompany any future legislative or policy reforms.

Mr. Speaker, these issues are significant. Since the consultation was launched, it has become apparent that additional time is needed to ensure that the public has a full and meaningful opportunity to consider the issues and provide feedback.

These are not straightforward matters. They touch on family property, inheritance, ownership rights, community development, and the future use of land and housing in Bermuda. They also require us to reflect on our history.

As Honourable Members will appreciate, questions relating to land ownership carry particular significance in Bermuda. Generations of Bermudians have experienced the consequences of historic land losses and the erosion of family property holdings. Those experiences remain part of our collective memory and continue to shape how many people view discussions involving property rights, inheritance, and Government intervention.

It is therefore essential that we approach this matter with care, sensitivity, and humility. Our objective is not simply to identify ways of addressing derelict and abandoned properties. Our objective is to ensure that any future policy approach is fair, transparent, and respectful of constitutional protections and property rights.

Most importantly, we must ensure that whatever measures may ultimately be considered do not repeat the mistakes, inequities, or unintended consequences of the past.

For these reasons, and because the Government wishes to give this matter the careful consideration it deserves, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that the consultation period will be extended by an additional two weeks and will now close on 18 December 2026.

As part of this extended engagement process, the Ministry will host a public conversation on Thursday, 10 December 2026, commencing at 6:00 p.m. The venue is currently being finalized and will be announced shortly.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this meeting is to provide members of the public with an opportunity to learn more about the consultation, ask questions, express concerns, and offer suggestions before the consultation period concludes.

During the extended consultation period, the Ministry will also continue its outreach efforts to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage participation from property owners, families, community organizations, industry stakeholders, and all interested members of the public.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to emphasize that at this stage, no decisions have been made. This consultation is intended to inform the Government's understanding of these issues and to ensure that any future policy direction is grounded in public input, fairness, and respect for property rights.

I therefore encourage all interested persons to review the consultation document, participate in the public meeting on 10 December, and submit their views before the revised closing date of 18 December 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.