

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 27 (Anne Arundel County Delegation)
Environment and Transportation

Finance

Task Force on the Disposition of the Crownsville Hospital Center Property

This bill establishes the Task Force on the Disposition of the Crownsville Hospital Center Property. By January 1, 2016, the task force must report (to the Governor, the General Assembly, the County Executive of Anne Arundel County, and specified State agencies) its findings and recommendations on the sale, transfer, or other disposition of the Crownsville Hospital Center property. The various State agencies represented on the task force must provide staff for the task force.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2015, and terminates June 30, 2016.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Staffing of the task force can be handled with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The 17-member task force includes 3 members of the House of Delegates, who represent the district in which the hospital center is located, and 1 member each from the Legislative Black Caucus and the Anne Arundel County Council. The membership also includes the Secretaries of Transportation, Environment, General Services, Health and Mental Hygiene, and Planning, or their designees.

Several other entities are also represented including the Anne Arundel County Branch of the NAACP, the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, Anne Arundel County Historical Society, and the Generals Highway Council of Civic Associations.

The Governor must designate the chair of the task force. A member of the task force may not receive compensation.

Background/Current Law: Crownsville Hospital Center opened in the early 1900s and was originally called the “Asylum for the Negro Insane.” Located in Anne Arundel County, the property served as a State-run psychiatric hospital until it was closed in June 2004. Due to the size and historical significance of the Crownsville Hospital Center, the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) has been involved in the disposition process of the property. When the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) closed the Crownsville Hospital Center, it provided MDP with appropriate notification regarding excess property, which includes 544 acres and 66 buildings.

The 200 patients residing at the hospital at the time of closure were transferred to other State hospital centers and community programs. However, the campus still has several tenants including three nonprofit behavioral health providers operating beds to serve adults and children with mental illness or addictions. The Maryland Environmental Service (MES) operates the State-owned water and sewer systems located on the Crownsville property. These systems serve the former hospital campus, a Department of Housing and Community Development building, and several county-owned and privately owned properties adjacent to the campus. DHMH pays MES to operate and maintain the water and sewer systems. DHMH also contracts with Anne Arundel County for property maintenance.

The Crownsville Hospital Center campus has an area known as the Crownsville Hospital Cemetery. In 1926, the first person was laid to rest, and in 1958, the last known burial took place. It is estimated that approximately 3,000 individuals were buried during the intervening years. Many individuals (both children and adults) who died at the hospital and had no relatives or friends were buried in this area. The Legislative Black Caucus held a hearing in September 2013 to discuss concerns about the Crownsville Hospital Cemetery and the treatment of African Americans at State hospitals. Concerned local residents expressed interest in having the cemetery history researched and publicized. Some hope that the site can serve as a memorial to honor former patients. Chapter 305 of 2014 established perpetual care maintenance requirements for the cemetery and required DHMH to publish an annual report about the implementation of the new law and the status of the cemetery.

In 2000, MDP's Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) used information gathered from a 1986 historic resource survey to make a formal finding that the property is eligible for listing in the Maryland Register of Historic Properties and the National Register of Historic Places. This determination means that DHMH has several restrictions when transferring the property including (1) avoiding, reducing, or mitigating adverse effects to the historic district; (2) consulting with the public; and (3) completing historical mitigation if it does proceed with adverse action. Examples of adverse action are demolition of historic buildings or the transfer of the property out of State control without easements or other restrictions to ensure long-term preservation.

The Maryland State Clearinghouse for Intergovernmental Assistance (Clearinghouse) also completed a review of the property and has been directly involved in the disposition process. The Clearinghouse review began by convening an interagency committee in 2007 with representatives from MDP, DHMH, the Department of General Services (DGS), the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Department of Business and Economic Development, and MES. The workgroup established guiding principles which were used to evaluate proposals of interest in the Crownsville property from other State agencies. At that time, the committee concluded that the proposed State uses did not meet the guiding principles and, thus, recommended that a request for expressions of interest (REOI) be issued.

This REOI was issued in 2008 by DGS and DHMH. The REOI garnered 12 proposals, 4 of which were selected for consideration. However, negotiations ultimately failed, and there was no final agreement. As there have been no negotiations since 2009, the property is still in DHMH possession. On December 7, 2009, the Clearinghouse issued a formal recommendation for transfer of the property. The recommendation's guiding principles focused on minimizing short- and long-term costs to the State, maximizing the return to the State, and limiting the intensity of uses on the site. The recommendation was valid for a period of three years, so it is likely that the recommendation needs to be revisited and updated. Further, MHT advises that, since the original finding of eligibility for listing in the Maryland and National registers was based on research and standards that are now 30 years old, a new evaluation is necessary.

More recently, MHT provided DHMH with a draft Invitation for Bid for a Preservation Plan for Crownsville Cemetery. DHMH is moving forward with this plan and has contracted with a professor from Howard Community College to conduct a remote sensing study to determine the extent of the burials at the cemetery.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland Department of the Environment, Department of General Services, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

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