



MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF LAUREL

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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February 19, 2020

Delegate Kumar Barve, Chairman
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251
Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Delegate Barve,

As the Director of the City of Laurel Department of Parks and Recreation and the Vice President of the Maryland Municipal League's Parks and Recreation Association, I would like to express my opposition to HB 203, Community Parks and Playgrounds.

There are many wonderful things about serving as a member of a Municipal Parks and Recreation Department; unfortunately, limited budgets and funding is not one of them. The Community Parks and Playgrounds program has offered small cities and towns the opportunity to create amenities that everyone should have the privilege of enjoying in their community but can be out of reach for many due to budgetary constraints. The Community Parks and Playgrounds program allows many municipalities to create parks and build structures that might possibly take years to fund, if even at all.

Last year, the 2.5 million dollars in the Department of Natural Resource's Community Parks and Playgrounds budget was able to fund about 20 municipal projects. With over 75 applications totaling over 9 million dollars, this is just a fraction of the need of the 157 municipalities that are eligible to take advantage of the program. Competing for funding with even more agencies could decimate what little monies municipalities have available to them through this over-subscribed program.

While I understand that even large County Parks and Recreation Departments feel the economic squeeze, counties are able to rely on Program Open Space funding for projects. Counties are eligible for a percentage of funds provided in the Program Open Space budget with no obligation to share any of the funding with municipalities that reside within their jurisdiction. Though some counties do make funds available to municipalities through their local program, it is never guaranteed funding.

Last year, the sponsors of the bill, Baltimore County and Howard County combined received 20 % of the total POS dollars allocated to all 24 counties in the state. As these two wealthy counties have no municipalities within their borders, they were able to retain all the funding for their own use. With \$6.5 million allocated to Baltimore County and \$3.4 million to Howard, it hardly seems necessary for them to dip into the Community Parks and Playgrounds pot to receive additional funding. Last year's CP&P projects ranged in cost from \$6,000 to \$250,000. This minimal amount of funding would have little impact on a multimillion dollar county project, but will make a huge difference for a project in a small city or town.

When my agency was looking to replace an older, well-worn playground at one of its busiest parks, it was through the Community Parks and Playgrounds program that the city was able to build its newest and most high adventure structure that is unlike any other playground in Laurel. The project could have been funded through the City's Capital Improvement Program, but competing with other high dollar projects like street and sidewalk repairs and information and technology requirements it can be difficult to approve items that don't carry the same immediate need.

The Department of Natural Resources absolutely got it right when it restricted the Community Parks and Playgrounds program for use only by municipalities and I encourage to you to reconsider passage of HB203.

Sincerely,
Joanne Barr, Director
Laurel Department of Parks and Recreation

CC: Environment and Transportation Committee membership