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SB0906

February 29, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 906 –Housing and Community Development – Conversion of Commercial Buildings for Residential Use – Report

POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **opposes** Senate Bill (SB) 906.

This legislation would require Baltimore City and other jurisdictions to inventory vacant commercial buildings, develop a plan to convert vacant commercial buildings for residential use, and submit a report to the Department of Housing and Community Development on or before January 1, 2025. The report would be required to be updated every 2 years and require State DHCD to establish and maintain a database of vacant commercial buildings in the State that have the potential to be converted for residential use.

SB 906 would have limited usefulness in addressing the housing crisis. The data collection and reporting requirements of this Bill would require additional staff time to implement. The data required is already publicly available for properties under City control. It is unclear what problems these data collection and reporting requirements will solve or why they are necessary. Our commercial zoning categories allow for residential use and in some cases at a higher density than some of the residential categories.

BCA already has a robust Vacants Reduction Strategy in place and has made historic investments for transformative and equitable economic development in neighborhoods with high rates of vacant and abandoned properties. Almost every vacant commercial building in the City of Baltimore has the potential to be converted to residential, as a permitted use in most cases, or conditional by the Board or City Council Ordinance. The Baltimore City Zoning Code (*see ART. 32, TBL 10-301*) already allows for residential uses in commercial properties including Live-Work, Multi-Family, Rowhouse and other higher density residential uses.

If the purpose of this Bill is to re-occupy vacant buildings, our Zoning Code already allows for that in most cases. All City-owned properties that are available for purchase, including vacant residential and commercial, are currently available to the public and easily searchable on the [BuyIntoBmore site](https://mogr.baltimorecity.gov/).

BCA has a vested interest in balancing the uses of our Zoning categories. In some areas of the City we have a particular interest in preserving industrial and heavy commercial zoning and in other areas, expanding residential uses. This legislation is not necessary and would occupy valuable staff time to create a plan and report that may be contrary to plans already in place to address vacant buildings, or properties that we do not currently control. For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests an **unfavorable** report on Senate Bill 906.