

Testimony of Elly Colmers Cowan
Director of Advocacy, Preservation Maryland

Before the
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 4, 2020

Pertaining To: HB125, Board of Public Works – Land Acquisition – Requirements
Support

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the value of historic resources and quality green spaces in our rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Preservation Maryland is the statewide voice for historic preservation that strives to protect the best of Maryland. Since 1931, we have worked tirelessly to preserve the places, stories, and communities in Maryland that matter.

SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 125

Preservation Maryland supports HB125, which would require the Board of Public Works (BPW) to provide the Legislative Policy Committee with a justification for any acquisition of real property worth at least \$500,000 and a cost-benefit analysis. If the acquisition of property is from the federal government and requires the State to provide ongoing maintenance, the BPW may not approve the acquisition until a study has been completed on the ongoing fiscal effect of the acquisition on the State.

The bill does not apply to acquisitions of property for land preservation and conservation purposes, property at the Port of Baltimore or BWI Airport, or federally owned military property.

As described in the Fiscal and Policy Note, the Governor signed a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2017 for a potential land swap in which the State would acquire 512 acres of Oxon Cove National Park in Prince George's County in exchange for 2,841 acres of State-owned parkland in

Frederick and Washington counties, including a portion of South Mountain Battlefield.

While talks with Washington's NFL team about building its next stadium at Oxon Cove National Park have ceased, the Hogan administration is continuing to pursue the land swap without any meaningful consultation with local officials, the affected communities, or the public. The proposal sets a concerning precedent where state lands could be traded away without any public input or a transparent and open process.

Additionally, the swap and subsequent development of Oxon Cove Park would result in a net loss of protected land in our state. The park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and receives thousands of visitors every year. A refuge for residents of area communities, the park offers trails for biking and walking and greenspace for free play and picnicking. The park also includes a farmyard with animals that has delighted generations of children.

While not proposed for development, concerns about the future of South Mountain Battlefield have also been raised. The Central Maryland Heritage League has noted the considerable state and private investment in the park, which includes three recently renovated museum and visitor centers, as well as trails and history programs. The National Park Service's maintenance backlog and resource constraints could result in a decline in the quality of park facilities and programs.

HB125 will ensure that acquisition and disposal of state property receive the necessary level of review and consideration; therefore, I urge a favorable report.

Contact: Elly Colmers Cowan, Preservation Maryland (443) 386-4609