



March 4, 2021

Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

I am asking for your support for a multi-use sports and events center in downtown Hagerstown. While the idea of a stadium has consistently been a topic of debate for many years in the community, it has never had the support of the business and investment community as it does today. Led by respected businessman Blackie Bowen, the project has the oversight of an investment-minded group that combines a vision for a revitalized urban core with the fiscal responsibility necessary to ensure its success for decades to come.

My partners and I began investing in downtown Hagerstown in 2004, specifically buying "distressed" assets (companies and real estate) which we breathe life into with fresh capital and energy. Those energies have resulted in owning 9 companies and over 300,000 SF of real estate, all within the City. Last year, Beachley, a furniture and millworking manufacturer, moved into 100,000 SF factory in Hagerstown in a renovated industrial building. I continue to invest here because I see opportunities and it is working. There are many others who are doing the same at an equal or greater scale. However, we need a project that links those individual efforts and those of the City of Hagerstown together. The integration of the facility into the Cultural Trail connecting the City Park the Arts & Entertainment District would be an impressive public-private partnership between the City, the State and private investors that could become a model for revitalizing struggling communities. The support is here and so is the demand.

During my factory build out, I was contacted by a youth volleyball group to see if I had space available. At the completion of the project, we had a gym with three volleyball courts in 15,000 SF of space. The group pays a fair rent and the space is full on nights and weekends when our manufacturing operations are not running. It has turned out to be a perfect partnership. There are many more opportunities such as this available in our City. To be able to capture these opportunities in a multi-use arena would give our City – the housing, restaurants, the shops, etc. - an economic boost that will only attract more attention and more investment.

I am asking for your support in this Downtown Hagerstown project. We have momentum that even a pandemic has not curtailed. Why not make this long-debated project a model for the State in support of its small, historically-rich communities? To have baseball be the foundational activity that pulls it together only seems even more appropriate.

Sincerely,

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