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HB 1293

March 16, 2021

TO: Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1293 Baltimore City – West North Avenue Development Authority

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1293 with amendments.

Under HB 1293 the North Avenue Development Authority would be required to develop a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan in partnership with local residents, to support affordable housing, healthy neighborhoods, accessible transportation and spur economic development in the target area. The focus of the Development Authority would include areas within 250 yards of the 600 blocks through the 3200 blocks of West North Ave.

The nearly 2.4- mile proposed corridor is the focus of millions of dollars of current and proposed investment, beginning with the redevelopment of the former Madison Park Apartments at the eastern boundary and terminating at Hilton Avenue. Through North Avenue Rising, this area has been the focus of a long-standing partnership between multiple City and State Agencies including the MTA, along with the Departments of Planning and Housing and Community Development, and on the City side, the Departments of Transportation, Housing and Community Development, and Planning.

This stretch of North Avenue includes the City's Westside Impact Investment Area, Walbrook Lumber site redevelopment, Coppin State University, the Black Arts District, and numerous communities that are likely to be part of a citywide Middle Neighborhoods strategy. A half-mile radius of North Avenue includes Dorothy Heights Elementary/Middle, a 21st century school, the new Westside Recreation Center. Baker Division homeownership, Etting Street Black Women Build, and Marshall Gardens.

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A dedicated Development Authority would provide a singular focus to ensure that efforts are coordinated and that neighborhood voices will be heard—a critical first step to developing an equity-driven implementation strategy. Agency and other stakeholder communication would be expanded and enhanced, improving opportunities for residents to understand and participate in the investment and changes directly affecting their blocks and their communities. Development authorities can serve as clearinghouses and resource centers, coordinating development opportunities and enhancing local participation.

The West North Avenue Development Authority would have a diverse membership of representatives comprised of State and City Officials as well as City agencies, including the Commissioner of Baltimore City DHCD. Representatives of local institutions of higher learning would also sit on the Authority to support the development of a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan. MICA's presence on North Avenue further anchors the community as an arts district and on the west side, Coppin State University's state-of-the-art Science and Technology Center has transformed the 2500 block of West North Avenue.

BCA supports the creation of the West North Avenue Development Authority and the development of a comprehensive neighborhood plan to more effectively coordinate City and State investments to benefit the North Ave corridor. By building off of current assets, planned investments and with the advice and assistance of the members of the Authority, it is the BCA's hope that the residents of the target area will have improved access to affordable housing, healthier neighborhoods and increased economic development.

BCA supports the Sponsors amendments, which would give the Authority the ability to modify the target area and buffer zone by a majority vote of all members and would remove the requirement for the Department of Commerce to staff the Authority.

We respectfully request a report of **favorable with amendment** on House Bill (HB) 1293.