



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

Ref: HB 1073, Housing and Community Development – Neighborhood Revitalization
– Passive House Pilot Program

February 18, 2021

Dear Delegate Barve,

As president of the Maryland Institute College of Art, I am pleased to provide this letter of enthusiastic support to the “Passive House Pilot Program, aka ‘Housing as Catalyst for Social Change’ and as ‘Carver House’. The initiative would bring together the anchor institutions, MICA, Coppin State University and Carver Vocational-Technical High School, with Innovators such as The South Baltimore Community Land Trust, the Baltimore City Public Schools CTE program, Southway Builders and others in a project that will rehabilitate vacant west Baltimore row-homes into affordable, energy efficient, healthy “Passive House” homes and create learning and training opportunities for youth and students.

The pilot project is designed to fuse homeownership and “green” builder training while fighting climate change and social inequity. It fulfills the promise of regenerative enterprise by leveraging resources and partnerships to build a multi-sector ramp to self-sufficiency. Using housing as a catalyst for social change, the project will yield a model that can be replicated across the city and the nation.

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While Baltimore is a vibrant city, it is also a post-industrial city. The specific neighborhood now includes many who have quite low incomes, resulting in high rates of home and home energy insecurity. Economic dispossession leads to physical dispossession. There are blocks of abandoned houses; the people who remain often report an alienation from their neighborhoods, from the rapidly deteriorating built environment and, eventually, to the outside. During the annual “Baltimore Thinkathon,” conducted by MICA and the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance, residents who worked to keep their homes tidy reported littering outside because they did not feel the same about the streets outside of their homes. One recurring suggestion is to tear down the shells but that disrupts rows and the extended families and communities who once lived there.

The climate of Baltimore is cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Utility bills present challenges to many families. According to a [study](#), low income families in Baltimore spend an average of 18% of their income on energy—9 times the percentage of affluent families (Applied Public Policy Research Institute for Study and Evaluation). Built to the passive house international building standard, passive houses promise to save 90% of energy costs, leading to energy independence. No less importantly, the project builds a model for youth workforce development in a growing field. There is currently a need for builders skilled in sustainable building practices. As an early proposal stated, “All of these efforts in combination catalyze a thriving environment which empowers the community to steward and build upon this pilot. The ultimate goal of the Passive House pilot is to engage and empower community members to design, refit, and sustain a passive house community in Baltimore.” From the beginning, MICA’s Department of Architectural Design and Master’s degree of Social Design program have been instrumental in conceiving and building this project, demonstrating MICA’s commitment to community development.

MICA is already actively immersed in community practice. The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City profiled MICA in its study, [“The Overlooked Anchors Advancing](#)

[a New Standard of Practice for Arts and Culture Organizations to Create Equitable Opportunity in America's Cities.](#)” funded by the Kresge Foundation. MICA was the only higher education institution among the non-profit organizations profiled. The authors wrote, “We chose to profile MICA because its deep understanding of the anchor framework and its nearly two-decade long anchor engagement stood out among the arts and culture organizations we reviewed. The prominence of MICA in anchor collaboratives is also notable because arts and culture organizations, even art colleges, typically do not lead such collaborations.”

We hope to continue our community work in partnership with the State of Maryland by supporting bill HB 1073.

Sincerely,



Samuel Hoi, President,
Maryland Institute College of Art

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