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The Town of Williamsport

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URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY

The Town of Williamsport is seeking Urban Renewal Authority pursuant to Article III, Section 61 of the *Maryland Constitution* so that it can exercise the powers granted to it pursuant to *Annotated Code of Maryland, Local Government Article, Section 5-215*.

This authority has been granted to at least 68 other Maryland Municipalities over a span of more than 50 years.

In Williamsport, as in other jurisdictions, absentee landlords and irresponsible property owners have properties that have been vacant, abandoned, vandalized and are a blight on the community. The Mayor and Council believe that Urban Renewal Authority could be used to address these concerns and to assist the Town in its ongoing economic development efforts. In many instances the requests of the Town to discuss these properties have been ignored for years.

The content of the requested legislation is only applicable within the confines of the corporate limits of the Town.

The Mayor and Council of Williamsport are seeking the Legislature's assistance in their attempt to improve the Town of Williamsport as well as the region through the enactment of the requested legislation.

The proposed *Urban Renewal Authority* legislation contains numerous policies and procedures which municipalities must follow which help in economic development.

As part of the legislation, an Urban Renewal Plan must be developed and submitted to the Mayor and Council for consideration and approval. The Plan should include, but not be limited to, properties identified as blighted, abandoned, in disrepair or dangerous.

After public hearings, review by the local Planning Commission and formal adoption by Resolution, the Town will then be authorized to approach the property owners and/or engage in an active and planned program of economic development with a goal to eliminate slum and blight within the Town.

The Town of Williamsport is currently in a phase of economic growth which in many instances is being driven by growing tourism due to its location adjacent to the C & O Canal National Park and the recent location of the Park Headquarters for the C & O Canal National


Park within the Town limits. The aesthetic appearances of the structures within the Town are important in that regard.

In addition, The Town is in need of this legislation to allow it to work in a meaningful way to convince owners of blighted properties that are impacting neighborhoods and the business community to engage with the Town to find solutions to their property issues.

Because Article III Section 61 of the *Maryland Constitution* requires municipalities to have this authority conferred to it by the General Assembly, the residents and elected officials of the Town is requesting your assistance and support in passage of this necessary legislation.

The language of the proposed Bill tracks closely the authority previously granted to the Town of Boonsboro as well as similar Bills being considered this year for the Town of Hancock in Washington County and the Town of Mt. Airy in Carroll County.

Thank you for your anticipated assistance to the Town of Williamsport in connection with the passage of this Bill.



William Green, Mayor