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MAYOR

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**HB 798**

March 7, 2023

**TO:** Members of the Appropriations Committee

**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** House Bill 798 – Baltimore City - Modifying or Closing Public School Facility - Review by Community Task Force

**POSITION: Support with Amendments**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 798 **with amendments**.

As originally drafted HB 798 would require a task force, appointed by a community association, to examine and make recommendations concerning any future use of a public-school facility, including any real property, that is a part of that school facility before the Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners (Board) take final action on a matter to discontinue a program and close, declare surplus, or modify the ongoing use. The introductory Bill also requires the members of the task force to sign the sale contract for any facility to be sold.

This Bill as introduced is problematic for several reasons: Baltimore City does not have any legal recognition of community associations, nor does the City designate an official association for each neighborhood. There are currently 286 Community Associations that have self-registered through Baltimore City Department of Planning's online portal, which was created solely through public submission. There are many more ad-hoc community associations that have not registered or have registered and are no longer active or have current contact information. Some communities have multiple community associations with overlapping boundaries and different objectives, while other communities have no association at all or one that is inactive or not representative of the broader community. Additionally, it is unclear the legality of members of a Community Task Force signing a contract of sale.

House Bill 798 as amended would address the intent of the Bill: to codify our ongoing commitment to community engagement in the disposition process along with addressing maintenance and security concerns highlighted by the community. By removing the requirement for a community task force to assemble and make recommendations before the Board closes, declares surplus or modifies the use of a school, the amended Bill requires community engagement after the decision of the Board to focus it on the outcomes of the disposition or reuse of facility and its grounds.

The amendments would strengthen the BCA's commitment to community engagement by requiring Baltimore City to develop a plan that will include:

1. An initial assessment
2. A community engagement process to receive input from the surrounding community on any future use of the public-school facility
3. The development of a plan for the disposition, reuse or demolition of the public-school facility
4. Issue requests for Qualifications or Requests for Proposals that includes use recommendations that are based on the outcomes of the community engagement.
5. Developing a security and grounds maintenance plan that will be implemented from the time of school closure to when the new developer or lessee takes possession of the property unless otherwise specified by legal agreement between the City and new developer and lessee.

Baltimore City already has a strong process in place for community input that includes engagement through ongoing neighborhood planning efforts and during the selection of any future developer of the site through the disposition process where neighborhood stakeholders can make recommendations and express their desires regarding the future use of these properties. This legislation would bolster those efforts to equitably balance both the desires of the community and the realities of driving purposeful re-use of former school buildings which are often driven by other factors outside of our control such as competing community interests, the conditions of the facilities, market interest and local zoning laws, to name a few.

This legislation should be amended to be effective as of January 11, 2023, as to not delay city-wide ongoing disposition efforts being undertaken by the Development Division under the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully **supports** House Bill 798 **with amendments** and respectfully requests a **favorable** report.