



Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Testimony: SB517 – “Port Deposit State Historical Park – Included Areas

Position: Oppose

Hearing Date: February 15, 2023

Testimony of Ted Evgeniadis, Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman and Committee:

Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association opposes SB517 “Port of Deposit State Historical Park - Included Areas”. This bill would take the historic waterfront Tome School land out of the Port of Deposit Historical Park. The Park was established last year with the enactment of the Maryland parks bill – the Great Maryland Outdoors Act (Senate Bill 541).

The Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association is a licensed Waterkeeper® 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the ecological health of the Lower Susquehanna River Watershed and the Chesapeake Bay. The Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper patrols the river for illegal pollution, and when necessary, enforces environmental laws to protect the river and communities that depend on it. Addressing this bill’s environmental repercussions towards local water quality of the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake along with the general well-being of our communities is of the utmost importance to this committee.

Due to the economic, historical, and environmental importance of the site as explained in the Maryland DNR “Report on the Port of Deposit State Historical Park”, we urge maintaining the intent of the Parks bill in preserving the waterfront site. Given the human, wildlife benefits and local benefit to the Port Deposit community, Tome School is more valuable to the state as part of the Port of Deposit Park as originally visualized.

Senate Bill 541 of 2022 - Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service and State Parks - Alterations (Great Maryland Outdoors Act) mandates that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) establish a “Port of Deposit State Historical Park” as a partnership park that seeks to “educate the public about and preserve and interpret the lives and experiences of black Americans both before and after the abolition of slavery.”

There was general consensus among the Advisory Committee that both the Tome School held historical and cultural significance. They found that there was value in preserving and interpreting the history and the archeology there, and that the public would benefit from some level of public access. The Tome School Site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

The Maryland General Assembly and local leaders should support existing efforts to provide access to the sites. Removing these sites from a plan that preserves these parcels as a state park would have detrimental impacts to local water quality and the surrounding community. Without the assurance that these lots will be used for preservation purposes and for public access, there are risks that this land may be developed further for residential, commercial or industrial uses. This area of the land is not suitable for increased development and will cause immediate harm to the town of Port Deposit, the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay.

Increasing the amount of impervious surfaces and other forms of development reduce the infiltration of water into the ground. Impervious surfaces especially on top of bluffs overlooking the Susquehanna River will greatly contribute to higher storm water runoff, greater sediment yields, and increased pollutant loads, all of which will degrade water quality of the Lower Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay.

The Town of Port Deposit already suffers from the impacts of flooding and the damages to public and private property that comes along with it. Valuable property is lost due to erosion and eroded land allows sediment to build up in waterways, killing fish and aquatic species. The changes in land use associated with urban development affect flooding in many ways. Removing vegetation and soil, grading the land surface, and constructing drainage networks increase runoff to streams from rainfall and snowmelt.

We see corporations undermine the processes set forth to protect the welfare of our communities in the name of power and greed. No other uses for this property should be explored as the current plan would be a valuable addition to the community as a state park system. No other development scheme that may be in discussions behind closed doors should be pursued.

The people of Port Deposit and Marylanders in general will benefit greatly from more open, green and preserved areas along the Lower Susquehanna River. The people of Maryland would be better off for their health and well-being if these parcels of land remain protected by the state to be used for the public good and nothing else. We urge an unfavorable report on SB517. Thank you for your attention to my testimony.

For the River,



Ted Evgeniadis  
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper  
Executive Director