



February 20, 2023

The Honorable Kumar Barve  
Chair, Environment and Transportation  
Maryland House of Delegates  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein  
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation  
Maryland House of Delegates  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: the **Maryland the Beautiful legislation** ([HB 631](#)). **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

We are grateful for your proposal of this legislation and your dedication to land conservation. On behalf of Baltimore Green Space, I write to urge your support for the **Maryland the Beautiful legislation** ([HB 631](#)), to advance this bill favorably from the committee **with amendments**.

Baltimore Green Space is Baltimore's only environmental land trust and one of the few land trusts in Baltimore City increasing its conservation holdings each year. We currently protect 19 spaces and 61 acres of land. Despite the reputation of crime and blight, Baltimore City contains an abundance of green spaces with over 400 spaces on vacant lands without land security. At least 100 of these are 5 years old or more. These spaces are largely located in historically redlined neighborhoods impacted by historical discrimination, and they are in need of protection and resources.

It is not uncommon for development to displace a long-standing community project because funds can't be raised fast enough to secure the land from an owner in need of selling the property. In the past three years alone, we are aware of the following green spaces which have been displaced or are facing displacement, because of ownership changes or changes in ownership management: Cherry Hill Urban Garden, The Remington Village Green, and Bradford Street Park. A revolving loan fund would increase the ability of land trusts to acquire valuable conservation spaces. It could even be what saves the Pigtown Community Garden.

This past year Pigtown Community Garden which provides almost a half-acre of food to the community in a food desert and has been operating and serving the community since 2011 was purchased by a new owner. This new owner despite having NO imminent plans to develop the property is now charging local gardeners to garden land they maintained for over a decade. He is unwilling to donate the land and the price he is willing to sell for (at least \$80,000 at last check) is far beyond the means of the current budget of our small land trust and beyond the means of the community gardeners in general. Photos and





articles can be found here: <https://www.baltimoresun.com/photos/bal-md-pigtown-community-garden-vg-20221102-aznjn2du7jdg3el36y2ic6wh7m-photogallery.html> . And additional articles found here: <https://civileats.com/2021/12/03/a-baltimore-urban-farm-fights-for-food-sovereignty-in-the-face-of-eviction/>, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-pigtown-community-garden-20221109-dl7nlmsstjanbf3pkzjr6gizk4-story.html>.

Having access to the revolving loan fund would allow us to be better poised to conserve land that faces this kind of development risk. It would allow us to purchase land and fundraise over a time scale not governed by a landowner's timetable. **We recommend no change to this portion of the bill.**

Of the over 400 green spaces in Baltimore, many of these spaces routinely secure grants from the state's Keep Maryland Beautiful grant program currently providing \$5,000 grants for local stewardship. This grant program works well and is relatively easy for community leaders to participate in. Increasing this fund would increase the ability to impact communities. I would recommend you **consider increasing the limit to \$10,000**, so that you might allow larger projects to utilize your funds for deeper impact.

In relationship to the Land Trust Stewardship Capacity Grants and the Land Trust Stewardship Improvement Grants we recommend increasing the funding pot and the cap on awards. There are over 40 land trusts in Maryland and those numbers are growing. Increasing funding will allow for more land trusts to access these funds. If land trusts are to grow to meet the needs of 30x30 it seems that \$50,000 in each area may not go very far and may limit the ability of trusts to increase holdings at the rates needed to impact climate change.

As land trusts increase their holdings it becomes more important than ever to have extra capital for both stewardship and capacity building. We recommend making \$10,000 the minimum and **changing the limit to \$20,000 in both areas**. The Janice Hollman award through the Keep Maryland Beautiful program has a \$10,000 cap on the program and historically is only distributed in \$4,000 to \$5,000 awards. Setting \$10,000 as the minimum and raising the cap would again allow for flexibility to support projects with deeper impact.

We definitely support this bill and the positive impacts it could have and we hope you will consider making these minor adjustments to bolster the land trust community and community leaders caring for the land. Thank you for the legacy of your legislation work.

Sincerely,

Katie Lautar  
Executive Director, Baltimore Green Space