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CECIL COUNTY, MARYLAND

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March 8, 2023

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: House Bill 1140 – Port of Deposit State Historical Park – Included Areas

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

I am writing to request an unfavorable report for HB 1140. As Cecil County Executive, I am strongly opposed to this legislation which would undermine the prudent actions of this General Assembly during the 2022 session.

Last year, the legislature passed (and my administration supported) the Great Outdoors Act, which created a state and county partnership to provide for a new Maryland State Park in Port Deposit. In furtherance of this initiative, the General Assembly established an advisory committee to advise the Maryland Department of Natural Resources on the scope and management of the State Park project. Stakeholders include one member designated by the Mayor and Town Council of Port Deposit, two members designated by the Cecil County Delegation of the General Assembly, the Cecil County Executive, the President of the Cecil County Council, President of the Cecil County Branch of the NAACP, President of the Historical Society of Cecil County, Director of the Cecil County Department of Parks and Recreation, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, Representatives from the state departments of Commerce, Environment, and Planning, Director of the Maryland Historical Trust, President of the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Gateway, Superintendent of Cecil County Public Schools, Executive Director of Cecil County Public Library, and the President of Cecil College.

Now, the efforts of these stakeholders are in jeopardy.

I would like to first share with you some important background information for context. In 1999, the Maryland General Assembly created the Bainbridge Development Corporation to oversee the clean-up and development of the then polluted 1200-acre Bainbridge Navy Base in Port Deposit. The clean-up and redevelopment was conceived in two phases. In 2022, Cecil County signed a contract for Phase 1, currently our largest economic development project totaling \$250 million and encompassing nearly four million square feet of commercial activity. Later this year, we look forward to signing the contract for Phase 2, which will nearly double the square footage and capital investment.

There is no Phase 3 development planned for this parcel. The remaining land either contains steep slopes or is associated with the historic Tome School, forest conservation, a riparian buffer, or a national landmark, namely, the site of the Snow Hill Antebellum Free Slave community, which predates the Civil War. Additionally, this land is situated in the Chesapeake Bay critical zone. For these reasons, the General Assembly directed that this acreage be used as the basis for the Port of Deposit State Park. Passage of HB 1140 will grant the Bainbridge Development Corporation members the ability to sell off these sacred sites to developers at the expense of the State Park and our local cultural heritage.

I categorically oppose selling State Park land to developers and oppose allowing an organization that has failed to do anything positive or constructive with these historic landmarks for over 20 years. Sites like the Snow Hill Antebellum Archaeological Site have been ignored for too long. As a result of this prolonged inactivity, these sites have either decayed or fallen victim to arson, like the historic Tome building and gardens designed by Frederick Olmstead, who also designed Central Park in New York City.

Land associated with Phases 1 and 2 were indeed harmed by environmental contaminants, rendering them unfit for residential development. Thus, industrial use was determined to be most appropriate after remediation. The Bainbridge Development Corporation has made sound decisions regarding the development of Phases 1 and 2. However, this has not been the case with the remaining parcel.

Port Deposit will doubtless receive a financial windfall from Phases 1 and 2 – and it will benefit this municipality for years to come. Therefore, any suggestion that Port Deposit needs the State to sell a State Park to developers for its economic survival is simply untrue.

The bottom line is this: There *is* a State Park provided for in current law. There *is* funding in the Governor's budget for continued soil testing for this site. And there *is* an active group of stakeholders organized and ready to work toward our stated goal.

Open Space is important. We have invested millions of dollars in Open Space for our residents to enjoy and to support economic growth in our county by attracting high-paying jobs and quality businesses. We look forward to continuing this effort with this new State Park.

As Mark Twain said, "Buy land, they're not making it anymore." Last year, the legislature listened, and I urge lawmakers to continue listening.

We are on a path to do what is right and that includes honoring the freed slave archaeological site on the land in question. This bill would undermine this profound step.

For all these reasons I oppose HB 1140 and urge an unfavorable report for this misguided legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hornberger', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Danielle Hornberger
County Executive