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BILL NO.: **HB 706**

TITLE: **Economic Development - Sustainable Communities - Business Façade Improvement Program**

SPONSOR: **The Speaker**

COMMITTEE: **Ways and Means**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: **February 23, 2023**

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 706 – Economic Development - Sustainable Communities - Business Façade Improvement Program. This legislation would establish the Business Façade Improvement Program.

Like other jurisdictions across the State, Baltimore County seeks to support small businesses and help revitalize older commercial districts. Older commercial spaces and buildings may be functional, but in need of a “facelift” to restore a façade or make exterior improvements. HB 706 would give businesses located within State-designated Sustainable Communities financial support to encourage façade improvements, including things like better signage, exterior lighting, and other exterior improvements. Such improvements can enhance visibility, and drive renewed interest in local businesses within walkable commercial corridors. Reinvigorating such “main street” commercial districts is what the Sustainable Communities program is all about. Visible improvements, like façade enhancements and external lighting can positively impact neighboring properties and the community, spurring additional investments and revitalization.

HB 706 is an investment in the future tax base of our Sustainable Communities that will pay dividends for years to come. More visible businesses are more viable businesses, employing more people, generating more economic activity, and increasing confidence of nearby businesses and residents to make additional investments in their communities.

Counties are well-equipped to administer façade improvement grants that can complement existing business assistance programs. Further, we see this fund as complementary to other programs currently administered by the State’s Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)

through their Sustainable Communities Program, including Neighborhood Business Works, Community Legacy, Baltimore Regional Neighborhood Initiative, and National Capital Strategic Economic Development Fund. Baltimore County looks forward to deploying this tool to support stronger businesses in Sustainable Communities.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 706. For more information, please contact Jenn Aiosa, Director of Government Affairs at jaiosa@baltimorecountymd.gov.