



SB1005/HB1427
West North Avenue Development Authority - Alterations

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House of Delegates

Ways and Means Committee

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HB-1427

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West North Avenue Development Authority

Madame Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice-Chairwoman Wilkins, and other members of the Committee. It's my pleasure to provide favorable written testimony in support of SB1005/HB1427

The Maryland General Assembly established the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA), on October 1, 2021, to create a comprehensive plan for housing, economic, transportation, and neighborhood development along West North Avenue between 600 - 3200 Block, defined as the Target Area, and 250 yards surrounding the Target Area, defined as the Buffer Zone.

On November 10, 2022, The Office of the Maryland Attorney General further clarified the intent of the General Assembly and articulated the following legislative mission for the Authority:

- *Create a forum for stakeholders to come together on "one plan" for West North Avenue*
- *Serve as a "clearinghouse and resource center" for promoting coordination and communication on development opportunities for West North Avenue*
- *Ensure that money is being spent effectively and efficiently (for development) and that development is happening in the appropriate way for West North Avenue,*
- *Provide advisory services (to State and City agencies) on planning and development for West North Avenue*
- *"Initiate" and "Fund" development projects for West North Avenue*
- *Operate within the appropriated funding structure of the State government within the Office of the Governor*

The letter from the Office of the Attorney General also stated, *“The Authority serves a public purpose. Its function is to promote the revitalization of a neighborhood, both for the benefit of the neighborhood’s residents and for the general purpose of economic development. EC § 12-706. The General Assembly also intended to benefit Coppin State and indicated that intent both by making the President of Coppin State the Authority’s chair, EC § 12-703(b), and by establishing a target area centered on Coppin State’s campus, EC § 12-701. Because Coppin State is part of the State’s “consolidated system of public higher education,” these benefits to Coppin State serve the interest of the State as a whole. See Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 12-101(a).”*

On April 27, 2023, the Authority was assigned an Assistant Attorney General to further provide advice and counsel to the Authority on By-laws, procurement, personnel, and general operations to meet the intent of the General Assembly. Our Assistant Attorney General, along with other team members of the Office of the Attorney General, under the direction of Attorney General Anthony Brown. provided recommended statutory amendments to the legislation establishing the authority that were later drafted as formal recommended Bill amendments from the Office of the Attorney General on January 10, 2024 using the same statues that established the powers and duties of the Maryland Economic Development Corporation that however will be exclusively used within **a defined area of Baltimore that is experiencing 56% of the city’s vacancies of residential and commercial properties which hinders the optimal revenue collection for the State from property, sales, and income taxes that is unfortunately contributing to the current revenue, public safety, social, affordable housing, educational, and competitive economic challenges of our State.**

As stated in the Fiscal Note these expanded powers allow WNADA to generate revenue (for the State and Baltimore City), which may eventually lead to the authority being self-supporting. In addition, MBE, Woman, Veteran, Small, and Disadvantage businesses will continue to positivity benefit from the existing Procurement Div. II exemption. For example, our Authority has established a 31% MBE goal. This metric exceeds the State goal by 2%. To date, we believe we are the only State agency meeting and exceeding this goal with 46% of our procurement awarded to MBE, minority- or woman-, or small disadvantaged businesses with 39% awarded to women-owned businesses of color including Black and Asian, to date, for developing our comprehensive plan and providing technical assistance to nonprofit developers building affordable housing.

In essence this bill codifies the intent of the General Assembly as recommended by the Office of the Attorney General which represents the first holistic planning and economic development entity in the country to address the systemic root causes of “Redlining” that was specifically created, established, and promoted with devastating long-term economic, housing, transportation, and neighborhood impact in the historic old West Baltimore communities which eventually created the “Black Butterfly” effect in Baltimore City within the Authority’s catalyst area includes 56% of the vacancies of residential and commercial properties in Baltimore City along with the lack of sufficient retail are serious impediments to the State and City fully realizing its economic growth potential through revenue derived from property, sales, and income taxes.

The 12 resource-rich, but underinvested neighborhoods lining the West North Avenue contain some of the most undervalued, but high-potential communities in Baltimore City, represented by the deep care and devotion that residents and merchants have shown towards this area and the ever-growing presence of educational, cultural, and civic institutions. WNADA has been charged with a mission by the Maryland General Assembly to realize the long-missed potential of the West North Avenue Corridor, the second most travel roadway in the State, as a mixed-use residential, commercial, retail, light eco-friendly industrial, and entertainment destination site for Maryland citizens and tourist.