



To: Chair Delegate Korman and Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee
From: Bainbridge Development Corporation
Date: February 26, 2025
Subject: **In Favor of HB1184**

The Bainbridge Development Corporation submits testimony in support of House Bill 1184, particularly in the context of ensuring that the initiative best aligns with its original legislative intent. The primary goal of the original legislation creating the park concept is to *"educate the public about and preserve and interpret the lives and experiences of Black Americans before and after the abolition of slavery."* This noble mission aims to highlight and honor the contributions and history of Black Americans in the region, a goal which all stakeholders agree upon.

Snow Hill has long been the focus of efforts by the Lower Susquehanna Heritage Greenway (LSHG), in partnership with the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), Bainbridge Development Corporation (BDC), and the Town of Port Deposit. The goal has always been to preserve the Snow Hill site and connect it to the historic downtown area (potentially via a walking path), in ensuring that the site's importance and history are not only maintained but celebrated. The original legislation creating the Port Deposit State Park, neglected the insight and opinions of the Town of Port Deposit and our Black American community in Cecil County, the two voices which matter most.

The various uncertainties associated with the Tome School and wooded conservation areas —such as unknown site conditions, infrastructure costs, and contractual limitations—could create significant complications that may distract or delay the focus on Snow Hill and the core mission of preserving and promoting Black American culture in Cecil County.

It is unfortunate that misrepresentations and inaccuracies are being propagated in an attempt to skew the facts to suit personal agendas, rather than prioritizing the betterment of the historic campus and local community. The intent of the narrative below is to clarify the facts regarding the historical activities, goals, and preservation efforts surrounding the Tome School campus and Snow Hill site.

First and foremost, the property deed includes a historic preservation easement that safeguards the Tome School and Snow Hill from any unilateral activities on site. All proposed work must be reviewed and approved by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Easement Director at the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT). The claim that the campus is at risk for any form of development without oversight from SHPO is false.

Furthermore, to assert that the campus has been left to deteriorate or neglected is also untrue. This message overlooks important details about the site's condition and the complex relationships involved in its preservation.

For historical context, the Tome School was initially part of a project, in concert with MHT, for full preservation and restoration to 106 standards, with the goal of creating a continuing care retirement community. Unfortunately, this was terminated due to site contamination and the inability to install

Board of Directors

Carl Roberts, Chair Jim Reynolds, Vice Chair Chick Hamm, Treasurer

Martha Barchowsky Mario Gangemi David Rudolph Sandra Edwards Bob Ashby, Jr. Joe Brant



necessary utilities and infrastructure. This plan was developed under the original terms of the preservation easement, which carried substantial restoration costs and has since been discussed for modification.

In 2010, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) halted all activities on the site upon the discovery of contamination (the full extent of which was unknown at the time). This restriction remained in place until late 2019 when the BDC and the U.S. Navy executed a cooperative services agreement to address residual contamination on site. Following the lifting of the restriction, the BDC worked closely with MHT, the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), and the Town of Port Deposit to evaluate the best path forward for proactive and restorative reuse. It is also imperative to note that the BDC has submitted countless grant applications to the Maryland Heritage Area's Authority requesting funding for preservation activities at the Tome School campus and Snow Hill site, all of which were denied state funding.

The modifications to the preservation easement imposed by MHT would have a significant positive impact on potential preservation projects by lowering the cost of restoration, making financial models more viable. These new conditions have never been fully studied or presented in the market for consideration.

The MDP's 2020 Historic Complexes report underscores the importance of private involvement in sustainable historic preservation. There are various models that have not been fully explored at the Tome School, due to the previous restrictions of the easement and unresolved contamination. With those concerns now addressed, there are several avenues for potential partnerships that the Town of Port Deposit would like to explore. Below are examples of potential partnership models that could be evaluated through an Expression of Interest (EOI) or Request for Proposal (RFP) process:

1. **Public-Private Partnership:** This model allows public entities to utilize grant dollars, while private entities can take advantage of tax credits, maximizing private investment and minimizing public costs. An example of this is the Warfield Complex in Sykesville, Maryland, a great success for historic preservation in Maryland.
2. **Public Ownership with Leasing:** Public ownership can be maintained while leasing the property to private entities, which could create a revenue stream for the local community. Successful models of this type can be seen at Fair Hill and NorthBay, both of which are owned by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
3. **Heritage Trust:** A nonprofit organization could be formed to partner with private entities, utilizing grants and tax incentives for preservation efforts.
4. **Joint Ventures:** A third-party organization or LLC could be created to manage the property and preservation project.

In order to fully explore the preservation possibilities for the Tome School, a comprehensive evaluation of successful public-private partnership models is essential, something that the Town of Port Deposit has expressed their intention to do since site limitations were lifted in 2020. This could involve collaboration

Board of Directors

Carl Roberts, Chair Jim Reynolds, Vice Chair Chick Hamm, Treasurer

Martha Barchowsky Mario Gangemi David Rudolph Sandra Edwards Bob Ashby, Jr. Joe Brant



between DNR, MHT, the Town of Port Deposit, and the BDC, as well as engaging with experts from organizations such as the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), Maryland Economic Development Association (MEDA), and national preservation groups like the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Park Service.

Additionally, collaboration with local academic institutions such as Towson University, the University of Maryland, and Johns Hopkins could provide valuable research and guidance from both regional and national perspectives. The aim is to move forward with informed, thoughtful planning to preserve and restore this important historic site while ensuring its future sustainability and benefit to the community.

By separating the areas and focusing first on Snow Hill in partnership with the Cecil County NAACP, it fulfills the original mission while allowing additional time to conduct a more thorough exploration of potential preservation and reuse strategies for the Tome School, which could include partnership opportunities and innovative solutions to the complex challenges associated with historic campuses. These properties hold a significant (but clearly separate) place in the history of the Town of Port Deposit and it would be a disservice to try and group them together when they have such vastly different stories to tell.

We thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact our office with any questions or clarifications.

Toni Sprenkle – Executive Director
Bainbridge Development Corporation
tsprenkle@bainbridgedev.org
(717) 683-5117

Board of Directors

Carl Roberts, Chair Jim Reynolds, Vice Chair Chick Hamm, Treasurer

Martha Barchowsky Mario Gangemi David Rudolph Sandra Edwards Bob Ashby, Jr. Joe Brant
