



House Economic Matters Committee

March 5, 2026

HB 1137: Land Use- Multifamily Developments and Mixed Use Developments- Authorization (Bring Back Main Street Act)

Testimony

The Howard County Housing Affordability Coalition represents housing advocates, community organizations, service providers and residents who are united by a shared goal: ensuring that every person in our County has access to safe, stable and affordable housing.

The Coalition supports House Bill 1137 because it targets on the key affordable housing problems—lack of supply. Howard County is 98% developed. If we are to find ways to address the supply problem, we have to look at non-traditional alternatives. Allowing underperforming commercial properties to add “missing middle” residential is precisely the sort of idea that our Coalition believes will make a meaningful contribution to at least a portion of Howard County’s significant housing inventory gap.

The Coalition acknowledges that not every office building, industrial park or retail center can or should be redeveloped as residential or mixed use. We therefore are pleased to see that the legislation is anchored to local density, leaves the site design and permitting approvals to the local jurisdictions, while not imposing new barriers.

The combination of income tax and property tax revenue to Howard County from new multifamily development is demonstrably higher than from many existing office buildings that are reeling from work-from-home shifts, government layoffs and race to the bottom pricing for leased space from both inside and outside the County. Vacancies remain high in the County, new office construction averaged just 105,000 square feet per year from 2020 to 2024, and employment is just recovering to pre-COVID levels. At a time when tax revenues are challenged to keep up with demand for government services, the Bring Back Main Street Act provides a way to address the shortage of affordable housing and add to tax revenues that benefit the entire county.

For the reasons cited above, the Coalition requests that the Committee issue a favorable HB1137 Report.

Respectfully submitted,

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