



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

DATE: 02/01/2024

WORCESTER COUNTY:

Ocean City: The fight over the room tax is beginning in Annapolis. Last year the measure to increase the room tax was defeated. Part of the proceeds from the proposed tax will be earmarked for the sports complex in Berlin.

Ocean City: With the decision from Orsted to cancel the Ocean City project the town has taken a cautiously optimistic view that offshore wind will not be coming to Ocean City. The state legislature and governors' office have not yet made their opinion known. There is existing legislation signed by Governor Moore to increase offshore wind investment in Maryland.

Berlin: Beacon and the town Government held a meeting to talk about the future plans of Berlin, especially the historically African American east side. Many residents on the east side have concerns that the planning board has denied new development on that side of town. Storm water and pedestrian traffic have also been major concerns on the east side of Berlin.

Snow Hill: The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development has offered a grant to town businesses to receive up to a 50% match for capital improvement projects. \$50,000 will be awarded to the town and individual grants will be capped at \$10,000.

WICOMICO COUNTY:

Salisbury: The city of Salisbury will continue the discussions on recovery homes. Prior to the issues brought up this past year the city did not have a formalized policy for issuing permits and requirements. While the neighbors of these homes



have issues including property values and crime, the city and its officials have also recognized that the users of these homes need support and help. As this process continues the city will work off previous court precedents and neighborhood concerns.

SOMERSET COUNTY:

Crisfield: The city government has decided to lift the prohibition on cannabis distribution facilities. This will allow dispensaries and other related shops to open.

MARYLAND: The general assembly is on week 3 of the 2024 session. Governor Moore has released his legislative agenda. Some of these bills would directly affect CAR and fundamentally change the nature of the housing market in Maryland. All these bills are being monitored by MAR and CAR. Here are a few of the proposed bills in the Governors own words.

The ENOUGH Act (SB 482/HB 4601) is a first-in-the-nation state-level effort to end concentrated poverty. For too long, communities in Maryland have experienced multi-generational poverty and its consequences—which include higher rates of crime, fewer educational and economic opportunities, and decaying housing. Through place-based interventions in select communities across the state, the ENOUGH initiative will give communities the support and resources they need to identify the root causes of poverty in their neighborhoods and begin to address them. Because poverty does not look the same in every neighborhood, ENOUGH communities will work with community organizations, non-profits, anchor institutions, and other key community members to build a locally-focused plan of action for addressing poverty. Governor Moore has set aside \$15 million in this year’s budget to fund the initiative in its first year.



The Housing Expansion and Affordability Act (SB 484/HB 538) seeks to directly address Maryland’s housing supply and affordability crisis to lower costs and expand economic opportunity for Marylanders across the state. This legislation will incentivize the construction of highly targeted new housing by removing barriers to development that have contributed to the current supply shortage. The bill also seeks to modernize land use law and expedite and simplify approval for transit-oriented development, development on former state-owned complexes, and housing development by 501(c)(3) organizations if certain affordability requirements are met, in addition to incentivizing development projects by allowing for greater density when certain conditions are met.

The Housing and Community Development Financing Act (SB 483/HB 599) focuses on strengthening state financing tools for housing construction and community development investments. The bill seeks to establish the Maryland Community Investment Corporation as a state Community Development Entity, which will unlock the ability to compete for tens of millions in federal funding through the New Market Tax Credit program. Upon award of federal funds, the Maryland Community Investment Corporation will make investments in low-income communities and community development projects across the state. The legislation also seeks to strengthen the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund by allowing for debt payments and credit enhancements to be covered for qualified projects—in all, creating new tools for community and economic development in high-need communities.

The Renter’s Rights Stabilization Act (SB 481/HB 4517) addresses the immediate needs of renters who are experiencing housing instability. This omnibus bill seeks to 1) establish an Office of Tenant Rights in the Department of Housing and Community Development responsible for providing renters with information



about their rights under law and creating a tenant's bill of rights; 2) address the high eviction filing rate in the nation by increasing the eviction filing fee and preventing it from being passed on to renters; 3) reduce the allowable security deposit from two months rent to one month; 4) create a powerful new pathway to homeownership by creating a statewide right of first refusal, allowing renters the right to purchase their home if being sold; 5) modify the state's new rental voucher program to provide prioritization of vouchers for families with children under the age of five and for pregnant women.

The Transparent Government Act (SB 472/HB 581) is aimed at improving predictability for individuals and businesses seeking to build or grow businesses in Maryland. The legislation will require all state agencies to establish and publicize projected timelines for licensing and permitting applications and to share publicly whether they are meeting established timelines. Giving entrepreneurs a better sense of how quickly they can expect a response from state agencies will help them to better plan their business growth.