



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Eric Holcomb, Executive Director, Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	2/10/2025
SUBJECT	Council Bill 25-0003 Historic Preservation – Conservation Districts - Establishment

Position: Favorable

BILL SYNOPSIS

This bill will establish a conservation district program that will be administered by CHAP. Over the past several years, the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) has heard from many community associations that are interested in historic designation that is less stringent in design review requirements than the current local historic district designation, and this bill is the Commission's proposed solution.

Historic Conservation Districts have a concentration of historically significant structures that together create a unique historic character for neighborhoods that is worthy of preservation for future generations. A historic conservation district would protect a neighborhood's historic character through a CHAP-administered design review process for new construction, demolition, and limited types of alterations. This would be *different* from the level of review for local historic districts and Baltimore City Landmarks, where all exterior changes are reviewed and approved by CHAP. The proposed design review for conservation districts is *less restrictive* than design review for local historic districts and Baltimore City Landmarks.

In addition, the bill makes historic properties in conservation districts eligible for the local historic preservation tax credit.

During the last several years, CHAP staff has engaged with many neighborhoods about conservation districts. Some of these neighborhoods are Oliver, Charles Village, Belair-Edison, Wyman Park, Coppin Heights CDC, Harlem Park (especially around Lafayette Square), Johnston Square, Old Goucher, Upper Fells Point, Forest Park and several more. CHAP has held several public Commission meetings regarding conservation districts. This idea has overwhelming support from communities across the city.

This CC Bill will significantly add to CHAP's tools to help preserve and revitalize Baltimore neighborhoods and expand our outreach to all neighborhoods. As important, conservation districts will also expand the eligibility of the local tax credit to more neighborhoods, helping to reduce vacancy and blight.

SUMMARY OF POSITION: CHAP supports CC Bill 25-0003

This bill allows CHAP to create a conservation district program only. It does not create any conservation districts. Once this bill is passed, CHAP will adopt rules and procedures to create and manage conservation districts. CHAP staff will then continue to work with communities to formally consider conservation districts. This process will take anywhere from a few months to a couple of years, depending on the outreach and consensus building within the community. In the end, all conservation districts will be created by City Council Ordinance. Once a conservation district is established, a CHAP staffer would be assigned to the community to administer design review.

In order to create and manage future conservation districts, CHAP will have to increase its staff. Currently, the Department of Planning is pursuing an enhancement for the FY2026 budget to increase CHAP staff. Nevertheless, CHAP staff has enough capacity currently to at least set up the program and begin the outreach with communities that are interested in establishing conservation districts.

FISCAL IMPACT

In order to manage a responsive, efficient conservation district program, CHAP will need to increase its staff which will cost approximately the following:

Total impact: \$129,377.00

Salary: \$91,078.00

OPC: \$38,299.00

Total Positions: 1

More permit review fees would be collected because of an increase in design review. The Department of Finance and CHAP have conducted a study to increase fees on the historic tax credit and historic district reviews. Combining the increase in number of permits fees collected (due to more historic designations) and an increase of those fees will help offset the cost of a staff position.