



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Caron Watkins Interim Director, Office of Equity & Civil Rights Interim Chief Equity Officer
ANALYST	Zachary Wellman Equity Policy Analyst, Office of Equity & Civil Rights
DATE	June 28, 2024
SUBJECT	OECR Report on Baltimore City Council Bill 24-0538 Sale of Property - 411 East Old Cold Spring Lane

OECR POSITION: Favorable; with equity considerations to be addressed at a later date

SUMMARY OF LEGISLATION

The Office of Equity & Civil Rights (OECR) has reviewed and is herein reporting on City Council Bill 24-0538 – *Sale of Property - 411 East Old Cold Spring Lane*. This is a property sale bill for the plot located at 411 East Old Cold Spring Lane (Block 5070A, Lot 022).

The bill seeks to accomplish the following:

- Authorize the Mayor and City Council to sell, either at public or private sale, all its interest in the property.
- Provide an effective date for the sale (effective immediately upon passage).
- Allow the unoccupied property to be reused.

The bill enables the Mayor and City Council to divest their interests in the property by way of sale through the authority of the Comptroller, as outlined by Article V, Section 5(b) of the Baltimore City Charter.

ANALYSIS

Council Bill 24-0538 seeks to sell the property on which the former Guilford Elementary School facility is located. The primary motivation for selling this unoccupied school building is to adhere to the 21st Century Schools Initiative to surplus and repurpose 26 abandoned school buildings over the next ten years.

The OECR understands that the Department of Housing and Community Development intends to award this property to Midtown Academy, a Baltimore City Charter School. The intended use of the property following its sale could positively impact the equity of Baltimore City residents by

re-establishing an education program in the facility to service nearby residents and offer an additional charter school program in the area. If the property is sold and awarded, Midtown Academy would be granted a permanent facility to house its program and allow the school to admit additional students.

However, the OECR would like to raise equity considerations tangentially related to the bill's scope. As of 2023, Midtown Academy had a total enrollment of 193 students, around half of whom are from Bolton Hill, Reservoir Hill, or surrounding neighborhoods. Suppose the charter school is awarded the former Guilford Elementary School facility. In that case, Midtown Academy will migrate four miles (or 15-20 minutes by car) north, potentially alienating existing students and families who do not have access to adequate/reliable transportation to the new location. This migration of buildings could harm low-income students who are enrolled at Midtown Academy based on merit but cannot maintain enrollment due to financial circumstances. This barrier to attendance could disproportionately affect black people, as 168 of the 193 Midtown students were Black in 2023.

This move could also have additional equity implications when considering that Midtown Academy, a 50th percentile high-performing school that services West Baltimore, will relocate to Guilford, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. Guilford is already serviced by the high-performing Tunbridge Public Charter School and two other charter schools. The result would be a well-off region in Baltimore's "White L" going from one to two high-performing schools and a disadvantaged area of Baltimore's "Black Butterfly" going from one high-performing school to zero. The loss of Midtown Academy would mean that students from that region of Baltimore would be relegated to attending one of six sub-15th percentile zone schools nearby or a single sub-10th percentile charter school. Conversely, the proposed relocation area in North Baltimore would now have four charter schools.

To remedy this and make the transition equitable, students' transportation plans should be taken into account. It is essential that adequate transportation is provided for students who reside in the area where the school is located to the new facility so they can continue enrollment without complications.

CONCLUSION

The Office of Equity & Civil Rights discerns no inequity in the bill's scope or general intent to sell the property at 411 East Old Cold Spring Lane for surplus and reuse. Additionally, the OECR supports reopening this unoccupied educational facility to service the Guilford community in line with the 21st Century Schools Initiative. The OECR has only raised foreseeable equity concerns for the potential outcomes of the sale.

As such, the OECR requests a **favorable** committee report on City Council Bill 24-0538.

Respectfully Submitted,



Caron Watkins
Interim Director, Office of Equity & Civil Rights