



CITY OF BALTIMORE  
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

<b>TO</b>	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
<b>FROM</b>	Caron Watkins Interim Director, Office of Equity & Civil Rights Interim Chief Equity Officer
<b>ANALYST</b>	Zachary Wellman Equity Policy Analyst, Office of Equity & Civil Rights
<b>DATE</b>	November 12, 2024
<b>SUBJECT</b>	OECR Report on Baltimore City Council Bill 24-0598 Rezoning - 1223-1229 Argyle

**OECR POSITION: No Objection**

**SUMMARY OF LEGISLATION**

The Office of Equity & Civil Rights (OECR) has reviewed and is herein reporting on City Council Bill 24-0598 – *Rezoning - 1223-1229 Argyle*. This is a rezoning ordinance.

The bill seeks to accomplish the following:

- Rezone the property located at 1223-1229 Argyle Avenue.
- Change the zoning district from R-8 to I-1.
- Allow the property to be used for the Natural Dye Initiative.

The bill accomplishes this by amending Article – Zoning, Zoning District Maps Sheet 45 of the Baltimore City Revised Code.

**EQUITY ANALYSIS**

City Council Bill 24-0598 intends to rezone the property located at 1223-1229 Argyle Avenue from the R-8 residential zoning district to the I-1 industrial zoning district for use as an indigo dye processing facility for the Natural Dye Initiative.

In November of 2022, the Upton Planning Committee acquired the property - once the Harriett Beecher Stowe School, now vacant – to house the Natural Dye Initiative to Grown Indigo in partnership with the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). A clear goal of the initiative is to create jobs in the Upton community and invest into local urban farming and entrepreneurship for Black residents of Baltimore. Under the initiative, the adjacent fields to the property will be used to grow and harvest indigo locally; however, the MICA requires a facility to process the locally grown indigo into dye once harvested. The Upton Planning Committee determined the best location to house this facility is the former Harriett Beecher Stowe School building located at

1223-1229 and acquired it from Baltimore City in November 2022. Now, the former school must be rezoned from its R-8 residential zoning district to the I-1 industrial zoning district. I-1 zoning permits live-work uses, commercial-vocational education, government facilities, urban agriculture, some commercial use, and some moderate industrial use.

Bill 24-0598 could positively impact the equity of Baltimore City residents by repurposing a vacant property for community investment, urban agriculture, education, and job creation in Upton, a historically underinvested neighborhood in West Baltimore where approximately 96% of residents are Black.\* According to the Historic Upton Neighborhood 2026 Master Plan, 56% of Upton households live below the federal poverty line (\$23,850 in household income). Additionally, Upton has the second highest unemployment rate in Baltimore at 26%, and nearly 40% of Upton residents have not received a high school diploma/GED as opposed to 19% city-wide. \*

It is important to consider that, while the intent, purpose, and impact of the zoning change should benefit the equity of Baltimore Residents overall by enabling the Natural Dye Initiative to continue, that is not universally true of all potential uses for this property that are permitted under I-1 zoning. This means that this equity assessment and the assumptions therein is contingent upon the use of the rezoned property remaining that which has been expressed by the Upton Planning Committee. Any potential future reuse of the property under I-1 zoning may not have the same equity implications as that of the Natural Dye Initiative.

## CONCLUSION

The Office of Equity & Civil Rights discerns no inequity intent in the bill's intent, purpose, or impact and, as such, has **no objection** to City Council Bill 24-0598 under the current intended use of the property.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Caron Watkins

Interim Director, Office of Equity & Civil Rights

## **APPENDIX**

\*Department of Planning. (2017, December). Historic Upton Neighborhood 2026 Master Plan.  
[https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Historic Upton Neighborhood 2026 Master Plan.pdf](https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/Historic%20Upton%20Neighborhood%202026%20Master%20Plan.pdf)