



CITY OF BALTIMORE  
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

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| <b>TO</b>      | The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council        |
| <b>FROM</b>    | Veronica P. McBeth, Interim Director, Department of Transportation       |
| <b>CC</b>      | Mayor's Office of Government Relations                                   |
| <b>DATE</b>    | February 13, 2025  |
| <b>SUBJECT</b> | 25-0003 • Historic Preservation – Conservation Districts – Establishment |

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**Position: Favorable**

## **BILL SYNOPSIS**

The legislation defines and provides for the creation and alteration of Historical Conservation Districts. Conservation Districts appear to be a more regulatorily permissive alternative to Architectural Preservation Districts where the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) may exempt building permit applicants from some approval requirements. The legislation also clarifies terms, updates certain terms for consistency and format, and clarifies CHAP's role in the administration of relevant Code provisions.

## **SUMMARY OF POSITION**

The Department will work with the Department of Planning and other peer agencies as needed to adhere to the terms of the proposed legislation. While Transportation's role in the actual establishment and maintenance of historical districts is limited, the Department is marginally affected through restrictions and requirements imposed on maintenance or replacement projects.

The addition of a significant number of districts where special coordination will be required to identify appropriate construction materials may lead to a marginal decrease in the Department's footway reconstruction, ADA construction, and resurfacing availability and efficiency. That said, the Department acknowledges that one of the City's greatest assets is its historic charm and fully supports any efforts being made to preserve it. For these reasons, the Department requests a favorable bill report.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

While Council bill 25-0003 addresses the alteration and maintenance of historically significant structures, it does not explicitly mention construction within the roadway. However, depending on how alterations are interpreted within Conservation Districts, it is possible that the construction or

modification of sidewalks, ramps, curbs, or road surfaces could be subject to review and a higher level of regulation in these designated areas. This is currently the case in Architectural Preservation Districts.

The Department has engaged extensively with the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) to ensure project compliance in neighborhoods within its jurisdiction (such as Fells Point). Some items that require additional coordination may include structures such as exposed aggregate sidewalks and Belgian block roadways. As a general rule of thumb, the Department replaces sidewalks and roadways in kind. However, under certain circumstances and with CHAP approval and community input, the Department may use different materials as needed.)

Materials such as regular concrete, exposed aggregate, belgian block, and red brick have been used to match existing conditions in areas overseen by CHAP. Currently, any brick repair in neighborhoods within CHAP's jurisdiction require prior approval. This adds a layer of complexity that impacts the speed of project delivery. While not a deal-breaker by any means, the potential creation of new districts where additional CHAP oversight will be required may further affect how quickly and efficiently Transportation can deliver footway and resurfacing projects.

Additionally, ADA Job Order Contracts (JOC) for construction specify standard materials for ramps and sidewalks. Requiring the use of other materials including brick, special aggregate, exposed aggregate, or granite curbs would generally increase the cost of construction or reduce the number of ramps associated with ADA projects. If the legislation is enacted, the Division has flagged a need to identify any potential Conservation Districts where specific materials may be prescribed to adjust future contracts accordingly.

Finally, the creation of new historical districts under this proposed category may expand which areas qualify for ornamental lighting fixtures. Ornamental lighting fixtures (including poles and lamps) are roughly three times the cost of the standard aluminum poles and lamps prevalent throughout the City. Ornamental lighting fixtures are functionally identical to their regular counterparts. They are commonplace in many of the City's oldest and most prolific mixed-use neighborhoods.