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Canal Place Preservation & Development Authority Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Education, Business, & Administration Subcommittee

Nancy J. King, Chair
February 27, 2023

House Appropriations Committee
Education & Economic Development Subcommittee
Stephanie Smith, Chair
February 27, 2023

Presented By
Rebecca Ruppert, CPPDA Board Vice-Chair
&
Deidra I. Ritchie, CPPDA Executive Director

On the Proposed Budget of the Canal Place Preservation & Development Authority (CPPDA) for the Fiscal Year 2024

The CPPDA's responses to questions brought to our attention by Carrie Cook in the Analysis of the FY 2024 Maryland Executive Budget, done January 2023.

Analysis Observation: The agency should discuss the possibility of becoming a partnership park or merging with DNR outside of that program, including how inclusion in DNR's organization would help or hinder Canal Place's ability to achieve its short- and long-term goals.

Canal Place Response: The Maryland Outdoors Act was reviewed by Canal Place staff and board members who saw the potential to become a Partnership Park. As executive director, I thought it would benefit Canal Place in so many ways. Canal Place definitely fits the criteria of an urban park due to its location in the heart of the

city of Cumberland. There are significant heritage/historical aspects of the property with the C&O Canal Historic Park as well as the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad both being located on Canal Place property. Our connection to the beginnings of the Historic National Road, and, the building which houses our offices, the Western Maryland Railway Station, is on the National Register of Historic Places. There is also the potential to acquire additional waterfront property just south of the CPPDA. The partnership park aspect would be additional assistance to cover the cost of maintenance for the 11 acres of property. In addition, once the River Park at Canal Place is completed, it will be necessary to operate and maintain that facility. Having DNR funds to assist us with the river park would be of great help to a project that will be an economic driver for our area as well as our Canal Place mission. Legislation could be written or amended to include Canal Place as a partnership park and therefore we encourage being included in the Maryland Outdoors Act.

Analysis Observation: Canal Place should discuss the logistical challenges imposed by the new Open Meetings Act requirements and how making the necessary investments to achieve full compliance would impact the agency's long-term finances.

The CPPDA has always held Open Meetings. In January 2022 Canal Place was asked to review the Open Meetings Act Requirements and responded that it would be a financial hardship to achieve the intent of the Act without assistance, or lead time, to prepare for the onset of the Act which occurred in October 2022. As noted in the Analysis, Canal Place does post agendas for meetings on our website as well as physically in our building lobby. We do send out notices of the meetings as well as open meeting documentation to the media and regular attendees, as well as anyone who requests the notices or documents prior to, or during, a meeting. With the arrival of Covid, Canal Place has moved the meetings to a virtual platform (currently Zoom) and the ability to join those meetings is also available to anyone that would like to join as the link is also posted where any of our meeting notices are placed (online or physically). While the cost of hosting a virtual meeting is not prohibitive, the placement of the recorded meetings and documents into a dedicated space on our website has prevented us from fully reaching the open meetings goal. However, we are planning to fully comply in FY 2024. The most recent quote from our website developer is about \$12,000, which is covered within the amount appropriated in FY 2024 for telecommunications upgrades mentioned in the DLS analysis.

The Open Meetings Act made us, once again, look at what the CPPDA does not have in relation to the many state agencies that do have a fiber connection. Without that fiber connection we cannot access vital trainings that are put on the state's Intranet, we cannot securely connect to the state's Financial Management system (FMIS). When researching how to obtain fiber for our building, we were quickly connected to Kenrick Gordon who was instrumental in getting Canal Place a grant to

install the fiber. The grant is being handled by Allegany County Government. While the cost to install the fiber to the station is being covered by Allegany County through a broadband grant, it will be the responsibility of the CPPDA to upgrade the wiring within the station. The cost of the upgrade has been estimated to be \$2,000 to \$6,000 depending on the location of the connection. In addition, it will cost the CPPDA an additional \$600 per month to utilize the fiber. We have informed our tenants of the Western Maryland Railway Station of this upgrade and are allowing them to join us in this endeavor and to share the cost in the per month utilization. At this time the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad has indicated that they would like to share the cost. We are grateful of the financial assistance that we have been given for this project and we look forward to this becoming available to us and our tenants.

The Canal Place Preservation and Development Authority concurs with the FY 2024 Budget Analysis prepared by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) as presented.

The Authority continues to believe in the mission of heritage tourism while at the same time recognizing that organizational changes may be necessary to best accomplish that mission. We respectfully request your favorable consideration of our FY 2024 budget request.

Testimony Prepared By:

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