



## **FY25 Budget Testimony to the Maryland General Assembly**

**Chad Williams**  
**Executive Director**

## **Senate**

**Budget and Taxation Committee  
Health and Human Services Subcommittee**

**West North Avenue Development Authority**

**FY25 Budget Hearing**

**Miller Senate Building, William Amoss Room, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**Friday, February 2, 2024 – 11:30 AM**

---

## **House of Delegates**

**Appropriations Committee  
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**

**West North Avenue Development Authority – FY25 Budget**

**House Office Building, Room 120**

**Monday, February 5, 2024 – 12:30 PM**

## **West North Avenue Development Authority**

Good Afternoon, Chair, Vice-Chair, and other members of the Committee.

The Maryland General Assembly established the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA), on October 1, 2021, to create a comprehensive plan for housing, economic, transportation, and neighborhood development along West North Avenue between 600 - 3200 Block, defined as the Target Area, and 250 yards surrounding the Target Area, defined as the Buffer Zone.

On November 10, 2022, The Office of the Maryland Attorney General further clarified the intent of the General Assembly and articulated the following legislative mission for the Authority:

- Create a forum for stakeholders to come together on "one plan" for West North Avenue.
- Serve as a "clearinghouse and resource center" for promoting coordination and communication on development opportunities for West North Avenue.
- Ensure that money is being spent effectively and efficiently (for development) and that development is happening in the appropriate way for West North Avenue.
- Provide advisory services (to State and City agencies) on planning and development for West North Avenue.
- "Initiate" and "Fund" development projects for West North Avenue.

## **West North Avenue Comprehensive Plan**

The 2023 Maryland General Assembly amended the submission date of the WNADA Comprehensive Plan from October 1, 2023, to December 15, 2023.

On Tuesday, December 12, 2023 the Membership of the Authority, which includes the Governor, Mayor of Baltimore City, Maryland Secretaries of Commerce, Housing and Community Development, and Transportation, Executive Director of the Maryland Economic Development Corporation, Presidents of Coppin State University and Maryland Institute College of Arts (MICA), agency heads of housing, planning, transportation, and economic development for Baltimore City, and two community representatives, approved the comprehensive plan created by staff with the support of WSP, Neighborhood Design Center of Baltimore, and CHP/NSPIRE (a Black women-owned urban planning firm).

The [West North Avenue Comprehensive Plan](#) was submitted to the General Assembly on Wednesday, January 31, 2024.

This plan seeks to advance restorative justice and community development by promoting context-sensitive strategies that enhance housing, public space, mobility, and economic opportunity for West North Avenue. Our approach works to address disparities caused by persistent racial and economic discrimination, historic disinvestment and predatory practices which have led to adverse outcomes for West Baltimore's community, particularly the Black community.

We seek to mitigate the broken trust between residents and institutions due to past harm, and forge new, strong, interdependent ties among the people of West North Avenue. Our work understands that diversity is not just about representation, but also about ensuring inclusion and delegated power in decision-making and material redistribution.

As such, it is vital that this plan advances equitable development opportunities throughout West Baltimore that empower local actors, leverage local knowledge, and prioritize the needs of residents in the community who have experienced harm. Robust participation in the planning and implementation processes will help heal old wounds by ensuring that plan outcomes are truly representative of local values and community character.

This work prioritizes the most vulnerable members of the community by realizing the benefits of new development through inclusive and responsible growth and by avoiding the adverse effects of displacement, social tension, cultural dilution, and exacerbation of economic hardship.

The [West North Avenue Comprehensive Plan](#) specifically focuses on the following:

- Community and Land Planning
- Housing and Equitable Development Policies and Strategies
- Real Estate Market Analysis
- Health Equity
- Concept Development Framework
- Transit-oriented Development/Urban Design
- Policy and Land Use Alignment
- High-level Cost Estimate

A supplemental report will be submitted no later than June 30, 2024, providing visual concepts and building design guides for residential and commercial properties, estimated total development cost to create an economic catalyst along W North Avenue that would generate revitalization for West Baltimore, a strategy for a phased neighborhood-by-neighborhood and block-by-block implementation, and an estimated required authorization period for the Authority to ensure the comprehensive plan is implemented efficiently and effectively in coordination with State and City agencies or, if necessary, unilaterally by the Authority.

## **Initiate and Fund Development**

### **Fiscal Year (FY) - 2025**

To “initiate” and “fund” development for **FY25** projects, in a plan to reduce residential and commercial vacancies from 61% within our “Target” and “Buffer” zones and increase property, income, and sales tax revenue for the State and Baltimore City, WNADA intends to release \$15 million in grants for development projects along the corridor, in partnership with the community that will support:

- **economic development** with commercial and retail construction and small business development grants to MBEs/WBEs;
- **housing development** which includes affordable single-family homeownership, student housing for Coppin State University, and mixed-income multifamily housing;
- **multi-modal transportation** enhancements and infrastructure improvements that efficiently move residents to workforce designations with the Baltimore region;
- **neighborhood development** to improve the beautification of communities; and

- **green space development** of streetscapes, parks or open spaces that have deteriorated, and remediation or removal of environmental health hazards.

As we know:

- **Economic Development** - provides critical access to investment and quality of life services that create a strong foundation to revitalize the economic viability of a community.
- **Housing** - addresses the core needs of an individual's overall well-being and can create the types of transformative growth that are at the cornerstone of a progressive community's long-term prosperity.
- **Transportation** - creates safer, healthier communities and provides access to key destinations like jobs or core services that impact all aspects of an individual's lifecycle and can provide ladders to sustainable success.
- **Neighborhoods** - unify and bring people together from various walks of life for a common interest and can offer a sense of place, togetherness, and civic pride.
- **Greenspace** - establishes functional access to safe and welcoming spaces that can help address negative health determinants throughout the community and improve quality of life.

The connectivity among housing, economic development, transportation, and green space is crucial to the West North Avenue Development Authority's holistic revitalization approach. These components mutually influence and shape the quality of life, socioeconomic opportunities, and overall well-being of communities.

The availability of multi-market and quality housing will attract more residents and businesses to the West North Avenue Corridor, fueling economic growth and development. To sustain such economic progress and growth, multi-modal transportation will be the key to connecting people to job opportunities, educational institutions, healthcare services, and other essential amenities, which will further facilitate economic activity and ensure that communities are thriving. Additionally, green spaces such as parks and gardens contribute to community well-being by providing opportunities for recreation, improving air quality, and enhancing the overall livability of a community.

By integrating each of these elements into our revitalization strategy, our approach fosters an inclusive, sustainable, and vibrant future for the residents of West Baltimore as we support economic development, promote environmental sustainability, and create places where people want to live, work, and enjoy their lives.

### **Fiscal Year (FY) - 2024**

In the current fiscal year, WNADA structured a transparent online grant application process that included: an [application](#), [scoring criteria](#), and [frequently asked questions](#) to award \$10 million in economic, housing, transportation, neighborhood, and green space development grants.

A [recorded video of our pre-submission conference](#) held with 91 perspective applicants is available on our YouTube channel [@wnadabaltimore](#).

We received 68 application responses to the grant solicitation that are eligible for scoring. WNADA expects to announce funding awards before the end of March, execute grant agreements before the end of April, and distribute all funds to recipients by the end of May.

## **Contracts and Procurement**

The 2023 General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed, SB 331/HB 627 titled Baltimore City – West North Avenue Development Authority – Membership and Procurement. This legislation generally exempted the Authority from the State procurement law. The Authority is still subject to written policy and procurement requirements for exempt units and the State’s Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) program.

Generally, each unit with an exemption from any provision of Division II of the State Finance and Procurement Article must have written policies and procedures. The written policies and procedures must include the types of procurement exempted from Division II, plus the methods for such procurements, and their advertising requirements, procurement goals (including MBE participation), and their approval process. Units that are governed by their own board, commission, council, or authority must submit their policies and procedures to their board, commission, council, or authority for approval.

To ensure historical acceptable compliance with this requirement, the West North Avenue Development Authority adopted similar aligned written procurement policies and procedures currently used by the Maryland Stadium Authority. The agency adopted its [West North Avenue Development Authority Procurement Policy and Procedures](#) on Tuesday, May 23, 2023.

Our Authority has established a 31% MBE goal. This metric exceeds the State goal by 2%. To date, we believe we are the only State agency meeting and exceeding this goal with 46% of our procurement awarded to MBE, minority- or woman-, or small disadvantaged businesses with 39% awarded to Black women-owned businesses.

## **Staffing and General Operations**

The Authority became fully staffed on Wednesday, October 18, 2023, with 9 of 12 positions starting on this date.

## **Legislative Department Recommendations**

### **Comprehensive Plan**

The Authority disagrees with the DLS recommendation to hold \$2.5 million in grants to nongovernmental entities because the agency has not submitted its comprehensive plan.

The [West North Avenue Comprehensive Plan](#) was submitted to the General Assembly on January 31, 2024.

### **Grants Manual**

The Authority disagrees with the DLS recommendation to reduce \$2.5 million because the agency has not submitted a grants manual.

The Authority has established interim grant procedures that continue to evolve since September 2023. We expect a finalized grant procedure process to be established by June 30, 2024, after we have assessed lessons learned from completing our first round of granting by April 2024.

In the current fiscal year, WNADA structured a transparent online grant application process that included: an [application](#), [scoring criteria](#), and [frequently asked questions](#) to award \$10 million in economic, housing, transportation, neighborhood, and green space development grants.

A [recorded video of our pre-submission conference](#) held with 91 perspective applicants is available on our YouTube channel [@wnadabaltimore](#).

## **Conclusion**

The West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA) represents the first holistic planning and economic development entity in the country to address the systemic root causes of “Redlining” that was specifically created, established, and promoted with devastating long-term economic, housing, transportation, and neighborhood impact in the historic old West Baltimore communities which eventually created the “Black Butterfly” effect in Baltimore City.

The 12 resource-rich, but underinvested neighborhoods lining the West North Avenue contain some of the most undervalued, but high-potential communities in Baltimore City, represented by the deep care and devotion that residents and merchants have shown towards this area and the ever-growing presence of educational, cultural, and civic institutions. WNADA has been charged with a mission by the Maryland General Assembly to realize the long-missed potential of the West North Avenue Corridor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and answer questions on the Governor's proposed FY25 budget for the West North Avenue Development Authority.