

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1276
Economic Matters

(Delegate Wolek, *et al.*)

Finance

West North Avenue Development Authority - Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program - Establishment (WNADA Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Act)

This bill establishes the Neighborhood Social Connection and Development Program in the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA). The purpose of the program is to foster social connections to support neighborhood development within the West North Avenue Corridor by providing technical support to specified entities and awarding grants, as specified. The bill requires WNADA to award grants to implement the program, though WNADA may set aside existing funds totaling no more than \$150,000 annually for such grants. The bill also expands the purpose of the existing Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund to include assisting WNADA in expeditiously removing blighted property within Baltimore City. **The bill terminates September 30, 2029, concurrent with the termination date of Chapters 215 and 216 of 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: WNADA expenditures in total are likely not affected but may be redirected from other priorities as it must award grants under the program. The overall finances of the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund are not affected, as discussed below. Revenues are not directly affected.

Local Effect: Baltimore City operations and finances are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: While WNADA must award grants under the bill, it may only do so for (1) social gatherings, including block parties, cultural festivals, parades, speaker series, and service or recreational events; (2) outreach initiatives, including neighborhood newsletters, community bulletins, or digital content, to raise awareness of social events and connect residents with available resources and services; (3) stipends to compensate volunteers for the time used to organize projects, refreshments at program designated events, rental and event spaces, and materials for program events; (4) operating support for participating organizations; (5) social connection projects to create and maintain green spaces or other community gathering spaces; (6) resources for training and hiring community organizers; and (7) resources for grant application efforts.

Participating organizations must collaborate with residents of the West North Avenue Corridor in the planning and implementation of events and projects to ensure that activities reflect neighborhood priorities and, to the extent practicable, that events and activities are led by residents.

By July 1, 2029, WNADA must compile evaluations and outcomes of programs to develop a template for neighborhood building and provide scaling recommendations to similar organizations in the State and across the United States. By December 1, 2027, and annually thereafter (in 2028 only, under current termination provisions), WNADA must report to the Governor and the General Assembly on its comprehensive grant-awarding activities.

Current Law:

West North Avenue Development Authority

Chapters 80 and 81 of 2021 established WNADA for the purpose of developing a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization strategy for the benefit of a specified “target area” and “buffer zone” in Baltimore City, generally defined as West North Avenue and the surrounding area in Baltimore City. The Acts establish provisions governing the membership, procedures, and duties of WNADA. Under Chapter 136 of 2023, the authority is generally exempt from State procurement law, although WNADA is still subject to written policy and procedure requirements for exempt units and the State’s Minority Business Enterprise program. By December 15, 2023, WNADA was required to report its [comprehensive neighborhood revitalization strategy](#), including any procurement activities undertaken by the authority, to the Governor and specified committees of the General Assembly.

Chapters 215 and 216 altered the composition, powers, and duties of WNADA. Among other things, the Acts created a special fund to carry out the purposes of WNADA,

exempted WNADA from specified provisions of State law, and generally modified the statutory authority of WNADA to more closely align with that of a State economic development authority. The Acts also extended the authorization for WNADA until September 30, 2029, authorized the Governor to include an appropriation to WNADA, and required WNADA to be self-sustaining beginning in fiscal 2028.

Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Initiative and the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund

On January 5, 2016, then-Governor Hogan and then-Baltimore City Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake announced Project CORE (Creating Opportunities for Renewal and Enterprise) as a multi-year State-city partnership to demolish thousands of vacant buildings in Baltimore City and replace them with green space and economic development projects. On October 1, 2024, Governor Wes Moore, by [executive order](#), redesignated Project CORE as Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Initiative (BVRI) to eliminate blight, revitalize neighborhoods, and maximize the economic potential and quality of life for residents in Baltimore City. BVRI is *not* authorized in statute, and additional information regarding BVRI can be found on its [website](#).

Chapters 639 and 640 of 2018 established the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund within the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for six years with funding *authorized* at specified levels. The fund is a special, nonlapsing fund with the stated purpose of assisting DHCD, in conjunction with the Maryland Stadium Authority and Baltimore City, in expeditiously removing blighted property within Baltimore City. Chapter 335 of 2024 made the fund permanent and requires the Governor, for fiscal 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter, to include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$50.0 million to the fund. The Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) of 2025 authorizes the Governor to meet that requirement in either the operating or capital budget beginning in fiscal 2026. The fiscal 2026 requirement was met in the capital budget through funding for the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund, rather than *specifically* for the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund. Once again, neither the fiscal 2027 capital budget as introduced nor the fiscal 2027 operating budget as introduced includes funds *specifically* for the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund.

Strategic Demolition Fund and Smart Growth Impact Fund

Chapter 30 of 2016 established the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund within DHCD. The fund is a special, nonlapsing fund to provide grants and loans to assist in predevelopment activities, including interior and exterior demolition, land assembly, architecture and engineering, and site development for revitalization projects in designated areas of the State. The fund may only be used to provide grants and loans for such activities to government agencies and community development organizations in an area designated as a sustainable community or a qualified opportunity zone. Historically, this fund supports

Project CORE/BVRI (rather than capitalizing the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund). The fiscal 2026 capital budget includes \$60.0 million in general obligation bonds for the fund, of which \$50.0 million is designated for BVRI (DHCD advises this satisfies the mandate under Chapter 355 as amended by the BRFA of 2025). The fiscal 2027 capital budget as introduced includes the same level of funding, with \$50.0 million again designated for BVRI.

State Expenditures: WNADA must award grants under the program, but the amount for them is capped at \$150,000 annually. This analysis assumes that grants can be awarded in fiscal 2027 within the appropriation for WNADA; the fiscal 2027 budget as introduced includes \$19.8 million for WNADA. However, as the authority must be self-sustaining in its final two years (given the current termination date), the requirement may necessitate funding needed for other purposes being used for program grants instead. WNADA advises that it can administer the program and complete other requirements under the bill (develop a template and report annually) with existing staff.

Although the bill expands the purpose of the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund to include assisting WNADA with removing blighted property within Baltimore City, BVRI already provides grants and loans for the removal of such blighted property. Furthermore, the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund has not actually received any funding since its inception, regardless of the \$50.0 million mandated appropriation established under Chapter 335 and the subsequent authorization established under the BRFA of 2025 that the mandated appropriation can be accomplished through either the operating or capital budget. Instead, BVRI is funded through the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund, and DHCD advises that it considers the \$50.0 million in general obligation bonds it typically designates for projects in Baltimore City as meeting that mandate.

Nevertheless, as BVRI already funds projects for the removal of blighted property within Baltimore City and utilizes the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund to do so, expanding the purpose of the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund to include WNADA-related projects has no effect on either the fund or overall State finances. DHCD further advises that although the bill expands the purpose of the Continuing the CORE Partnership Fund to include assisting WNADA, DHCD plans to utilize BVRI and its funding through the Strategic Demolition and Smart Growth Impact Fund to meet the bill's intent of assisting WNADA in removing blighted property within Baltimore City.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 816 (Senator Hayes) - Finance.

Information Source(s): West North Avenue Development Authority; Department of Housing and Community Development; Department of Commerce; Department of Legislative Services

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