



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY



**TO** Interested Parties

**FROM** Dave Metz and Miranda Everitt  
FM3 Research

Lori Weigel  
New Bridge Strategy

**RE:** Maryland Voter Views of Program Open Space

**DATE** January 28, 2021

---

The bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and New Bridge Strategy (R) recently partnered to complete a statewide survey of Maryland voters to assess their attitudes towards the state's land and water conservation program, Program Open Space. <sup>1</sup> **The results show that Maryland voters overwhelmingly support Program Open Space, and strongly oppose proposals to divert its funds to unrelated programs.** A majority opposes such diversions initially. After a balanced exchange of pros and cons on the topic, a majority still oppose the diversion.

Key specific findings include:

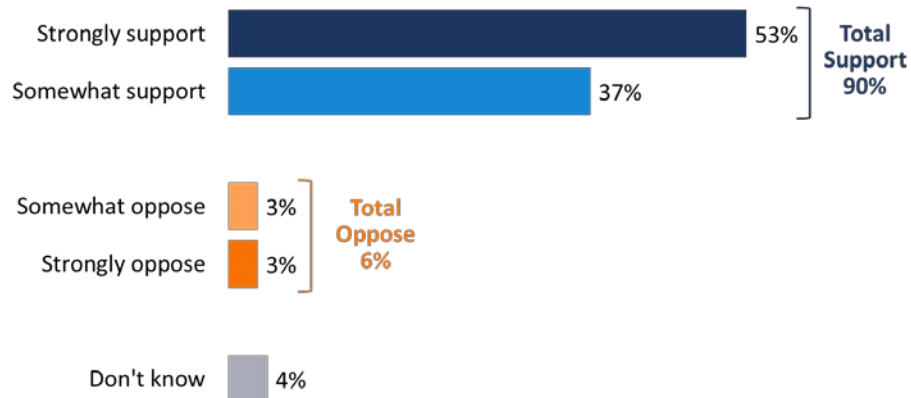
- **Given a brief explanation, fully nine in ten Maryland voters support Program Open Space.** As shown in Figure 1 on the next page, 90% of Maryland voters back the program, and more than half (53%) "strongly support" it; fewer than one in ten express any opposition. This support cuts across major demographic and geographic groups, including:
  - 95% of women and 86% of men;
  - 92% of voters under 50, 86% of voters ages 50 to 64, and 91% of voters ages 65 and older;
  - 93% of Democrats, 90% of independents and 83% of Republicans; and
  - Support no lower than 90% in each of the state's four largest cities and counties - Baltimore, Prince George's, Montgomery and the Baltimore City.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and New Bridge Strategy (NBS) conducted a statewide survey online and via landline and wireless phones of 743 Maryland voters likely to cast ballots in November 2022. The sample included 400 voters statewide, plus oversamples yielding at least 100 voters each in Baltimore City and Prince George's, Montgomery, and Baltimore counties. The survey was conducted Jan. 16-25, 2021. The margin of sampling error for the full study is +/- 5.7% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups will be higher. Due to rounding, some percentages may not sum to 100%.

**Figure 1: Support for Program Open Space**

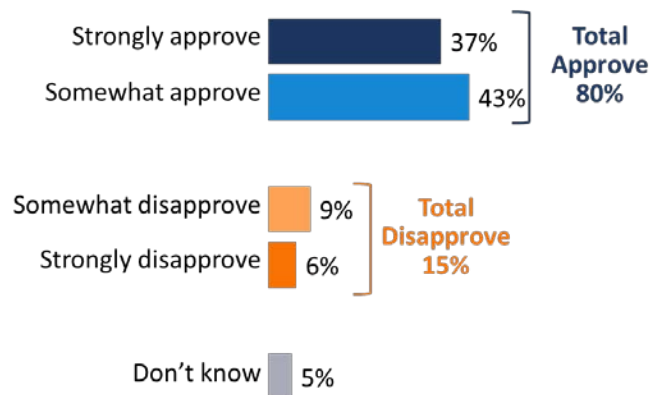
*Established in 1969, Program Open Space sets aside money to build parks; protect land around rivers, streams, and the bay; preserve fish and wildlife habitat; conserve forests, natural areas, and open space; protect farmland; and preserve cultural and historic sites throughout Maryland. Funding for the program comes from an existing tax charged each time a piece of property is sold, equal to 0.5% of the price paid for the property. Over the years, Program Open Space has protected 800,000 acres of land and has created over 4,000 state parks and recreation areas, and thousands of local neighborhood parks, playgrounds, historic sites, and battlefields. Based on this description, would you say that you generally support or oppose Maryland’s Program Open Space?*



- **In addition, four in five approve of the source of funding -- the real estate transfer tax -- for Program Open Space.** As shown in Figure 2 below, Maryland voters approve of the mechanism used to fund Program Open Space by a 65-point margin. More than one-third (37%) "strongly approve" of this source of funding.

**Figure 2: Funding Program Open Space**

*As I just mentioned, Program Open Space is funded by an existing state tax charged each time a piece of property is sold in Maryland, equal to 0.5% of the price paid for the property. Some people say that this is a fair way to fund land conservation and parks because much of the tax is paid through new development, meaning that if there is more development in Maryland, there will also be more money available for conservation and parks. In general, do you approve or disapprove of using this existing tax to fund land conservation in Maryland?*

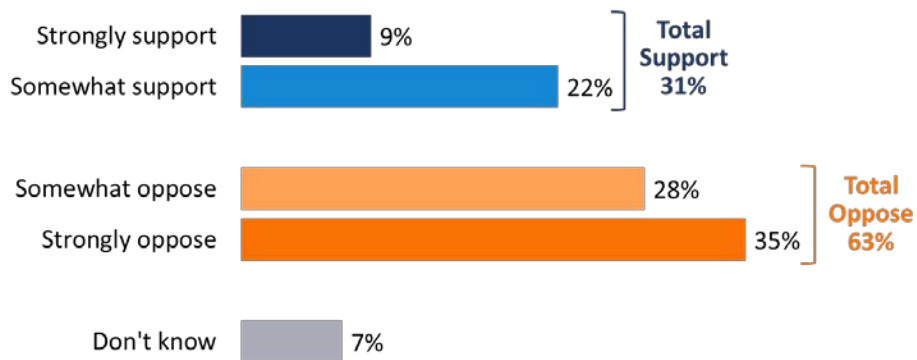


- **More than three in five Maryland voters oppose diverting funding away from Program Open Space to unrelated programs.** Figure 4 on the next page shows that three in five (63%) oppose using Program Open Space funding to balance the state budget and pay for maintenance of existing parks. Notably, a greater share (35%) "strongly opposes" this idea than even leans toward support (31%). Opposition to diversions from Program Open Space cuts across major demographic and geographic subgroups, including:

- 66% of men and 60% of women;
- 64% of voters under 50, 63% of voters ages 50 to 64, and 58% of voters ages 65 and older;
- 63% of Democrats, 58% of independents and 65% of Republicans; and
- Opposition as high as 66% in Baltimore County and no lower than 55% in Prince George's or Montgomery counties.

**Figure 4: Proposal to Divert Funding from Program Open Space**

*This year some legislators have proposed diverting funding away from Program Open Space to help balance the state budget, and to pay for maintenance of existing parks. This would take funding away from the dedicated purposes of Program Open Space, including protecting land around rivers, streams, and the bay; preserving fish and wildlife habitat; conserving forests, natural areas, and open space; and protecting farmland throughout Maryland. Would you support or oppose diverting funding from Program Open Space to help balance the state budget?*



After a brief exchange of arguments for and against diversion, a majority (55%) still oppose diversion and three in ten (31%) "strongly oppose" such a move.

In sum, the results of the survey make clear that **Maryland voters overwhelmingly support Program Open Space, approve of its funding mechanism, and oppose diverting its funding for other unrelated purposes.** Opposition to such diversions is broad and bipartisan, and even after a brief exchange of pros and cons a solid majority of Maryland voters continues to oppose such diversions.