

Desperate Annapolis

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Trying to be a responsible public servant can be a dicey thing in these trying economic times. That's what some local officials found out last week when they discovered that Annapolis was coveting some of their Project Open Space funds.

Sen. David Brinkley, a Republican who represents [Frederick](#) and Carroll counties, has been looking out for the interests of his constituents in this matter, and deserves their appreciation.

It seems that during the recently ended 2009 session of the General Assembly, cash-desperate lawmakers considered stripping from the fiscal 2010 budget about \$7 million in previously approved open space funds for the two counties.

The rub: Here in [Frederick](#) County, about \$3.9 million of the promised funding has yet to be committed to specific parkland purchases. Those uncommitted funds caught the attention of the Annapolis crowd, and they began to covet them. In order to help balance the books, they considered stripping the funding from the state budget.

Brinkley has urged local officials to start spending. Some may ask why county and municipal officials had been sitting on the funds as opposed to using them for their intended purpose. The answer: They were trying to — but it isn't that simple.

The state open space program requires that half the funding be spent to purchase parkland. That makes sense, considering the program's charter. But identifying and buying appropriate parcels of parkland doesn't happen overnight. Moreover, in order to buy significant parcels of land, several years' worth of funding must be accumulated. It was those accumulating uncommitted funds that the state found so tempting.

Brinkley's attention and efforts preserved [Frederick](#) County's \$3.9 million in uncommitted open space funding that, we hope, will soon translate into additional parkland for the county.

Brinkley says it's urgent that those unused funds be spent as soon as possible. Rushing the purchase of expensive and critical parkland isn't the best way to go about it, but when the state's sticky fingers are grasping at money already promised to [Frederick](#) County, it calls for quick action.

Brinkley's exhortation to spend the money included the warning that, otherwise, next year the county could face the possibility of the funding being "harvested by the state."

He also compared leaving uncommitted funds "lying around" in tough times such as these to "leaving booze around for an alcoholic. You can't keep doing it." The temptation will, at some point, be too much to bear — and that point could be next year.

While it might not represent the best public policy, Brinkley's call for the money to be spent is a realistic one, and we encourage officials to do the best they can under the time and other constraints they face.