

let Lewis column response

Published in Washington Post October 13, 2003

***Letters to the Editor
Real Estate Section
The Washington Post***

To the Editor:

I was stunned to read the assertions in Roger K. Lewis's column on October 4 that "developers do not cause growth, they respond to it" and that "developers in effect implement public policy set forth in master plans, zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations and building codes."

The idea that developers are simply passive implementers of public policy could not be further from the truth in Montgomery County -- and I expect in many other local jurisdictions as well.

Developers and land-use attorneys have persistently lobbied for higher density development in almost every master plan -- urban, suburban, and rural -- that has come before the County Council since I was sworn in five years ago. They also have persistently lobbied for zoning ordinances that would allow higher density development than called for in master plans. They have furiously lobbied against any proposal, however modest, that would place any limitations for their ability to build whatever they want, wherever they want -- without giving them offsetting advantages in some other area.

In addition, development interests have lobbied against changes to the building code that would improve public safety. For example, the Suburban Maryland Building Industry Association and the Greater Washington Coalition of Realtors opposed legislation just passed unanimously by the Council to extend the requirement for built-in fire sprinklers to new single-family detached homes built in Montgomery County.

Moreover, developers, land-use attorneys, and other real estate interests hyperactively seek to shape who is elected to the County Council. Even though a recent independent poll showed that only one percent of county residents think the county is growing too slowly, half of all monies raised in the 2002 county election came from fast-growth development interests. Candidates who support faster growth have a huge fundraising advantage over candidates who favor slower growth.

For Mr. Lewis to devote an entire column about the role of developers in the land-use

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process without noting any of these facts is very disappointing. Those of us who experience it on the ground in the real world -- day in and day out -- see a very different reality.

Sincerely,

*Phil Andrews
Montgomery County Councilmember*