

Affected Resident Objection to ZTA 20-07

From: Matt Pacinelli
To: county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov
Date: Tuesday, June 22, 2021, 10:36 PM EDT

June 22, 2021

Montgomery County Council Members
100 Maryland, Avenue, 6th floor
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Hucker and Council Members:

As residents of a potentially affected neighborhood in Chevy Chase (Brookdale), we are appealing to our elected representatives, five of whom directly represent us, to consider resident perspectives before moving forward on any zoning changes or the Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan.

The county executive and other groups have detailed specific steps that the County Council needs to address before proceeding with any steps affecting existing single family home neighborhoods. We have reviewed several of these and strongly endorse their consideration by the County Council. While we are not repeating those recommendations and comments, we would like to add a few additional points for consideration.

While we, like others, think bringing additional living units, including MPDUs near transportation is a laudable goal, it can be executed without eliminating single family home neighborhoods as proposed by the Planning Board (see [3/7/21 Washington Post opinion by Natali Fani-Gonzalez](#), Planning Board vice-chair). The Planning Board's one-size-fits-all approach to urban, suburban, and more rural areas of the county near metro stops is extremely short-sighted and irresponsible, doesn't benefit stable and historic neighborhoods like Brookdale and will not create any affordable or attainable housing.

Our reasoning is as follows:

First, despite a significant collapse in the Friendship Heights retail core, redevelopment is already planned or underway to substantially expand new residential opportunities within immediate proximity of the Friendship Heights Metro Station. For example, the 5500 Wisconsin plan by Donohoe and Carr Properties will replace a mostly empty one story retail complex with a 380 unit apartment building, including 15% MPDUs. In addition, on the D.C. side, the current Mazza Gallerie site has been purchased by Tishman Speyer, and they announced plans to construct 350 apartments on the site, including affordable units, along with ground floor retail. Finally, GEICO has an approved development plan for its current headquarters at 5620 Western Ave, Chevy Chase, MD, that includes 500 residences (town homes and apartments). Surely, this is not the last of these large scale projects in higher density locations proximate to the Metro and we fully support similar projects as they provide a substantial amount of affordable or attainable housing.

Second, as we understand the proposal, letting developers, by right, infill our R-60 lots with town homes or apartment blocks, with no off-street parking requirements or community comment or review, causing significant increases in density on our mostly narrow streets, with no sidewalks, curbs, or gutters seems like a recipe for disaster. When residents have events with significant street parking, you can't drive a normal car down some streets, let alone emergency vehicles.

Third, though the proposed changes will increase density, given the significant cost to land in this neighborhood, it will yield more higher-priced homes and owner-occupants competing with developers which will only drive up pricing and therefore may even result in **fewer attainable units** than exist today! Evidence of this can be seen in the enormous prices obtained by other town house type developments in and around Chevy Chase and Bethesda.

Finally, real estate experts have told us that the real scarcity is in the number of single family homes. Every sale of a single family home in our area in the past six months brings in multiple buyers, bidding wars, and prices exceeding the already high asking prices by 10-20%. **Reducing their quantity will only increase pricing and make the area less affordable which is the antithesis of the stated goal of The Thrive Montgomery 2050!**

We recently heard from several members of the planning department at our annual meeting and it became clear they are moving forward to implement a plan that isn't even approved. We urge the Council to slow the process down and expand your outreach efforts to locations across the county to obtain the input you need from your constituents and allow for debate on such a significant change to the county plan - as is done on nearly all comparable major zoning change proposals.

Please do not mistake our politeness for acquiescence as many residents are outraged over this assault on taxpayers that seems to mostly benefit developers and will surely not result in greater quantities of attainable or affordable housing within proximity to the Friendship Heights Metro. **The Thrive Montgomery 2050 plan and related zoning proposals will be eliminating a zoning planning and approval process that resident taxpayers relied upon when buying their homes.**

Instead, we support maximizing production of affordable/attainable housing in the existing high density zones such as 5500 Wisconsin and Mazza Gallerie.

We thank you for the opportunity to offer our views and concerns and look forward to robust community involvement in the development proposals for our county. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Matthew S. Pacinelli & family