

Liz Brent's testimony for the November 30 Thrive 2050 public hearing

My name is Liz Brent. I am the founder and broker of Go Brent Realty and the founder of the non profit Silver Spring Cares. The book Neighborhood Defenders, published in 2020 by 3 professors at Boston University tells a powerful story about participatory politics and America's Housing Crisis. Here's a brief synopsis:

"Since the collapse of the housing market in 2008, demand for housing has consistently outpaced supply in many US communities. The failure to construct sufficient housing - especially affordable housing - in desirable communities and neighborhoods comes with significant social, economic, and environmental costs. This book examines how local participatory land use institutions amplify the power of entrenched interests and privileged homeowners. The book draws on sweeping data to examine the dominance of land use politics by 'neighborhood defenders' - individuals who oppose new housing projects far more strongly than their broader communities and who are likely to be privileged on a variety of dimensions. Neighborhood defenders participate disproportionately and take advantage of land use regulations to restrict the construction of multifamily housing. The result is diminished housing stock and higher housing costs, with participatory institutions perversely reproducing inequality."

It's high time that Montgomery County walk away, head held high, from the outsized power given to our most privileged residents as well as neighborhood associations and particularly the Montgomery County Civic Federation which oddly speaks of their almost 100 year history as though that history is something to be proud of. The Civic Fed's own write up on the birth of the organization cites Col E Brooke Lee, developer who used racially restrictive covenants and later an outspoken critic of new civil rights measures in Montgomery County in the 1960s, as a major early supporter of the Civic Fed.

It's time to say enough. It's time to pass Thrive 2050. Thank you.

Liz Brent