

My name is Katherine Katzin, and I oppose Bill 18-23. The Bill would eliminate the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) from the County Code, replacing it with a Community Zoning and Land Use Resource Office, where key OPC functions have been removed and the advantages of developers and other powerful interests are preserved.

According to the Code (Sec. 2-150 (a)), "an independent People's Counsel can protect the public interest and promote a full and fair presentation of relevant issues in administrative proceedings in order to achieve balanced records upon which sound land use decisions can be made. In addition, a People's Counsel who provides technical assistance to citizens and citizen organizations will encourage effective participation in, and increase public understanding of and confidence in, the County land use process."

Our county's land use rules and regulations are complex, and attorneys have an advantage. An OPC would provide people with technical support for land use and zoning processes. This is even more critical given the growing immigrant population in our county. A People's Counsel would advocate for the public interest, participate in proceedings, and promote equity and fairness in land use and zoning.

Unless represented by counsel, affected residents are excluded from pre-hearing proceedings and barred from filing pre-hearing motions. A People's Counsel participates in proceedings to protect the public interest and ensure balance in the record to promote full and fair presentation of relevant issues. The Resource Officer does not.

A People's Counsel must be among those consulted before Council Staff draft reports to the Council. Many of the ZTAs adopted since the defunding of the OPC would have been flagged by an OPC.

Please vote Bill 18-23 down and vote to restore and fully fund the Office of the People's Counsel, as requested in the County Executive's budget.