

Testimony on behalf of the County Executive Marc Elrich on

Bill 18-23, Structure of County Government – Community Zoning and Land Use Resource Office

April 18, 2023

My name is Meredith Wellington, Land Use Planning Policy Analyst to County Executive Marc Elrich. The County Executive would retain the Office of the People's Counsel to advocate for BIPOC and low-income residents and to provide equity for those who lack the means to hire an attorney of their own, and strongly supports OLO's RESJ Impact Statement that recommends retaining the Office of the People's Counsel, with several options.

The County Executive opposes the creation of the new position, the Community Zoning and Land Use Resource Officer. He sees no need for the new Resource Officer, regardless of the Council's decision on the People's Counsel. Despite the impressive job title, the position is one of little authority. The job responsibilities are narrow in scope: to compile information as requested by residents about development review matters and variances. This information is already easily available to the public online and through interactions with Planning Staff. The new position would not have the authority to address issues around RESJ.

The Community Zoning and Land Use Resource Officer has no authority to advocate for the public interest or to promote a full and fair presentation of relevant land use issues in administrative proceedings; no authority with respect to zoning changes; or to advocate or advise even on the limited land use subjects that are in the bill. This new position is simply not needed, and an unnecessary expense.

That is not the case for the Office of the People's Counsel. Recently, residents needed, but did not have, an advocate to speak for them to the Planning Board, to call out, among other things, the Planning Board's violations of the Open Meetings law and abuse of the Consent Calendar. What is needed is an advocate, not a bureaucrat. Please retain the Office of the People's Counsel.

Thank you for your consideration.