

**I URGE COUNCIL TO:
OPPOSE 18-23 AND FULLY FUND THE OFFICE OF THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL**

Hello,

I'm Susan Labin and I'm pleased to address this new Council. I'm a long-time resident of Montgomery County and my children attended MCPS.

I have a PH.D. and many years of experience in evaluation. I have worked collaboratively with public and private stakeholders at all levels of government and community. Collaboration and listening to stakeholders is foundational to good evaluation. It is also foundational to good government.

Montgomery County needs the Office of the People's Council. It needs two-way communication, not the one-way communication that Bill 18-23 proposes. Ike Leggett sponsored the creation of OPC to provide for more balance and diversity in land use decisions. In 2016, he also asked the Council to preserve OPC. The public interest—not special interests—is at the heart of the OPC. It can be hard to determine what is the public interest, but at a minimum, a range of stakeholders and evidence is necessary for informed balanced decisions.

The County Executive has no legislative authority in land use and zoning decisions. When a recent bill in Annapolis sought to increase the role of the County Executive in land use, a Councilmember called it a "power grab". It seems like at every turn the real power grab is by special interests.

The sponsor of 18-23 has said his motivation is equity, yet the findings in the 2008 Office of Legislative Oversight report found the opposite: that OPC benefited equity and should be expanded. OLO found that those who could afford to hire their own attorneys did so. OPC chose to participate in proceedings where affected parties could not afford their own counsel. Yesterday's Report from OLO reaffirms the need and its support for OPC. Despite claims to the contrary, OPC does not represent either party in a proceeding, it represents the public interest at large.

I'm not opposed to business interests or to development, but we need to include a range of stakeholders and include a range of evidence. Otherwise, where is equity or independence?

The lack of independence and integrity of the Planning Board has received a lot of attention in the past 6 months. Stated values of independence, transparency, integrity, inclusion, equity and diversity, have been hailed many Councilmembers. These are the hallmarks of the OPC.

Please make them the hallmarks of this Council—withdraw 18-23 and fully fund the OPC, at a very minimum, at the level in the current proposed budget.

Thank you