

March 4, 2024

Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD 20850

Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 24-01, Household Living – Civic and Institutional Uses (Support)

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the D.C. region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

CSG supports ZTA 24-01. Montgomery County faces a serious housing shortage, and this ZTA adds another tool to our housing toolbox by allowing faith and private education institutions to contribute to meeting our housing need and produce affordable housing. It also excludes the Agricultural Reserve, affirming the continued importance of preserving this natural resource and preventing environmentally damaging sprawl development.

For faith institutions, building housing can be an opportunity to benefit the community, act upon values of service to and care for others, and creatively use their land in a way that supports an institution's continued thriving as its own needs change. Allowing faith and private education institutions a clearer path toward using their land for housing—and therefore greater flexibility to adapt to changing institutional needs—mutually supports the well-being of our communities and of these institutions.

The main objectives of this ZTA in our view are: 1) to meet our county's housing need by providing an additional, affordability-focused pathway to build more housing; and 2) to reduce the existing barriers to qualifying institutions who seek to build housing. With that in mind, we believe the ZTA could even more successfully achieve these goals if projects were approved through the site plan approval process rather than the conditional use approval process.

We believe that site plan approval would provide adequate review while being less likely to incur the costs and extended timeframe of the conditional use process, which could continue to represent a significant barrier to many institutions that would otherwise pursue housing production under this ZTA.

We would also like to draw the Council's attention to the language used on lines 103 and 175-6 of the draft ZTA, which states that "The Hearing Examiner may modify any development standards to maximize the compatibility of the building with the residential character of the surrounding neighborhood" (emphasis added). In each case this is preceded by the statement that "Height, density, coverage, and parking standards must be compatible with surrounding uses."

We believe that this statement regarding height, density, coverage and parking compatibility provides clear and sufficient guidance to the Hearing Examiner in the case of approval through the conditional use process. We are concerned that the language “maximize the compatibility” could be quite broadly interpreted and end up being unintentionally restrictive. We recommend that this language be changed or removed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie Kisicki". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Carrie" and last name "Kisicki" clearly legible.

Carrie Kisicki
Montgomery County Advocacy Manager