

February 27, 2024

**TO:** Montgomery County Council  
**FROM:** Jane Lyons-Raeder  
**BILL:** Zoning Text Amendment ZTA 24-01, Household Living – Civic and Institutional Uses  
**POSITION:** Support

---

Good afternoon and thank you. My name is Jane Lyons-Raeder and I'm a renter in downtown Silver Spring. I'm also a member and volunteer leader with Montgomery for All, but today I'm speaking as an individual. I strongly support ZTA 24-01, which would allow townhomes and apartment buildings on land used for religious or private educational purposes.

Many of you know me, but you might not know about my deep personal connection with the Episcopal Church. I grew up in the church and the Episcopal community and faith tradition remains a huge part of my life, primarily in my connection with the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland's camp, conference, and retreat center where I serve as the Vice Chair on the Board of Trustees. Although I've often wrestled with what my faith means to me, from a young age I felt called to social justice or liberation theology. In many ways, I view my advocacy work on affordable housing and land use as an expression of my faith and the Christian mission of caring for the vulnerable and disenfranchised.

I know that I'm not alone in this, and that there are many religious organizations, Christian and otherwise, who view affordable housing as an important ministry. For far too long, arbitrary zoning laws have prevented religious groups from using such a precious resource (their land) to enact their faith. If there are congregations willing to use their land for affordable housing, the county should do everything it can to encourage and assist them in that endeavor. Instead, our land use laws have effectively told our neighbors to look elsewhere for a home they can afford.

These housing projects would still have to meet a lot of standards. I am particularly concerned by the requirement that the new construction would have to be compatible with the height, density, coverage, and parking standards of surrounding uses, especially since this ZTA is intended to open up housing opportunities in neighborhoods that may have previously intentionally excluded townhomes or apartment buildings. I would also like to see housing allowed as a by-right or use the site plan approval process, rather than be a conditional use, which is a higher hurdle. I urge the PHP committee to consider loosening some of these requirements, which seem to go against the goal of providing more flexibility.

Despite these concerns, I am still enthusiastically supportive of ZTA 24-01 as a step towards more affordable communities. Thank you.