

ZTA 25-02 More Housing N.O.W Testimony
Laurie McGilvray March 11, 2025

Good Afternoon President Stewart and Council Members.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on ZTA 25-02 – More Housing N.O.W. While I support more affordable housing in the county, and the provisions for converting vacant office space to housing, the Workforce Housing Opportunity Fund, and increased Homeowner Assistance Program, I believe the proposal needs more thought and considerable refinement to avoid unintended consequences.

I am here today, in large part because I learned about the ZTA from a neighbor who was very upset to find her home included on the map. She feels singled out as one of only four homes on that stretch of road. As a low-income single senior, she is deeply worried that the change will increase property values and taxes and make it unaffordable for her to stay in her home. This must be avoided. There are precious few places for low-income seniors to live in the County, not to mention the disruption of leaving a long-time home.

In Takoma Park, we are working hard to keep low-income seniors in their homes. The Village of Takoma has volunteers like my husband who do small home repairs. We have helped seniors to apply for low-income weatherization and energy efficiency programs, both of which my neighbor has benefited from. There is something wrong with the ZTA if after trying so hard to stay in her home my neighbor will be forced out because of unaffordable property taxes. Making “room” for a higher income workforce housing resident and middle-income family doesn’t seem like the right balance.

I strongly recommend the Council look at how parcels for the workforce housing development method were identified. It is a real patchwork, especially for parcels with single-family homes. Single-family homes along busy streets are often some of the more affordably-priced houses, and yet the bill provides no protections for existing low-income single-family housing.

I encourage Council members to envision how redevelopment might work given this patchwork. There are areas where only 1, 2, 3 or 4 residential lots are included on a stretch of roadway. Despite being part of a subdivision, only the few lots fronting the roadway are included. It may make sense to include parcels on a corner lot and/or those that front the roadway but have an interior street address to create larger areas.

I wonder how many workforce housing units the ZTA will produce if the minimum is 15% of units in a complex or 1 of 3 units in a triplex. How many workforce units are required in a duplex? The ZTA doesn't say. I strongly recommend the Council exclude homes occupied by low-income residents and exclude residential areas with less than 5 parcels.

Finally, I was surprised that affected property owners were not notified directly of a change of this magnitude. I urge the Council to slow down, make sure all property owners are informed of the ZTA, and ensure that current low-income residents are not adversely affected.