

Testimony in Opposition of Housing NOW ZTAs

Good afternoon Council Members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Michelle Penn, I have been a Montgomery County resident for the past 12 years in the neighborhood of Kemp Mill. I strongly oppose this Housing Now Package and urge you to reject it.

Let's start at the concept underlying this package: the 15 minute city. You see, I am a super active person. Most weekends you'll see my husband and I out with our 5 kids exploring the bike paths around our neighborhood, or exploring a new area of the DMV on our bikes. When I first heard about this concept, I loved the idea. How cool would it be to live in a place where everything you need is within a 15 minute walk or "roll" of your home? Think about how much healthier we all would be. Think about how much community we would build amongst ourselves.

If we were starting with a blank plot of land and could build our neighborhood accordingly, then this utopian vision could actually become somewhat realistic. But, as you all know, Montgomery County is NOT a blank plot of land. It actually is a lovely, suburban area with its own characteristics that make it unique and a truly lovely, vibrant community. But it is one that is suburban, with sprawl. Which means it is necessary for a car, and the 15 minute city is a completely unattainable vision to then try to "make fit" on this already existing community. Its like trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. It just doesn't work.

Its actually worse than just an unattainable vision. It is actually existential threat to our community, one that hasn't existed before in the 12 years that I have lived here. How, do you ask? Let me tell you now, since you certainly did not ask for my or anyone else's input before you created these proposals.

By increasing the density with this Housing NOW package you are adding hundreds and hundreds more people to our roads, which are already crowded and busy. Do you know that during busy times, as it currently stands, you can still wait through multiple rounds of lights at Four Corners during rush hour? That traffic on Colesville is so bad that I avoid going to downtown Silver Spring until after 10:30am on weekdays. This is the reality BEFORE you start adding thousands of residents up and down the corridors. And now you are suggesting putting in place "traffic calming" measures of the UBCP. To what end? You will basically be making it virtually impossible to get anywhere in our suburban community. Because guess what? All those people that will live in your

workforce housing will have the same problem as we do....they will need their car to get where they need to go. And it won't be because they don't love biking or rolling or public transit, but because we don't live in a 15 minute city and it can't become that when it is already something else. I have many friends who live in communities in the Tri-State area where they have too many residents for the roads. It takes them 30 minutes to go three miles. Do not turn our communities into these types of cities.

By the way, I checked the mail all last week, certain there would be something about this upcoming meeting and initiative that has me so worried for the future of my community. No. Not one mailer about this initiative that would forever change the nature of our neighborhood. Even worse. Not a single resident of our neighborhood was asked for feedback or input into this plan. Not even our Civic Association. Ok, fine, maybe it was just our community. No, not just us. A colleague actually checked with 21 different civic associations and HOAs around the county. Not a single one was contacted. How is that possible? Who are you here to serve?

As your constituents who put you in place, we are feeling completely overlooked and blindsided. I truly believe my community and neighborhood would be as concerned as I am and would all be here now if they were even aware of what was in the works. Even as you see now, with our colored signs, in the middle of the day, just by word of mouth alone,, we are here to show you we are not voiceless and we will not be overlooked in service of a utopian vision that does not belong here.

For the record, on this gorgeous day, I thought about biking here. I took a look at how long it would take me. 1 hour and 12 minutes. If this were a 15 minute city, then shouldn't it be that I could bike to this council meeting in 15 minutes? Is the plan to move the Council Building to be within the 15 minutes of the Housing NOW buildings? You and I both know that is not in the plan. That no matter how much you try to force it., with these ZTAs, with the UBCP and the other Corridor Packages, that this round peg is not going to fit into the square hole. Please stop trying, please reject these ZTAs and the other packages looking to destroy our vibrant and thriving community. Thank you.

Michelle Penn

[REDACTED]

Silver Spring MD 20902