

Written Testimony of Robert Gorham, Montgomery County Citizen.

The goals of the More Housing N.O.W. bill and ZTA 25-02 are laudable, but the de-zoning proposal will not reach this goal.

Carving up established neighborhoods is not the best way to address Montgomery County's housing needs.

You need to identify "greenfield" opportunities that would allow for properly planned developments that include workforce housing. For example, White Flint and the GEICO campus are prime areas for planned communities supported by adequate infrastructure.

If no developer will step up to this opportunity, you need to examine what other rules and regulations are de-incentivizing them to build here, and not shoehorn random development opportunities where they don't belong.

ZTA 25-02 is not supported by data demonstrating the number of units needed for "workforce housing" and how many units need to be built to satisfy its stated goals. How will you know when you have achieved "success"?

As written, this bill is an open-ended give-away to developers, enabling them to develop as much market-rate housing as they want, regardless of the damage they do to existing infrastructure.

Please don't disguise a developer give-away in the name of workforce housing. That is disrespectful to us and the workers you want to help.

I was talking to one of my local firemen, and he said that increased densification will result in serious safety risks in my community. As it is, his firetrucks can't pass on many narrow streets in Bethesda and Chevy Chase, and he said more density would mean more street parking and more obstacles to getting to homes needing fire or EMT services.

He also said that many fire hydrants in Montgomery County operate at low pressure. Is this because the population density is overtaking our available water supply? If so, I don't think it's a good idea to jeopardize our safety, and the safety of incoming workforce residents, by overcrowding existing neighborhoods.

If my house burns down because the fire truck couldn't get to me, then it isn't worth living in Montgomery County anymore.

Duplexes have no workforce housing minimum requirements. Why are they included if they can be sold at market rates? This makes ZTA 25-02 a windfall for developers that does not produce more affordable housing and that unnecessarily disrupts established neighborhoods. Who does this proposal ultimately benefit?

Why allow triplexes and quadplexes to include businesses like day care? This will increase traffic and parking problems in effected neighborhoods, and what does that have to do with workforce housing in any case? This is another example of how internally inconsistent this hastily written bill is.

ZTA 25-02 has not taken into account the pressures on existing infrastructure, cost of mitigating that damage, and who will bear the cost of any infrastructure expansions required by additional housing under this bill. I believe in a variety of housing options for a variety of income levels, but what is the point of offering those if the underlying infrastructure will start breaking down? In your effort to make room for more people who want to live in Montgomery County, you could be making Montgomery County a less attractive place to live.

You need to work with the MCPS to determine the impact on school crowding. A thoughtful plan would predict where best to house new incoming students under this plan, and what the cost would be on school resources. Many schools are already overcrowded as it is. How is it good for incoming workforce residents to be placed in overcrowded schools?

The County Council has not followed a transparent, democratic process in introducing the More Housing N.O.W. bill. More time was spent with paid lobbyists than the community. The community cares about the goals of more housing options in Montgomery County, but you did not provide any meaningful opportunity to hear alternative proposals. I feel like you are “checking a box” at these public input session and that you are more attentive to special interests than the people who voted for you.

I will not vote for anyone who supports for this bill.

I am tired of the County Council bombarding Montgomery County with hair-brained ideas that waste tax-payer dollars. I want the best for Montgomery County, but this Council keeps proposing things that sound good in the abstract (like bike lanes, linear parks, and upzoning), but they do not deliver any benefit to the county in reality, mainly because they are notional ideas that aren't supported by data.

This Council refuses to work with the community on viable alternatives to challenges, including affordable housing. You seem to be serving other interests, like housing non-profits that depend upon you for funding. Please listen to the sincere ideas of the people who elected you.

Maryland, and Montgomery County especially, could be heading into a recession with the loss of federal jobs and federal funding for a variety of programs. This is NOT the time to pursue this effort. You need to wait to understand these effects before passing such a significant change in property zoning.

I signed up to live in a single-family zone neighborhood, and pay taxes accordingly. If my property values go down as a result of this plan, will my taxes go down? Or will my taxes go up if my neighborhood needs infrastructure expansion?

Many people think that the lack of jobs is what is causing people to leave the County. You should focus on attracting high-quality corporations to offer good jobs, then affordability will be less of a challenge.