

Citizen Testimony Regarding More Housing N.O.W. bill and ZTA 25-02

As a lifelong resident of Bethesda, I write to express my extreme upset at the pace at which housing proposals and roadway changes are being implemented without either clarification of how they address county challenges or sufficient discussion with the residents these proposals directly impact.

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. 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.

The More Housing NOW proposal has been touted as a way to add new affordable housing to the county. However, much like the last proposal, the proposal is not tailored to address that concern - most of the proposed available units would be at market rate, meaning those who would most benefit are the developers.

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. 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?

One infrastructure concern is traffic. The parcels proposed are not proximate to Metro, which flies counter to the County's efforts to drive use of greener transit options. Both River Road and Massachusetts Avenue are two-lane roads in either direction without capacity for extension. To my knowledge, the County has not conducted a study to determine how this increase in residents would impact traffic and thus pollution. This is to say nothing of parking.

Further, I am not aware of any studies done to determine the impact on our already crowded schools. Both of my children have attended Westbrook before and after the recent rezoning. The rezoning doubled the size of Westbrook and strained all the existing resources, whether the counselor (no additional counselors were added and, in fact, we don't have one on staff now after the departure of the school's beloved Mrs. Faerber) or parking. Class sizes exploded - my son's class (not grade) doubled in size, with no additional teacher support in the classroom. And this is before all of the housing scheduled to come online in the community, such as the new residences around Westbard and Mazza. Where will those children go to school?

Another infrastructure consideration is safety. Increased densification will result in serious safety risks in our community. There is already concern about firetrucks benign unable to pass on many

narrow streets in Bethesda and Chevy Chase; more density would mean more street parking and more obstacles to getting to homes needing fire or EMT services.

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 have not provided any meaningful opportunity to hear alternative proposals. The public input sessions feel like you are “checking a box” rather than engaging in substantive conversation. This is a half-baked, rushed proposal. As a democratically elected official, your responsibility is to us, the residents, not the developers.

Sincerely,
Caroline Coleman Handorf



Bethesda, Maryland