

**SUBJECT: More Housing N.O.W. Legislation (ZTA 25-02, ZTA 25-03, SRA 25-01, Expedited Bill 2-25)**

Dear Councilmembers:

The Citizens' Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights (CCCFH), a local land use advocate in southwest Montgomery County serving 20,000 residents in 18 communities, commends you for endeavoring to provide workforce housing for teachers, firefighters, police officers, and biotech and healthcare workers. We also commend you for supporting legislation that would provide the conversion of vacant office buildings to housing, which many of us suggested at the community meetings held for the previous housing initiative (AHSI) proposed by the Planning Board. Nonetheless, **the More Housing N.O.W. proposals should be withdrawn pending more detailed assessment of ongoing federal job and spending cuts, the completion of necessary impact studies, and revisions addressing numerous comments and questions from County residents and civic groups, including the CCCFH.**

While we do not yet know the full impact of dramatically reduced federal spending and job cuts on Montgomery County, it is clear that **federal downsizing will have an adverse effect on our county's economy, job market, and tax revenues.** *Withdrawing the More Housing N.O.W. package is necessary so that the Council can better assess what our county will be able to afford to promote workforce housing. We'd rather have ZTAs and legislation that are realistic in their approach and result in needed workforce housing than idealistic proposals that bear no fruit.*

We are also concerned that **the More Housing N.O.W. package raises numerous serious issues that need to be addressed before any discussion occurs** within the PHP Committee or the entire Council:

1. While workforce housing is an important need, **the most pressing housing need is for lower-income families**, those families making less than \$50,000 per year. Once again, as with AHSI, this need appears to have been ignored for developments with 19 units or fewer. It is also unclear whether developments of 20 or more units will be subject to the workforce housing requirement, the MPDU requirement, or both.
2. As was the case with AHSI, **the County has not provided baseline numbers of the types of housing needed at various price points.** We need this baseline to compare those numbers with the housing that is currently in the pipeline and under development. **We also lack estimates of the workforce housing expected to be produced under the proposed legislation, estimates that are needed to judge the efficacy of More Housing N.O.W.**
3. Once again, **members of community organizations were not involved in developing this legislation.** Instead, photos of the press conference held on January 28 to announce this legislation include paid lobbyists from the Coalition for Smarter Growth and Greater Greater Washington. Online posts supporting the legislation congratulate a lobbyist from the Coalition for Smarter Growth for playing a central role in drafting the More Housing N.O.W. package. Where were leaders of our community

organizations, including the CCCFH, the Montgomery County Civic Federation, the Montgomery County Communities Coalition, the Montgomery County Citizens for Good Governance, the Greater Olney Civic Association and other neighborhood associations? Why were none of our citizen representatives involved in crafting this latest iteration of housing legislation?

4. Shutting out the vast majority of the public — the taxpayers who pay for our government services — is clearly an objective of the current Planning Board, the Planning Department and the County Council. But it is **NOT** how the democratic process in this county has historically worked. **We are tired of being shut out and given pronouncements about where and how much housing will be built in our communities without having a seat at the table** alongside developers, lobbying organizations, and other “experts” on housing policy. We, too, are experts because we live in these communities, have children who attend local schools, commute to work on local roads, and know the opportunities and limitations in our communities. If members of the public have a seat at the table, the likelihood of buy-in by the public would increase. **As matters now stand, More Housing N.O.W. has too many weaknesses and unanswered questions to warrant our support.**
5. **The information that has been provided to the public about More Housing N.O.W, is inadequate.**

A. The map showing the corridors of properties affected by the proposed ZTAs is labeled “illustrative.” The more detailed map of affected properties posted on the Planning Department website has a lengthy disclaimer that says, “a small number of parcels may be inadvertently included or excluded from this map.” Consequently, **the map is confusing. Have all properties that are approved for higher density and workforce housing been identified?** When all properties identified for upzoning have been definitively identified, a list of all the addresses and legal descriptions (plats, lots) of these properties, should be appended to the ZTA with a clear and legally precise map.

B. Although Councilmember Friedson has stated that only parcels fronting on identified corridors can be upzoned, other Montgomery County land use lawyers have opined that the County’s Chapter 50 subdivision requirements allow adjoining lots on the interiors of single-family neighborhoods to be combined for upzoning with corridor facing parcels. **The More Housing N.O.W. legislation should be redrafted to explicitly eliminate parcels that do not front on identified corridors.**

6. **Confusion about More Housing N.O.W, is compounded because it includes properties along roadways that were not designated as Growth Corridors in Thrive 2050.** As a result, it will come as a surprise to many homeowners that suddenly their properties are subject to potential upzoning to develop workforce housing.

7. **Have property owners whose parcels have been identified for upzoning been sent a postcard or other information so they can participate in the public information sessions and hearings** that are planned to review these bills?  
Councilmembers provide ongoing information to their constituents on a wide variety of matters. Surely, the proposed upzoning of one's residence warrants advance written notice?
8. **What process was used to identify properties chosen for upzoning along the corridors?** Were these areas assessed for existing density? Were traffic studies performed, and assessments made for needed infrastructure including water, sewage, gas and electricity?
9. **The upzoning proposal in the More Housing N.O.W. package raises concerns about traffic congestion, increased on-street parking and impeded emergency response in single-family neighborhoods.** Will additional housing built result in traffic increasing through neighborhood streets or will all traffic directly **enter from and exit onto the corridors they face?** **Increased on-street parking could impede access by emergency responders?** Many of these corridors have poor public transit, requiring new residents to own vehicles, which will add to traffic congestion. And, **with some of these properties within a half-mile of Metro stations, developers will not be required to provide off-street parking per ZTA 23-10.** Some of these corridors do not allow parking on the street or only allow it during limited hours. Have parking and traffic ramifications been considered or studied?
10. **Have comprehensive environmental and fiscal impact studies been conducted? The new RESJ (racial equity/social justice) impact study finds that MORE Housing N.O.W will worsen RESJ outcomes.**
  - A. This legislation will affect **ground water retention, stormwater management, tree canopy coverage and the presence of urban heat islands throughout Montgomery County.** These concerns require **detailed environmental reviews.**
  - B. **Fiscal impact studies should be undertaken to assess the costs associated with implementing the More Housing N.O.W. package, including infrastructure costs and tax abatements.** The 25- year tax abatement for offices converted to multi-family housing should be more carefully drawn to reduce adverse fiscal impact and achieve affordable housing goals. The District of Columbia, for example, limits a similar abatement to downtown DC and portions of two other neighborhoods; the term of the abatement is restricted to 20 years. The DC abatement also requires set-asides for housing affordable to households earning 60% to 80% of median family income.
  - C. The RESJ impact study conducted by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight found that the More Housing N.O.W. legislation **“could have a negative impact on racial equity and social justice”** because the bill **“would likely benefit landlords and residents who can afford market-rate housing more than residents in need of affordable housing,”** thus widening **“disparities in housing by**

**race and ethnicity. Further, the foregone property tax revenue could undermine the County's capacity to provide future public goods and services, which could particularly harm BIPOC community members."**

In addition, there is considerable concern from low- and moderate-income communities that their single-family residences will be targeted by developers, leading to gentrification, the destruction of low- and moderate-income housing and substantial displacement.

- 11. The zoning modifications in the More Housing N.O.W. upend the master and sector plan process, a process that has worked well for the past 50+ years in designating where and how new growth should develop in our suburban county and a process that up until recently has included considerable community input. Just prior to these ZTAs being made public, the Planning Department released the University Boulevard Corridor Plan. What takes precedence? The new ZTAs which identify specific properties for work force housing, existing master plans, or the Growth Corridor Plan identified under Thrive 2050?**

Until its proponents can respond to the foregoing concerns and provide an honest assessment of the housing we need and how our county will help pay for it, **the More Housing N.O.W. proposal should be withdrawn.** While it is on hold, additional needs assessments should be made and greater input by residents should be included to ensure that the completed legislation meets community needs. **We live here. We understand our county's housing needs and we support the development of workforce and lower-income housing in our neighborhoods. Including community members in the solution will result in a stronger, more acceptable proposal than has resulted by excluding us.**

Sincerely,

David Forman

Chair

Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights