

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY
LEANNE TOBIAS
SPRINGFIELD CIVIC ASSOCIATION
MORE HOUSING N.O.W.
MARCH 11, 2025**

I'm Leanne Tobias, a Board member of the Springfield Civic Association in Bethesda. SCA represents 650 homes and approximately 1,700 residents.

SCA appreciates More Housing N.O.W.— it's an improvement from the previous AHSI proposal in that it restricts upzoning to major designated corridors, rather than permitting upzoning in the interiors of residential neighborhoods. But this legislation needs ***substantial amendment, additional study*** and ***more public input***, including the following changes:

1) Redraft the ZTA to explicitly eliminate from upzoning all parcels that do not entirely front on corridors, including lots to the rear of corridor-fronting parcels, corner lots and lots that front on side streets. Local land use lawyers and planning officials have reported that the current ZTA allows these lots to be assembled and upzoned with corridor-fronting parcels; such assembly and upzoning should be prohibited.

2) Ensure that single-family neighborhoods are not overwhelmed by on-street parking and traffic increases that cause congestion and reduce emergency response times. Older neighborhoods, like Springfield, have narrow residential streets that cannot accommodate additional traffic or on-street parking without impeding emergency response and increasing congestion. For these reasons:

- 2 parking spaces per unit should be provided on site.
- All vehicle access for upzoned parcels should be directly to and from the corridor, not from neighborhood streets.
- The amount of permitted upzoning on a corridor should be linked to mass transit capacity. The corridors that border Springfield — River Road and Massachusetts Avenue — have only one bus line apiece, with service provided at only 30 to 40 minute intervals from Monday through Friday. There are no plans for bus rapid transit (BRT). This limited mass transit service is insufficient for upzoning projects larger than a single-family lot.

3) Enact robust environmental controls, including non-disturbance of mature tree canopy, minimum tree canopy standards; and mandatory stormwater management requirements, including standards for triplex housing. SCA opposes the Planning

Department's recommendation to allow waivers of stormwater management requirements.

4) SCA opposes Planning Department recommendations to eliminate site plan reviews or reduce them to administrative reviews conducted by Planning staff.

Full site plan reviews are needed to allow public scrutiny and to tailor projects to community needs.

5) Conduct additional studies and revise the legislation to address fiscal concerns, RESJ issues and data gaps.

- **Fiscal Impact.** Thorough fiscal impact analysis is needed to ensure that upzonings and tax abatements for office to multi-family conversions do not strain County finances, especially in light of federal job and budget cuts.
 - It is possible that upzonings will require replacement of neighborhood infrastructure, including pipes, hydrants, sewers and roads. These costs must be assessed carefully before the Council acts.
 - The tax abatement for office to multi-family conversions should be assessed for fiscal impact and narrowed if necessary. The District of Columbia's abatement for office to multi-family conversions is restricted to the downtown area and is capped at \$41 million through 2028 with 4% annual escalations thereafter.
- **RESJ Impact.** The County's Office of Legislative Oversight found that the More Housing N.O.W. legislation could have a negative impact on racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County by assisting residents who can afford market rate housing more than residents who need affordable housing. In addition, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments has recommended that 75% of new regional housing construction be affordable. SCA therefore recommends that the More Housing Now Legislation incorporate provisions to protect NOAH (naturally-occurring affordable housing) and prevent displacement in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods, including BIPOC communities.
- **Housing Pipeline Data Gap.** More definitive information on the County's housing pipeline is needed before approving the More Housing N.O.W. package. County Executive Marc Elrich reports that ~30,000 fully-permitted housing units remain unbuilt, and that approved master plans have zoned for ~80,000 additional residential units. If this is correct, it might suggest that upzoning changes are not the most effective way to improve housing production in

Montgomery County. SCA recommends that the Planning Department or the Council commission an independent study to determine the size of the housing pipeline and the reasons that zoned and fully-permitted units are not being built. This evaluation should be completed before approving the More Housing N.O.W. legislation.

- **Housing Price Data Gap.** More definitive information is also needed on Montgomery County housing prices, to ensure that the Council has accurate information on housing affordability. SCA has reviewed numerous recent housing market reports and notices that **the County's 2024 median home sale price --** a more reliable indication of average County prices than the mean reported by the Council and the Planning Department, because the median is less influenced by multi-million dollar outliers -- **stood at \$615,000** according to Bright MLS, the most comprehensive data source available. **Median Montgomery County home sale prices have remained flat or declined in the first 2 months of 2025** as reported by major brokerage firms, **ranging from \$568,533** (Zillow, January 2025) **to \$615,059** (Rocket, February 2025). Montgomery County single-family median home prices are also lower than the \$1+ million average (mean) cited in the County's listening session presentations, According to Redfin, **Montgomery County's median single-family home price stood at \$794,500 as of January 2025** (latest figure available.)

6) Provide more notice, time and opportunity for public comment.

- Send written notice to affected homeowners to inform them of the upzonings so that they have the opportunity to testify before the Council.
- Conduct additional public hearings.
- Keep the record open for at least 30 days after hearings.

Thank you.

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SCA appreciates More Housing N.O.W.— it's better than AHSI. But this legislation needs ***substantial amendment, additional study*** and ***more public input***, including these changes:

1) Redraft the ZTA to explicitly eliminate from upzoning all parcels that do not entirely front on corridors, including lots to the rear of corridor-fronting parcels, corner lots and lots that front on side streets. Lawyers and planners say the current ZTA allows these lots to be assembled and upzoned with corridor-fronting parcels; this should be prohibited.

2) Ensure that single-family neighborhoods are not overwhelmed by on-street parking and traffic increases that cause congestion and reduce emergency response times.

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- The amount of permitted upzoning on a corridor should be linked to mass transit capacity. The corridors that border Springfield — River Road and Massachusetts Avenue — lack sufficient mass transit for projects larger than a single-family lot.

3) Enact robust environmental controls, including non-disturbance of mature tree canopy, minimum tree canopy standards; and mandatory stormwater management requirements, including standards for triplex housing.

4) SCA opposes Planning Department recommendations to eliminate site plan reviews or reduce them to administrative reviews. Full site plan reviews are needed to tailor projects to community needs.

5) Conduct additional studies and revise the legislation to address fiscal and RESJ issues.

- Thorough fiscal impact analysis is needed to ensure that upzonings and tax abatements for office to multi-family conversions do not strain County resources, especially in light of federal job and budget cuts.
- NOAH and anti-displacement protections should be enacted to address RESJ concerns.

6) Finally, provide more notice, time and opportunity for public comment.

- Send written notice to affected homeowners to inform them of the upzonings and allow them to testify.
- Conduct additional public hearings.
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Thank you.