

My name is Rich Biedrzycki. I am a resident of downtown Bethesda and a member of Strong Towns DC, a local conversation whose goal is to make our communities more financially resilient and affordable for everyone.

We support Bill 25-25. Montgomery County, like the rest of the country, is facing a housing shortage. This has resulted in the cost of living to skyrocket as more and more of our paychecks go to pay for housing. By expanding the PILOT program, this legislation will encourage development of more, desperately-needed housing. Addressing the housing crisis cannot be done through a one-size-fits-all approach. Allowing non-profit developers to reap the full benefits of the program as well, not just the Housing Opportunities Commission, is a good step in addressing the shortage.

Because the requirements stipulate that the non-profit developers either work with Section 8 housing vouchers or have at least 50% affordable units, developers who qualify would likely receive less operational income from renting out these units. Reduced operational income would mean increased difficulties paying property taxes, especially if rates increase. By expanding this PILOT, these developments would be more likely to pencil out as long-term costs of property taxes could be avoided. This would then allow for more housing for our lower income residents.

We would like to emphasize that this should only be one of many steps taken to address the housing crisis. The median price for a home in Montgomery County, according to Zillow, is \$633,000. This is simply unattainable for middle class families. Without bringing costs down, the county will lose teachers, firefighters, social workers, and healthcare workers as they become unable to afford the cost of housing. Thus, if unaddressed, the housing crisis will become a public health crisis. We have already heard from a nurse whose office had to delay appointments for patients because other nurses were unable to arrive due to highway closures preventing them from commuting from their homes as no affordable housing was close to their work. Situations like this is why we would like to see more changes made to reduce the cost of housing.

Some changes that we would like to see implemented are upzoning, particularly property located near public transit like MetroRail and BRT stations; by-right development of duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes; by-right development of accessory dwelling units; faster development application approval time; reducing minimum lot sizes and setbacks; and eliminating minimum parking requirements.

Let us be clear that we should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. While we would like to see legislation expanded upon, we cannot get bogged down in constant deliberation while the housing crisis worsens. This bill, along with the More Housing NOW package should be passed. Following that, the council should continue to work on legislation to address the housing crisis, including, but not limited to, the recommendations outlined above.

We are thankful for the county allowing us to comment on this legislation. We would like to thank Councilmember Katz for sponsoring this legislation. We hope to see this bill, as well as other pro-housing legislation, passed.