

Testimony on University Boulevard Corridor Plan
Presented by
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Good evening. Council President Stewart, Vice President Jawando, and Councilmembers. My name is Elizabeth Joyce, and I am testifying as an individual resident about the University Boulevard Corridor Plan. I am inspired by the number of thoughtful comments offered thus far, and I am grateful for the opportunity to testify tonight. I would like to pinpoint key aspects that I believe will undermine the acceptability and effectiveness of the UBCP.

Fundamental misconceptions about densification and upzoning: All Council-proposals to “solve the housing crisis” have assumed that rezoning single family neighborhoods will remedy the problem. Proponents cite outdated Council of Governments (COG) data to support this view. Yet recently revised COG projections show that the County has already approved enough units to accommodate all anticipated new residents for 30 years, and there are at least 30,000 additional approved units already in the pipeline. **So why is the Council determined to rezone single-family neighborhoods to solve a problem that does not exist?**

No one denies that we have a shortage of AFFORDABLE housing. Yet there is no evidence that the multifamily units endorsed by the UNCPC will meaningfully increase the supply of affordable units. Many upzoning advocates illogically conflate the goals of recent proposals (affordability) with the means these plans lack to achieve these goals (upzoning and rezoning). Of course, we want young people to be able to afford to live here, but there is no evidence that the market-rate housing endorsed by UBCP can achieve that goal.

Master and Sector Planning: When the Council passed Thrive Montgomery 2050, residents were assured that all planning under Thrive would be conducted via master and sector plans. While Thrive introduced the corridors concept, there was no statement that corridor planning (**not to mention the 15 more corridors added to the County by ZTA 25-02**) would **replace** the master plan process (as UBCP clearly does). Thrive states:

“...Thrive Montgomery 2050 will inform future master and functional plans. Master plans (or area master plans or sector plans) are long-term planning documents for a specific place or geographic area of the county. All master plans are amendments to the General Plan. They provide detailed land use and zoning recommendations for specific areas of the county. They also address transportation, the natural environment, public facilities, and implementation techniques. (Thrive Montgomery 2050, Approved and Adopted, THRIVE-Approved-Adopted-Final.pdf, pg. 4)

Despite these assurances, the University Boulevard Corridor Plan abandons master planning. In focusing only on “corridors,” the plan makes it impossible to assess school, park, and public safety needs. Furthermore, the reliance on the “optional method of development” for certain development areas increases the power of the Planning Board (to approve applicable projects) and removes residents from their legitimate role in master planning.

Community Engagement: This resistance to master planning raises crucial questions about its true rationale. At an event sponsored by the legal firm Lerch, Early, Brewer (representing developers) in Bethesda last month, I asked two development firm executives how they view master planning. **They both expressed strong approval for master plans**, which they said demonstrate professional planning and community buy-in. So, if developers favor master planning, why doesn’t the Planning Board? Is it because the Planning Board seeks to deny homeowners their rightful place in the process?

If the Board has conducted as much public outreach as it says, what fundamental changes in the plan has this engagement produced? Why is it that so few--or no--neighborhood associations have endorsed this plan? As any good PR expert would tell us, successful, two-way community engagement—rather than one-sided imposing unpopular plans on residents—should guide all new County development plans. True leadership requires the willingness to change course when needed rather than doubling down on demonstrably inadequate plans.

For residents to trust the officials we elected to represent us, we need to be heard. I respectfully ask the Council to take to heart the thoughtful concerns voiced by your constituents tonight.

