

Testimony from Barney Rush, Mayor of the Town of Chevy Chase

SRA 25-02 -- Workforce Housing Development and Compatibility with Surrounding Neighborhoods

Council President Stewart and County Council Members:

My name is Barney Rush, Mayor of the Town of Chevy Chase. Our Town supports the County's goal of broadening housing opportunities in down-county neighborhoods. We have been strong supporters of the construction of the Corso retirement community along Connecticut Avenue and inside our municipal boundaries. This complex, now under construction, will bring more than 500 new housing units to our Town. We believe that the collaborative approach taken by the developers and the Town may serve as a model for how to thoughtfully integrate multifamily housing into our neighborhoods.

In that spirit, we have worked with our neighboring municipalities to provide comments and proposed changes to the draft SRA you are now considering. You received our letter with our comments yesterday, and my testimony draws substantially from that joint letter.

The draft SRA proposes a three-lot consolidation limit – using a metric that does not account for the wide variation in lot sizes across down-county neighborhoods. While the standard size of a lot in the R-60 zone is 6,000 square feet, many lots in our communities are far larger, even exceeding 20,000 square feet. Allowing consolidation of these large lots could lead to massing that would be overwhelming in scale to adjacent single-family homes.

To address this concern, we recommend defining consolidation limits by total lot area rather than by the number of lots. Specifically, consolidation should not be permitted if the resulting parcel exceeds three times the minimum lot size of the underlying residential zone. For example, in an R-60 neighborhood, the maximum allowable consolidated parcel would be 18,000 square feet.

This balanced approach provides opportunities for a developer to assemble small lots into a parcel of ample size to construct workforce housing and is consistent with renderings presented by the Planning Department of such housing on 12,000 and 18,000 square foot lots. Yet, it also prevents excessive scale in areas that have large lots and where even a single lot is of sufficient size to support workforce housing.

Our second concern is “front to back” consolidation - combining corridor-facing lots with interior lots on neighborhood streets. The draft language indirectly prohibits this. However, we request clear language in the SRA that eligible and ineligible lots may not be combined and that only lots fronting on an Applicable Corridor as of November 1, 2025, qualify as eligible. This will provide clarity and assurance.

Lastly, we propose a minor clarification to the Planning Department's recommended amendments. These amendments should not be interpreted as allowing the waiver of other zoning provisions such as setback standards. With this clarification, we have no issue with the Planning Department's recommendations.

We believe these proposed amendments will provide ample opportunities for workforce housing while ensuring new development fits appropriately within our adjacent single-family neighborhoods.