

Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 25-12, University Boulevard (UB) Overlay Zone

Written Testimony - P.A. Brown

My name is P.A. Brown. I am a Montgomery County resident and renter.

I support the Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 25-12, University Boulevard (UB) Overlay Zone. This is a good, hopeful, and common sense measure. It could go further, but it is a start.

Montgomery County needs more housing, of all types. Extensive reforms to zoning and permitting are desperately needed to enable the construction of more and varied housing types throughout the county.

Allowing the construction of more housing – especially varied and multifamily housing - near transit, including along major corridors like University Avenue (and Georgia Avenue, where I live). If accompanied by permitting reform, ZTA 25-12 would be real progress.

Yes, more growth will tax our infrastructure and our schools. More growth will also bring more taxpayers – increasing the tax base - which will help pay for the services that county residents need and depend on. More residents should also ease the tax burden on existing residents. Locating new housing near transit will increase transit use, maximizing county investments in transit, investments paid for by taxpayers.

I regret that some neighbors oppose zoning reform, for various concerns, but including fears - often unstated but nonetheless real - that more housing will decrease the value of their property. Such concerns are completely understandable. But they also strike me as not in keeping with the progressive values many residents assert they share. High property prices in part due to constrained supply may benefit the homeowners of today, but prevent many middle and working class people from becoming homeowners. Our own grown children see little hope of ever being able to own a home. Rainbow flags, equity banners, and Black Lives Matter yard signs mean little if the neighborhood is effectively locked against change.

Yes, some – maybe even most - new housing may not be “affordable”, because more housing should decrease pressure on prices and rents. Much greater supply that meets and then exceeds demand is what we need to give hope to aspiring homeowners.

Maryland and Montgomery County should go further. We should follow California’s lead. On October 10, Governor Newsom signed California Senate Bill 79, greatly facilitating the construction of more housing into neighborhoods within half a mile of major rail, subway,

and bus rapid transit stops. *"The world looks to California for leadership — it's time to build modern, connected communities that fulfill California's promise, meeting the needs of today and the next generation,"* the governor wrote in a signing statement.

The sponsor of the California bill added: *"In California we talk a lot about where we don't want to build homes, but rarely do we talk about where we do—until now. SB 79 unwinds decades of overly restrictive policies that have driven housing costs to astronomical levels, forcing millions of people away from jobs and transit and into long commutes from the suburbs or out of the state entirely. It has been a long road to tackling these decades-old problems, but today's signing marks a new day for affordable housing in California."*

Fairness demands action on housing. The Council has a chance to demonstrate leadership and provide new hope to aspiring homeowners, just as California has. The Council should support - and expand - Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) 25-12, University Boulevard (UB) Overlay Zone.