




OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

March 24, 2023

TO: Evan Glass, President
Montgomery County Council

FROM: Marc Elrich, County Executive 

SUBJECT: Disapproval of the Appointment of James Hedrick to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Section 15-103 of the Land Use Article of the Maryland Code provides for the County Executive to approve or disapprove appointments of commissioners to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. On March 1, 2023, the Council submitted the appointment of James Hedrick to me for consideration.

I met with Mr. Hedrick for almost two hours on Friday, March 10, and have reviewed his participation in land use issues in Montgomery County, his comments on social media, and other work. After this review, I have decided to disapprove his appointment to the Planning Board.

The Council has taken extraordinary action to address Planning Board improprieties that fueled the public perception that the Planning Board was tendentious with little interest in community input. Our shared goal is to restore confidence in the Board by appointing members who are open-minded, dedicated to the public interest, and committed to transparency. In addition, new board members should welcome robust community participation galvanized by comprehensive public outreach, particularly to racial, ethnic, and low-income communities.

In the nuanced work of planning, there is a need to recognize the opinions and lived experiences of others and to come to the table ready to work together. During my interview with Mr. Hedrick, he made it clear that he has no interest in doing this difficult work. Instead, his comments to me, as well as on social media, demonstrate an ideological close-mindedness as well as a disdain for those whose views do not comport with his. This seems particularly true regarding the widely recognized need for more housing in the county.

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Mr. Hedrick's view is that we need greater housing densities everywhere, that he has "heard the same arguments" from those who oppose his view, and that he "doesn't have a lot of patience with those people." He seemed unaware that over the past 16 years, master plans have been used to substantially increase housing densities. He also seemed unaware of the fact that the forecasts for population growth in the county are based on the densities adopted in these master plans. This demonstrates a basic lack of understanding of the county's master plan process, one of the most important elements of the Planning Board's responsibilities and one that requires balancing sometimes competing policies – what rezoning is needed to encourage buildout; what steps must be taken to promote racial equity and social justice issues such as displacement and gentrification; what consideration must be given to the environmental consequences of increased land coverage.

The appointment of a new Planning Board is an opportunity for a fresh start, removed from the toxic atmosphere that permeated the defunct Planning Board at all levels, including social media. Unfortunately, Mr. Hedrick perpetuates, rather than alleviates, that atmosphere. He has made insulting and dismissive statements about those with opposing viewpoints. When asked about this, he disappointingly expressed no regrets.

Such rigid views are anathema to restoring the reputation of the Planning Board and the public's confidence in its decisions. Land use planning in Montgomery County is at an inflection point that will determine how we move forward in addressing housing and community building mindful of the important role land use decisions play in ameliorating the increasingly apparent effects of climate-driven storm events on our homes, businesses, and transportation systems. We need Planning Board members with good judgment who are open-minded, constructive, and, above all, interested in hearing from all sides in a fair and transparent process before they have reached a decision. Mr. Hedrick does not meet those standards.

Therefore, under the powers vested to the County Executive in Section 15-103(a)(7) of the Land Use Article, the appointment of James Hedrick to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is DISAPPROVED.