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Civic Federation Testimony to County Council on ZTA 12-07, Automobile Filling Stations

I am Jim Humphrey, testifying on behalf of the Montgomery County Civic Federation as Chair of their Planning and Land Use Committee. At their June 11 meeting, our delegates voted by overwhelming majority to endorse Council approval of ZTA 12-07 as introduced.

When the current standards for automobile filling stations were enacted in county law, so called "mega stations" did not exist. Those standards did not anticipate a time when a single gas station could dispense 3.6 million gallons or more of fuel per year. But now that such a thing does exist, the MCCF is asking the Council to approve new standards for these "mega stations" as a precaution, in response to the huge increase in intensity of the use.

The Federation is not asking Council to altogether prohibit these "mega stations" from locating in the county. But we urge you to consider the unburned gasoline vapors that ordinarily escape into the air during refueling of vehicles, and the exhaust from cars waiting in line for a place at a pump and then restarting after refueling, and multiple that times the possible 1000 cars that might frequent a "mega station" each day.

Now we ask that you, perhaps, err on the side of caution...at least for the time being...by not allowing these high volume refueling stations within 1000 feet of playgrounds or recreation facilities where residents gather to play tennis or basketball, or to swim--activities during which participants are breathing more quickly and more deeply than in everyday life. And we ask that you not allow these high volume refueling stations within 1000 feet of schools and hospitals--facilities that may have air exchange systems to replace the stale air in the building with air from the outside, air that might be laden with toxic chemicals if a "mega gas station" is located nearby.

A primary purpose of zoning is for officials to decide what uses are compatible with other uses, and at what level of intensity that compatibility can no longer be assured. There may come a time when scientific findings indicate you have been overly cautious in applying these new standards, or when some new technology might allow the air at a high volume refueling station to be scrubbed clean before being released into the surrounding community. In the meantime, as we said previously, the Federation urges this Council to come down on the side of caution by enacting the new standards proposed in ZTA 12-07.