

Montgomery County Civic Federation, Inc.
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Councilmember Andrew Friedson
Councilmember Natalie Fani-Gonzalez
Councilmember Kate Stewart, Council President
Councilmember Will Jawando, Council Vice-President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850
February 6, 2025

Dear Councilmembers,

The Montgomery County Civic Federation (MCCF) has been reviewing the information available thus far on the More Housing N.O.W. plan, introduced this week. We are encouraged that the plan includes elements that our members have previously endorsed, such as workforce housing, utilizing vacant office space, and increasing down payment assistance programs. Focusing housing efforts on those in most need of assistance, including our valued public employees, is important to the future of the county.

There remain important unanswered questions, including the basic threshold issue of which streets are considered corridors under this new proposal. The lack of sufficient information to support a reasoned analysis of the proposal, and the reasons below, lead us to request that you postpone the hearing set for March 11. The limited time available between the announcement of the plan and the March 11 hearing date is insufficient to enable Civic Associations to study the proposal, educate residents and develop positions within their neighborhoods. The challenges created by this short timeline are exacerbated by a lack of complete explanations concerning many aspects of the plan.

Although the proposal is more limited than AHSI, it remains complex to analyze for the average resident. As you know, the MCCF is an umbrella group of local neighborhood civic associations. Very few associations have the technical expertise to parse the changes in zoning from existing rules and evaluate the impact on their neighborhoods. Without a People's Counsel, or the assistance of the paid staff, attorneys, and lobbyists that developers – including groups like Coalition for Smarter Growth have – residents are unfairly and unreasonably disadvantaged in developing a full and thoughtful response.

Our member Civic Associations are understandably anxious to learn the full details and impact on their communities. The proposal as announced last week expands the number of corridors from those incorporated in the previous Thrive proposal. However, the plan does not provide key data, which in our view should include a list of included roads, the exact stretch of each road that is considered a corridor, and the number of lots eligible for upzoning. The MCCF adopted resolution on AHSI calls upon the County to provide 120-day written notice to every property owner who would be affected by rezoning or a change in status of their property. We call upon the County to begin now to provide residents whose property is subject to redevelopment under the plan with the details of this plan. It appears the ZTA was developed at the Council without the involvement of Montgomery Planning. For that reason, Montgomery

Planning has just begun the process of evaluating and understanding the proposal and has not been able to answer technical questions.

There is confusion about lot consolidation, potential tools to ensure affordability or attainability to middle income workers, whether there are exceptions to the height limit, traffic, parking and environmental conditions. The issue of equity is very important to our members. The impact on low-income and diverse neighborhoods must undergo honest analysis and be explained to communities. The effort to expand workforce housing must be borne equally across the County, and effective mechanisms must be established to ensure that the effort does not create unintended consequences on naturally occurring affordable housing or our most diverse and vulnerable neighborhoods. Infrastructure, schools and impact and other taxes to support infrastructure is also a concern. The underlying data problem that we have flagged repeatedly still exists – there is no solid analysis of projected job market and housing needs, and an analysis of why so many approved units stalled in the development pipeline must be prepared and shared with the public. The issue of investors buying homes for rental and reducing the inventory of single-family homes must be examined and prevented.

Civic Associations do not meet once a week or even once a month. Some only meet quarterly. Allowing time for residents and neighborhoods “to catch up” is the right thing to do at this point. We respectfully request that you meet soon with the Civic Federation representatives and Council or Planning staff with professional expertise to provide a full briefing and respond to questions fully, both on the technical aspects of the proposal and how current zoning regulations impact the process and place a temporary hold on the hearing until this process is complete. Without this, the neighborhood civics (and residents) will be unfairly challenged to respond effectively at a hearing on March 11.

We look forward to opportunities to work with the Council on a plan to responsibly and equitably develop housing targeted to identified community needs. Including residents and community associations in the discussion is essential to public support of the eventual legislation. Thank you for considering these issues.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Gannon, President