

Testimony in Support of ZTA 20-07:

Thank you to the county council and Council President Hucker for allowing me to submit my written testimony on this incredibly important Zoning Text Amendment. My name is Mark Clements, and I have lived in Downtown Silver Spring for the last three years. While I am currently serving on the County's Historic Preservation Commission, I write to you today as a concerned private citizen. Montgomery County desperately needs to expand its housing stock without delay, particularly in areas that can and should support increased density. As such, I am asking that the members of the council pass ZTA 20-07 to stimulate the construction of "missing middle" housing such as duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings.

There are no two ways about it: the county is experiencing a severe housing affordability crisis. When the average cost of a home in Montgomery County easily exceeds half a million dollars, the dream of homeownership has utterly evaporated for even solidly middle class households, let alone working class and disadvantaged ones. As many modest, older homes are being sold at these inflated prices, they are being torn down and replaced with even larger, even more expensive single family homes—even further exacerbating the crisis.

Contrary to what its opponents will say, ZTA 20-07 will not radically destroy the county's many suburban and rural neighborhoods. In fact, by increasing density near transit and metro stations, it will alleviate the need for building further and further out from the county's inner core. As a commissioner on the HPC, I have noted disturbing incursions in upcounty areas such as Clarksburg that threaten to disrupt the historic fabric of the area; it strikes me that much of this development would not be necessary if more development was permitted in areas where it is already taking place.

There is an unfortunate loud minority of primarily wealthy residents living in the county's inner core who are deluded about the nature of areas such as Silver Spring, Takoma Park, Bethesda and so on. These are urban areas. They are edge cities in the orbit of Washington, D.C. As D.C. grows, so will the urban areas of Montgomery County. As D.C. becomes less and less affordable due to its own housing crisis, the more these areas in Montgomery County will also feel the strain. New and younger county residents should not have to pay the price of living hours away from their workplaces or stuck in a permanent lumpen-renter class to maintain this delusion.

If more is not done to alleviate the housing affordability crisis in this area, it will have profoundly negative effects in the future. Most obviously, inequality will skyrocket as the county increasingly becomes a citadel for the extremely wealthy. For another, as the wealthy homeowners who oppose this measure grow older, they will not only be at a loss to find smaller accommodations that allow them to age in place in their neighborhoods. They will also find it increasingly difficult to find buyers among younger families who experience financial pressure across a variety of vectors beyond just the high price of housing. On top of that, failure to increase density in these close-in areas will create more sprawl, resulting in more impermeable surfaces jeopardizing our watershed and more car commuter emissions polluting our air.

ZTA 20-07 alone will not alleviate all of these problems, but it is a quick and easy amendment that will nonetheless be a great foot forward on some of the most pressing issues of our lifetimes. Only a very small few wealthy households have anything to benefit from prolonging this untenable status quo. It is in the interest of not just current county residents who are increasingly losing access to housing they can afford, but in the interest of all the county's future generations that you take action and approve ZTA 20-07.

Thank you,

Mark Clements