

Written Testimony Concerning ZTA 20-07
MCC Public Hearing
February 11 2021

I am writing to express my concern over ZTA 20-07; while we can all agree Montgomery County has an affordable housing crisis, this proposed amendment does nothing to increase the stock of affordable housing. In fact, in places where this type of legislation has been tried, studies show an increase in land prices with no increase in housing, affordable or otherwise (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087418824672>). I therefore ask that the MCC vote No on ZTA 20-07 unless modifications are added to (a) protect already existing affordable housing and (b) ensure affordable housing is required in any new construction.

ZTA 20-07 Will Replace Existing Affordable Housing With Luxury, Market Value Options

I am a resident of Forest Estates simply because it was the closest place to downtown that was Metro accessible that I could afford. As an unmarried, lesbian, State of Maryland employee, loan equity and housing availability were challenges my partner and I faced. We felt very lucky to find an entry-level house in Forest Estates. Our block of Woodland is, in fact, a perfect example of the kind of entry-level, affordable housing we need to protect and add more of; there is a reason the houses on our block are occupied by a Muslim family of 8, a lesbian couple, a disabled veteran and his family, a young family recently moved from Chicago, a single female healthcare worker, and a single female. Having housing at a variety of price points ensures a diverse and healthy neighborhood. Unfortunately, ZTA 20-07 contains no protection for lower-cost housing, ensuring that these homes will be the first to be bought up, torn down, and replaced with luxury quadplexes and townhomes. Neither does this amendment meet any of the COG goals established to increase affordable housing and is, very simply, gentrification under a progressive coat of paint. Trickle down housing is no more successful than trickle down economics.

Removal of Zoning Process

The truth is, home owners can rezone their properties by following the zoning process currently in place. That process includes an important step where confronting and

abutting neighbors can request modifications to new construction. Noise, ecological, and other issues can be addressed at this stage so the needs of everyone in the neighborhood can be met. Communities need to work for everyone, not just the richest residents and not just developers; meeting this democratic standard requires input from all affected parties.

The MCC certainly found this to be true in 2020 when a request was made to allow 2 houses on our block of Woodland to be instantly rezoned for townhomes during the last public meeting of the Forest Glen Montgomery Hills Sector Plan. This request had never been discussed or revealed before this meeting and followed none of the in-place procedures for rezoning or inclusion in the Sector Plan. However, Councilmember Hans Reimer thought it appropriate to grant this request (made by the ex-Chair of the Montgomery County Planning Board Francoise Carrier) despite the lack of process, notification, or input. However, the PHED committee rejected Councilmember Reimer's request because it allowed no input from neighbors and did not follow the existing process. ZTA 20-07 also takes away the ability of neighbors to seek adjustments to construction made in confronting or abutting properties in their communities, offering instead libertarian, "every man for himself" rules. Surely, the council will find the absence of process and community input just as objectionable and harmful now as it did then.

Insufficient Parking Hurts The Working Class

Before we lived in Forest Estates we lived in Langley Park by the Long Branch library. Most of the rentals in this area did not provide parking spaces matched to the number of bedrooms per unit. Many people in this area worked in the trades and, therefore, drove work vans. Every day, these blue-collar workers would return home and be forced to park up to a mile away or park illegally, facing tickets or towing. ZTA 20-07 also doesn't require developers to provide adequate parking; how will this amendment defend members of the working class, especially those who work in the trades?

Developers and Absentee Landlords

ZTA 20-07, whether it intends to or not, works to primarily reward developers and absentee landlords. Developers will no longer have to go through the important steps in the rezoning process; absentee landlords who fail to keep up properties will be able to sell these properties to developers no matter what their condition, as the houses will simply be bulldozed and replaced. The Marcia Docter rezoning request

(represented by Francoise Carrier and supported by Councilmember Reimer) are a perfect example of this. Doctor has failed to maintain either property she has owned as rentals for decades. This is why she wished to have them rezoned, so she could sell them “as-is” to a developer who would tear them down. While Montgomery County does need more affordable housing, it is naive and misguided to believe that the market or developers are solutions to a problem rooted in systemic racism, classism, misogyny, and homophobia.

For all the reasons listed above, I am asking you to vote NO on ZTA 20-07.

Tanya Olson
Susan Pietrzyk