

Comments on Zoning Text Amendment No. 20-07

February 9, 2021

I. Introduction and Summary

My name is Robert Fares and I live within a ½ mile of the Forest Glen metro station, i.e. my property would be affected by all of the reforms considered in Zoning Text Amendment No. 20-07 (“the Amendment”). I write to express my support for the Amendment because it would: (1) provide “missing middle” housing without harming the character of Montgomery County neighborhoods; (2) help to address the need for affordable housing in Montgomery County and the wider equity challenges in our community; and (3) help to address the climate emergency by increasing access to mass transit. My detailed comments are provided below.

II. The Amendment Will Provide Missing Middle Housing and Maintain or Improve the Character of Montgomery County Neighborhoods

As the Montgomery County Council (“the Council”) is well aware, the County will need to add a significant amount multifamily housing over the coming years, and housing within walking or biking distance of a Metro station is in very high demand. For example, the July 2020 Montgomery County Housing Needs Assessment found that the County will have to add over 60,000 new households by 2040, and that the majority of new units added will have to be multifamily rental units in order to accommodate the forecasted growth.¹ The assessment also found that household growth is highest along the Metro and Interstate 270, and that housing cost burdens are greatest along transit routes.²

The Amendment will address the County’s housing needs by unlocking additional affordable housing units within a mile of a Metro station, while maintaining or improving the character of adjacent neighborhoods. The Amendment will not harm the aesthetics or character of adjacent neighborhoods because it makes no changes to the height or setback requirements whatsoever. At the same time, the additional density it unlocks will help to attract development of retail, restaurants, cafés, and other businesses that have been proven to improve livability and attract residents to Metro-adjacent neighborhoods.

III. The Amendment Will Improve Housing Affordability and Equity

¹ Montgomery County Housing Needs Assessment at 48-49 (July 2020), <https://montgomeryplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MoCo-HNA-July-2020.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 12, 29.

The fact that cost burdens are greatest along transit routes exacerbates concerns surrounding socioeconomic equity. As the Council is well aware, affordable public transportation provides a vital lifeline to many families that are unable to afford the upfront cost and upkeep of a vehicle. But that lifeline is threatened if those families cannot afford to live in a neighborhood with reasonable access to a Metro station.

The Amendment will surgically increase housing supply exactly where it is most needed: within one mile of a Metro station. Increasing the number of units and diversifying the type of housing units near a Metro station will help to reduce housing costs through market forces by increasing and diversifying the overall housing supply.

IV. The Amendment Will Help to Address the Climate Emergency

I am an expert in energy technology and policy, and my work has been published in several peer-reviewed journals.³ In my opinion, transportation will be one of the most challenging emissions sources to eliminate in time to avert disastrous global warming – dwarfing the (significant) challenges associated with transitioning the electric grid to 100% zero-emission generation. Even if we were to somehow transition to 100% sale of electric vehicles powered by 100% clean energy overnight, it would take *decades* for the fossil fuel vehicles that are already out there to reach the end of their useful life and be replaced by electric alternatives.

The Amendment will make an enormous contribution to the challenge of reducing transportation emissions by increasing the number of households within walking or biking distance of a Metro station. Some of the new households enabled by the Amendment will forego buying a vehicle and instead rely exclusively on public transit, walking, or biking. And those households that do opt to own a vehicle will almost surely use their vehicle significantly less than they would if they did not live near a Metro station. This reduction in vehicle use provides a vital reduction in transportation emissions, where few other ready methods to reduce these emissions exist. Moreover, the Amendment will have the added benefit of reducing traffic congestion and auto accidents.

V. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, I request that the Council adopt the Amendment in its entirety.

³ Robert L. Fares, Michael E. Webber. The impacts of storing solar energy in the home to reduce reliance on the utility. *Nature Energy*, 2017. <http://doi.org/10.1038/nenergy.2017.1>; Robert L. Fares, Carey W. King. Trends in transmission, distribution, and administration costs for U.S. investor-owned electric utilities. *Energy Policy*, 2017. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2017.02.036>.

Sincerely,

Robert Fares

Resident of Silver Spring