

To: Montgomery County Councilmembers

From: Dennis O'Brien

Re : Zoning Text Amendment 20-7

Public Hearing: Thursday, February 11, 2021 at 730pm

Thank you for accepting this written testimony in place of live testimony I wished to provide to the Council. Unfortunately, a Wait List exists.

I am writing to you to voice my opposition to ZTA 20-7 as proposed by At Large Councilmember Jawando in December 2020 and which is the subject of tonight's hearing.

I am a long-time resident of Montgomery County, residing within one half mile of the Forest Glen Metro station in the house my wife, Catherine, and I purchased in 1985. During those thirty-six years we have raised a family, supported the community and County business community. I have coached youth sports, primarily ice hockey, for countless years, and now, in early retirement, I have been actively engaged for five years as a Founding Mentor within the Maryland Tech Council (MTC) Venture Mentoring Service, providing pro-bono support to entrepreneurs in the County. Recently, I am also part of the MTC Business Continuity Task Force, which is assisting local companies weather the economic storm related to the pandemic. Lastly, I have participated for the last four years in TEDCO's (State of Maryland) Builders' Fund, where I, along with other executives, provide hands-on support and guidance to economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs to help them secure funding for their startup businesses. Catherine has provided supportive business services to local businesses and professional practices for over 20 years through her own company.

As I noted, I have lived in the same house for 36 years and look forward to spending my retirement years there. Catherine and I purchased our property because of the very mature pre-WWII neighborhood that Forest Glen and its adjacent post WWII neighborhood Forest Estates was and still is to this day. As many of you are aware there are many older homes close to the Forest Glen Metro (ours was built in 1938) and many very old and tall trees populate the community. While our community has grown younger, than older and now younger once again, it has also grown more diverse. What hasn't changed is the fundamental character, friendliness and acceptance of the community. The location and smaller single-family homes represent a valuable economic homeownership point for many. True, we have to endure significant street parking, but what attracts folks is ultimately the single home nature of the community, its stability and friendliness. Over the 36 years as I have resided in the same house, I have seen many houses expanded by those investing their futures into the neighborhood based on the present single family home character of the neighborhood. As such, Mr. Jawando's proposal will disenfranchise many residents in the community who recently entered and/or invested in the community. This is not equitable.

The proposed text amendment seeks to address the growth of our County, and need for middle housing, by negatively impacting the quality of life of longtime and new homeowners, all County taxpayers, by introducing the very likely near-term building of apartment like buildings, townhomes, duplexes and other multi-unit dwellings in the middle of established single-family home populated streets. Ignoring for the moment the noise, pollution, negative environmental impact on old growth trees and general construction disruption that will be introduced to our community and other like communities for years to come, Mr. Jawando reaches for, but fails to address the significant increase in vehicles which will be parked on the street by saying that Metro will be utilized. I have worked in six different locations over my career and not one was even close to being serviced by a Metro station. This is the case for many within our community. Additionally, ours is not a walking community where one shops for significant groceries or desires to patronize a local restaurant. He indicated seniors, as well as entry level buyers, are a target population as well for these smaller housing units, but not

many seniors will walk under the beltway to acquire their provisions. Mr. Jawando's failure to realistically and selectively address these practical issues makes his entire transit hub foundation a folly. Again, ignoring for the moment the long term construction noise, truck traffic, additional pollution and overall disruption to our, and other like communities, Mr. Jawando claims this change will be environmentally positive, despite added vehicles parked on the street due to limited on property parking, more heat absorption due to additional paved surfaces, roof lines and less lawn due to building expansion, and the destruction of old trees which will be inevitable during demolition and rebuilding. Based on these completely unaddressed issues and the selective targeting of single-family lots only adjacent to Metro Stations, I find Mr. Jawando's ZTA 20-7 deplorable.

While the County has grown and continues to grow, housing supply will be a concern. The present low interest rates and the pandemic has pulled forward the demand curve here, as well as elsewhere in suburban areas. The net impact of these changes will not be fully known for some time as office space likely becomes less necessary and workers who can perform their job duties remotely relocate even further from urban centers, thus freeing up more current housing stock. A radical alteration, as proposed, of decades old zoning regulations, which are the backbone of planning, should not be done haphazardly and not without the majority of its citizens supporting such a change. Mr. Jawando noted the zoning changes in Portland and Minneapolis recently in presenting his proposal to local community groups. The difference is those changes applied to all single-family lots, not specific carve outs. Additionally, Oregon directed such cities of 10,000 or more to alter its zoning. Thus, any change to the present single family home zoning should not only apply to lots within one mile of a Metro station, but to ALL residentially zoned lots within the County, R-60 and larger as well. Surely, more affordable properties in larger lot zoned neighborhoods with quality schools and amenities will be attractive. As many such potential owners/renters will not be utilizing a Metro for daily use anyway, such a widespread change would be even more inclusive and meet the goals of providing more housing options. Additionally, the County's excellent Ride-On bus service provides very good linkage, if needed by a homeowner, to Metro Stations as would be the case in single family zoned neighborhoods well outside the one mile radius, such as where Mr. Jawando currently resides. My point is, all current Montgomery County single family home owners should support this effort by their vote and then by having some skin in the long term game, not just those that happen to live very close to a Metro Station.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Dennis P. O'Brien
Silver Spring, MD