

Testimony on ZTA 20-07, R-60 Zone, Uses and Standards

County Council Public Hearing

February 11, 2021

Meredith Wellington, testifying on behalf of the County Executive. The County Executive thanks CM Jawando for drawing attention to the need for more diverse housing types, and has the following comments:

ZTA 20-07 would sweepingly rezone 24,723 R-60 parcels within 1 mile of Metro stations as a means of addressing the need for “missing middle housing.” While we need to focus on providing more diverse housing options, **the CE believes that adding Missing Middle Housing to existing neighborhoods raises issues that can’t be resolved by one county-wide zoning text amendment.**

**The CE agrees with Planning Staff’s conclusion that while building Missing Middle Housing will result in more market rate housing, it will not result in more affordable housing for low and moderate income residents.** Increasing the density will increase the cost of the land. As a result, in currently unaffordable neighborhoods, adding these new housing types will not make the new units affordable to low and moderate income residents. We have already seen townhouses built at extraordinarily high prices in similar locations in our neighborhoods. **This is an equity issue that must be addressed.**

**We need to work with our communities to understand how walkability works in their neighborhoods, but we already know that the one mile distance from Metro is too far.**

According to the Missing Middle Study, housing that is truly walkable typically falls within a 10-minute walk of centers that provide services, shopping, and transit. It’s not just distance; it’s also destination.

**We need a shared understanding of what missing middle housing will look like.** Will it fit into small-lot, single family neighborhoods? In the Missing Middle Study, the goal was to add small-footprint, missing middle housing that met the development standards of the surrounding single family houses. Now, because developers have concerns that they can’t build housing within those standards, Planning wants to explore increasing heights, reducing or removing parking requirements, and subdividing already small R-60 and R-90 lots.

**This ZTA can’t address all of these problems, which is why the CE agrees that there is a need for a deeper review in coordination with other ongoing Missing Middle initiatives, and perhaps, new initiatives.** As a next step, he supports the consideration of Missing Middle Housing in Thrive Montgomery, followed by reviews in more focused area master and sector plans that provide an opportunity to consider the viability of more diverse, affordable housing options in specific areas near transit.

Thank you for your consideration.