

January 16, 2024

ZTA 23-10

TO: Montgomery County Council
FROM: Jane Lyons-Raeder
BILL: ZTA 23-10, Parking, Queuing, and Loading - Calculation of Required Parking
POSITION: Support

Good afternoon. My name is Jane Lyons-Raeder and I strongly support ZTA 23-10, although I echo others' calls for it to be expanded to cover one mile from Metrorail stations. As a renter in downtown Silver Spring, my household has a car, but I don't believe that its parking should be mandated by minimum parking requirements.

One of the reasons I care so much about something as technical as parking requirements is because they impact so many other aspects of our daily lives, such as the environment, housing affordability, economic development, traffic, and more. Instead of letting the market dictate how much parking is needed, for decades we have embraced an inefficient policy that negatively impacts all of these issues that we care about.

Right now, we have minimum parking requirements for some places in the county where over 30 percent of households do not own a car. Despite that, homes are still required to have parking spaces that can add tens of thousands of dollars onto the cost of constructing that home. And, it cannot be stressed enough that the numbers selected for parking requirements – for example, 1.25 spaces for a one bedroom apartment – is an art, not a science. While our requirements stay the same, consumer demand is fluctuating, and builders do not have an option to respond when demand for parking dips below the county's minimum parking requirements. For example, after Buffalo got rid of parking minimums, mixed-use projects opted to provide 53 percent less parking than previously required. That might sound scary to some, but this is right-sizing our parking, especially when our public parking garages are under-utilized and would be better used by sharing parking with new buildings like the Bonifant.

When our public policy encourages an oversupply of parking, we invite more cars, more traffic, more greenhouse gas emissions, and more expensive housing. Parking requirements are not a rational policy for anywhere – near transit or otherwise – but they are especially alarming public policy in the transit-rich areas where we hope to encourage alternatives to driving.

This ZTA will make it easier to build affordable housing at no cost to the county and help create more liveable neighborhoods near transit. I am excited to see Montgomery County adopt a national best practice that will make a concrete improvement in people's lives. Thank you.