

## Takoma Park MMPA Threatens Displacement – So Where is Promised Racial Equity Analysis?

### Testimony from Colleen Cordes, Takoma Park Resident

After many residents expressed concerns about harmful racial-equity impacts and related questions from the Takoma Park City Council, County Planning Staff repeatedly promised a full racial-equity analysis of the MMPA would be done by the Council's Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO). In fact, at an Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> Planning Board [session](#), staff made this claim four times – including twice by the Acting Planning Director. (View the recorded meeting between times of 5:40 to 5:57.) The County Planning Staff repeated that assurance in a [December document](#) for our City Council.

#### ***But the OLO this month denied it had any intention of conducting such a study!***

This is a major error in the planning process that must be corrected. The Planning Board voted to move the MMPA forward, based in part on the staff's mistaken assurance that OLO would do a racial-equity analysis. And the City Council voted to conditionally approve the advancement of the Board's MMPA to the County Council, again based partly on that false assurance by staff. (The Planning Board subsequently failed to meet all of the City Council's conditions. That means, in effect, the Takoma Park Council has *not* approved the Board draft, as being ready for County Council's review.)

Fortunately, the County Executive has now stepped up to commission a racial equity analysis, but it's not yet complete.

It would be a grave injustice for the County Council to proceed without such an analysis. Council President Friedson and Vice President Stewart, please don't let that happen under your leadership. Please postpone Committee work sessions on the MMPA until the Council actually has a racial equity analysis in hand, as Takoma Park was promised, and has had time to carefully evaluate it. In fact, based on the likely findings of a careful racial equity analysis, the Council will need to send this draft back to the Planning Board to reduce the proposed zoning changes.

The need for a racial equity analysis is super urgent! Everyone following this MMPA knows a major concern has been the potential for the dramatic upzoning of Maple Avenue to raise land values, incentivizing tear downs of this neighborhood's deeply affordable, rent-stabilized residential buildings. They provide homes to hundreds of families, mostly residents of color with low or modest incomes.

That blanket upzoning would encourage new projects likely to replace such homes with more expensive housing -- or even 100 percent commercial buildings. Such incentives pose the threat of displacement for current residents, and as Carl Elefante, former president of the American Institute of Architects, has warned, "threatens, rather than protects and enhances, the City's most substantial inventory of affordable housing." ***To gamble with the future of this extremely racially diverse neighborhood through careless upzoning would reinforce systemic racism.***

So there must be careful scrutiny of the likely equity and social justice impacts BEFORE zoning changes, especially evaluation of the threat of displacement. As [Thrive Montgomery 2050](#) notes (p. 52): “Across the board, low-income and BIPOC residents are very worried about displacement as a result of new development.”

The MMPA itself does not show any sign of having seriously considered that threat, despite its intent to spark a wave of new development.

And the MMPA’s descriptions of its community engagement show no sign that residents who would feel most at risk were consulted or even informed about the upzoning and densification that County planners had in mind. Neither the Plan nor its Appendices reveal what questions residents of Maple and Lee Avenues were asked by the Planning team’s consultant, whether the consultant produced a report on the results of its interviews with those residents, or – if such a report was produced – exactly what the report said.

The City Council asked the Planning Board for more details about community engagement, specifically including Maple Avenue. The Board ignored that request. Instead, County Planning Staff suggested the City Council reread the staff’s inadequate June appendix on the subject.

The racial-equity analysis also should delve into this disturbing evidence of serious flaws in community engagement. That includes the unanswered questions about whether residents in the Maple Avenue District were even informed that County planners envisioned major zoning changes – let alone whether residents’ input on such changes was taken into account.

Again, the County Council should insist on a detailed racial-equity analysis and time to fully evaluate it before any Committee work sessions on the MMPA go forward. Thank you!

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