

Doherty Testimony

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

On behalf of the Potomac Highlands Citizens Association, I urge you to approve sewer category changes for:

**WSCCR-22TRV-06A- 13201 Carriage Ct.**

**WSCCR-22TRV-05A- 13205 Carriage Ct.**

**WSCCR-22TRV-09A- 13209 Carriage Ct.**

**WSCCR-22TRV-15A- 2 Foxden Ct.**

I want to make this crystal clear: we are asking for these changes because our aging septic systems will fail and cause environmental damage to the Watts Branch Creek. The three properties on Carriage Court abut the creek, and their septic systems date back to the 1950s.

Last week, the Montgomery Planning Board held a hearing on these requests. As you may be aware, while they did concur reluctantly with staff recommendations against these requests, they also agreed to send a letter to you expressing strong concerns about the environmental exposure and public health risks. In the case of the Carriage Court requests, the Commission vote was 3 to 2. That close vote sent you a message: there are serious environmental and health issues here.

A previous County Council passed changes to the water and sewer plan specifically aimed at blocking sewer in our neighborhood. None of the changes were based on any science or engineering. It was under heavy political pressure. They even went so far as stopping the North Overlea sewer survey which showed that a majority of properties studied have no viable options to replace aging systems.

The change required that at least one property must have a septic failure in order for a survey to be done. So instead of a rational process, we have to wait until someone's septic fails, and they are scrambling just to be able to live in their house. Suppose County regulations required you to wait to replace your leaking hot water heater until it fails completely and floods your house! Only then are you able to begin a long process to replace it.

Why are we so concerned about a "rational process"? Because we, the homeowners, have to pay for and manage the installation of sewer lines. We get no help from the County or WSSC. Depending on the number of owners who can afford to join together, the cost per house can be as high as 100 thousand dollars for the main line. The cost to connect a house to that line can run upwards of 15 thousand dollars. Then surveys have to be done, engineers found, plans reviewed by the County and WSSC at our expense, permits obtained, and contractors hired.

None of us have the experience or expertise to do this, yet if our septic system fails and we cannot replace it, we have to try. This process takes YEARS. Cooperation among neighbors is essential.

It is far cheaper to replace a failed septic system, except that in many cases in our neighborhood, that simply isn't possible.

The political pressure brought to bear on the County Council in 2018 was done in a misguided attempt to limit growth by sewer policy. The proper way to achieve such limits is by zoning.

In our neighborhood we have covenants that prohibit subdivision of our properties. The covenants were filed in 1952, six years before the County even started land planning and zoning. Those covenants have protected our neighborhood from development for over 70 years. People move to the neighborhood because they value it as it is, and they know it won't change.

You have the final say in these applications. It is time for a rational approach based on science and engineering and not based on politics.