

My name is David Hecht, and I am a homeowner in Kensington. I am testifying today on the appropriation for the "Blueprint Community Schools Program" because, while I fully support funding our schools, I must do so in the context of a grave and immediate fiscal crisis facing our county.

I am deeply worried that the Council is approving new spending while ignoring a "perfect storm" that is making these programs, and our existing ones, fiscally unsustainable.

This perfect storm is a "fiscal pincer" with two sides:

1. The State Crisis: As you know, Maryland just announced a \$1.4 billion structural deficit, driven largely by the unfunded "Blueprint" mandate. This all but guarantees that the state aid we rely on for schools and roads will be significantly cut.
2. The Local Crisis: At the exact same time, our county's own primary "paycheck," our commercial tax base, is in freefall. Our office vacancy rate is approaching 20%. This is not an abstract number; it is a multi-million-dollar, recurring hole in our budget that is getting deeper every year.

I looked for the Council's plan to address this crisis. I had assumed the plan would be to aggressively grow our own revenue to fill the gap.

Instead, I was alarmed to find that the Council has taken votes to actively block the most logical solutions. Specifically, I am referring to the vote on ZTA 23-05, the plan to convert our empty, tax-draining office buildings into new, tax-paying residential assets.

This was not a "pro-developer" bill; it was a "pro-solvency" bill. It was a common-sense plan to turn our single biggest tax liability back into an asset. The "no" votes on that measure, including from Councilmember Jawando, were, in effect, a vote to protect empty buildings over protecting taxpayers.

This has left homeowners in an impossible position.

- State aid is falling.
- Our commercial revenue is collapsing.
- The Council has voted against the primary solution to fix it.

My question is simple: How, then, will we pay for this new "Blueprint" appropriation?

How will we pay for our schools, our senior services, and our police when this fiscal pincer closes? Based on the math, it appears the Council has left itself only one viable, recurring revenue source: a massive, structural property tax increase on homeowners.

I am asking you to reject this "stagnation" model. Please do not "solve" the budget crisis on the backs of your residents. I urge you to reconsider a pro-growth strategy, like the one championed by Councilmember Friedson, that focuses on turning our commercial liabilities into assets. It is the only responsible path to funding our shared values without bankrupting our families.