



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

April 7, 2021

Dear Chairman Anderson and Members of the Planning Board,

As I first raised in my letter to you on January 21st, our departments and the public have been unable to give complete comments on the Planning Board Draft because of your decision to replace the Public Hearing Draft which the public had reviewed and commented on, and instead write a completely new draft that was released in pieces and reviewed in a confusing process. The draft that is attached to the April 8 Planning Board agenda is even different from the draft that the Planning Board approved on February 25, 2021. Unfortunately, the changes from February 25th to the latest version are not highlighted, and one must search to find them.

As a result, the Executive Branch will not be providing in-depth comments at this time to the Planning Board, and instead will send comprehensive comments to the County Council at a later date once we have a final Planning Board Draft that can be carefully reviewed.

In the meantime, here is a list of some of the issues that are concerning and will need further in-depth comment once there is a final draft to review:

- 1. The draft is based on the incorrect assumption that housing leads to jobs, when, in fact, the reverse is true.**
- 2. The draft is impractical, mandating “urbanism” with Complete Communities at 32 centers throughout the entire county whether near transit or not. Our future success depends on focusing our density in areas near high quality transit, and any effort to control green house gases without transit is sprawl with another name.**
- 3. The draft presents “Missing middle housing” as essential to Complete Communities in every part of the county even after Planning Staff’s study concluded that none of the missing middle housing types are feasible in Silver Spring, except for townhouses—which are being built already. In other words, this essential “solution” will result in little new housing, while the upzoning to allow it will raise the already high cost of land, the very reason that our housing is already expensive.**

4. **The draft should give equal consideration to other housing tools like preservation of naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH). Without effective preservation we may lose more affordable units than we produce. This has happened historically.**
5. **The draft lacks priorities, assigning the same importance to the urbanization of rural villages as it does to our large urban job centers. Adding density to rural villages will contribute to sprawl.**
6. **The draft misses the point: Jobs are the priority, and the county must make sure that our urban centers have the transportation and infrastructure needed to support new development.**
7. **The draft ties the hands of this and future County Councils by making its recommendations obligatory: “the county will pursue...”**
8. **The draft eliminates compatibility requirements, and substitutes form based development and rules, without specifying the community involvement that has made these kinds of developments successful. The concept of compatibility runs throughout the zoning code, and is in the DNA of county planning. Removing compatibility requirements jeopardizes fundamental planning concepts, like consideration of whether new buildings will cast shadows that deprive existing buildings and their occupants of needed sunlight. The Planning Department’s website on Missing Middle Housing mentions the importance of compatibility:**

“Missing Middle” housing refers to a range of building types that are compatible in scale, form and construction with single-family homes, but include multiple housing units.”

Small-Footprint Buildings:

“These housing types typically have small- to medium-sized footprints, with a body width, depth and height no larger than a detached single-family home. This allows a range of Missing Middle types—with varying densities but compatible forms—to be blended into a neighborhood, encouraging a mix of socioeconomic households and making these types a good tool for compatible infill.”

You can find the link regarding Housing characteristics [here](#).

9. **The draft threatens the future of the Agricultural Reserve by not supporting farming as the preferred use in the Reserve.**
10. **While the Plan acknowledges the importance of a network for walking, biking, and rolling, it fails to adequately address the importance of meaningful public transit that is essential for job growth.**

- 11. The decision to remove the chapters on Economic Development, Equity, and Environmental Resilience from the Public Hearing Draft is concerning because it truncates and disperses the needed discussion of important environmental and Equity issues, reducing them to afterthoughts.**
- 12. The draft depends too much on one planning tool, the zoning text amendment. There are many other planning tools that will encourage better planning by respecting area differences, and encouraging on-site creativity and compatibility.**
- 13. The draft's recommendations require costly investments in infrastructure - costs that are not identified in the plan and may not be achievable. The cost burden seems to fall squarely on the shoulders of residents, not on developers.**

The General Plan is fundamental to the future of the County – an update should present the County Council and the Executive with a cornucopia of ideas for the diversity of this county rather than a cookie cutter approach for every area of the county.

I look forward to providing additional, more detailed comments on these concerns as we work toward a common goal of providing a General Plan update that will help guide Montgomery County to preserve what is great about the county and recommend improvements where they are needed.

Thank you for your consideration.



Marc Elrich

County Executive