



January 5, 2015

Rockville City Mayor and Council
111 Maryland Ave
Rockville, MD

Re: Aligning the Rockville School Standards with Montgomery County's School Standards

Dear Mayor Newton and Councilmembers,

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. The Coalition for Smarter Growth is the leading organization in the Washington, D.C. region dedicated to advocating for walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to support those communities. My name is Kelly Blynn and I lead our work in Montgomery County where we count over 4,000 supporters. We support walkable, sustainable communities as an alternative to more sprawling auto-dependent development and traffic. In that context, we support the alignment of the city's Adequate Public Facilities Standards with the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance.

Young people and families increasingly want to live in walkable, transit-accessible communities like Rockville, with its mix of both old and new walkable neighborhoods. Empty-nesters looking to downsize are looking for new housing options that allow them to stay in and continue to contribute to the community. Both groups are contributing to the economic health, age diversity, and vibrancy of communities like Rockville. Yet, having an APF standard for schools that is stricter than the county's has limited the potential for new, walkable and more sustainable development, while not resulting in lesser crowding or accelerated county investment in the schools serving the city.

In fact, it appears that the local schools serving the city have become crowded with county residents and county funding has gone to other county schools with even more significant crowding problems. We understand that these were among the reasons that the 26-member Education and School Capacity Working Group and the 13-member Housing Work Group of the 2012 Rockville Summit recommended the city align its Adequate Public Facilities Standard with the county's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance for schools. By having its standards aligned with the county's, new growth in Rockville should prompt additional investment in Rockville-serving schools under the county standard.

In effect, we are recommending that the city seize the opportunity to offer more sustainable living options than can be provided in sprawling, auto-dependent locations. Rockville is already a great, healthy, sustainable place to raise a family, and we believe the city is perfectly poised to continue its trend of smart, appropriately-scale growth that enables more people to live sustainable, healthy lifestyles. We applaud the city for its progress with attractive development evident in the successful town center, and for its improvements for pedestrians and cyclists that have earned it recognition as a Bronze level Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists.

Rockville has the opportunity to offer more children a place to live where walking and bicycling to school are possible, bringing with it important health and quality of life benefits. Today only 15% of children walk or bike to school nationwide, compared to 50% of their parents' generation. Experts cite the lack of regular physical activity as a prime contributor to the childhood obesity epidemic, and studies have shown that children who walk to school are on average healthier and able to focus better. Creating the opportunity for more investment in Rockville-

serving schools and simultaneously investing in improved walking and bicycling conditions will help both children and adult residents.

We understand city residents' long-standing concerns about growth, but it's better to shape it by supporting neighborhoods and communities where people can drive less. Our region has shown that well-designed, mixed-use, walkable and transit-accessible neighborhoods generate far fewer auto trips. Therefore, we favor investing public resources in smart growth communities like Rockville, and in the schools, local streets, transit and other public services that your community needs. In that context, we believe that aligning your APF standards with the county, is among the approaches you can take to simultaneously allow you to shape your own future growth and trigger the investment you need in your local schools.

Thank you for your attention,

Kelly Blynn
Coalition for Smarter Growth