



Testimony before the Montgomery County Council regarding:

Support ZTA 19-01: Unlock the Potential of Accessory Dwelling Units

By Cheryl Cort
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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 help those communities flourish.

Montgomery County is a great place to live and work. But for many, finding a suitable home to live in can be difficult given high prices. For many existing residents, who may have lived in their homes for years, changing needs in their families may demand a more adaptable home. One part of the solution to these challenges is accessory dwelling units.

Reforming onerous restrictions on accessory dwelling units helps to seamlessly diversify the county's housing stock and better adapt homes as households' needs change. An accessory dwelling can help an older homeowner age in place, or enable a young family to purchase their first new home. An ADU might also be the perfect solution for a returning adult child or an aging parent. Accessory dwellings both help individual families and help communities adapt an existing housing stock to new needs as they change over time. ADUs have the distinct advantage of offering the potential for low-cost housing, especially in high-demand neighborhoods, since the land is not part of the building cost. For these reasons, we have been enthusiastic supporters of ADUs for Montgomery and the region.

The proposed changes to the current code will greatly improve the prospects for a homeowner to undertake the creation of an accessory unit on their property. At the same time, the changes strike a balance with the preservation of building standards important to many community members. Current rules discourage homeowners from building ADUs, and the county has lagged behind more innovative communities which have reformed their ADU regulations.

Montgomery housing planning studies have repeatedly cited ADUs as part of the solution for a cross-section of housing challenges. In 2018 alone, the Planning Department highlighted ADUs as solutions in two of their studies -- the Middle Housing Study, and the Housing for Older Adults Study. These studies noted zoning impediments that prevent making ADUs a meaningful part of the county's housing choices. ZTA 19-01 addresses these impediments and will set the course for graceful inclusion of new housing opportunities, benefiting both homeowners and communities.

Thank you for your consideration.