

February 1, 2021

Montgomery County Planning Board
2425 Reedie Drive, 14th Floor
Wheaton, MD 20902

Item 5 – Zoning Text Amendment No. 20-07: R-60 Zone – Uses and Standards (Support)

Testimony for February 4, 2020

Jane Lyons, Maryland Advocacy Manager

Chair Anderson and Planning Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on ZTA 20-07. Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

We urge you to support ZTA 20-07 as a step in the right direction. From various studies, reports, and plans over the past several years, middle housing typologies have emerged again and again as a key tool for providing more inclusive, attainable, and sustainable housing opportunities. We recognize that ZTA 20-07 needs adjustments in order to get us to the right outcome, but it is a critical starting point.

As research from the Planning Department has demonstrated, we do not have enough housing to meet the high and growing demand of living in a place as desirable as Montgomery County, especially in walkable neighborhoods. Wealthier households have outbid moderate and lower income households, and our essential workers are forced to drive farther and farther out, undermining our economy and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. If we are to meet the county's housing targets and reduce vehicle miles traveled, we must create more housing opportunities in neighborhoods near transit and other amenities.

Fixing this housing crisis will not be quick, which is why we need a countywide approach *now*. The master plan process followed by specific zoning changes can refine and adjust zoning requirements for specific communities, but legalizing more housing types through that strategy would take years. Updating our zoning to reflect the needs and demands of the 21st century is only one strategy that we must use to address the housing crisis, but it is a critical strategy. Our recommendations for ZTA 20-07 are as follows:

Relax onerous development processes: Building duplexes, triplexes, and small apartment buildings near transit needs to be much easier. To do this, they need to be allowed by-right with appropriate requirements. If a single family detached home is allowed by-right, then a multi-unit

structure that meets certain requirements for height and setbacks should also be allowed by-right, without having to go through an onerous process.

Ensure construction is feasible: Requirements placed on development need to be crafted in a way that ensures missing middle housing types are actually feasible to design and construct. We echo the Planning staff's recommendations to review parking, building height, lot coverage, and setback requirements. As such, we recommend eliminating minimum parking requirements within a mile of Metro. This does not mean that parking would not be included, only that it would be optional and not required by the county government.

Expand the target areas and consider affordability incentives: We would also like to see this initiative for more diverse housing types include R-90 zones as well and expand beyond one mile of Metro stations. In accordance with the blueprint being crafted in Thrive 2050, Montgomery County's growth should be focused near Metro stations, but also the Purple Line corridor and major arterial roads with existing or planned frequent transit, such as the identified bus rapid transit corridors. However, targeting zoning reform only around transit stations does not undo the legacy of inequitable land use policies and segregation in Montgomery County. We encourage zoning initiatives such as this to also enable a diversity of housing options in areas of high incomes and job clusters. To that end, we also urge the Planning Board and staff to consider creative approaches for incentivizing affordability in middle housing developments.

Thank you for your consideration.