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Montgomery County Council  
Andrew Friedson, President  
Stella Werner Council Office Building,  
100 Maryland Ave, Rockville, MD 20850

Friday, November 15, 2024

Dear President Friedson and Members of the Montgomery County Council,

The Greater Olney Civic Association, Inc., (GOCA) opposes the Attainable Housing Strategy Initiative (AHSI) proposal that is being presented to the Council from the County's Planning Department.

There are several deficiencies with the Initiative as presented. They include, but they are not limited to, the following:

1. AHSI is based on pre-pandemic population growth projections that are no longer valid according to the latest Census data;
2. Given that the County already has ample residentially zoned areas exceeding even the most optimistic projections of future housing needs and that the housing projections in the proposal are based on pre-COVID realities, it is likely that existing land is sufficient to meet anticipated needs.
3. The Initiative does nothing to address the affordable housing needs in the County. Our proximity to the Nation's Capital has an exponential impact on the cost of ground, regardless of the type of housing that may be selected to be placed upon the ground;
4. The Initiative does almost nothing to address the infrastructure issues that would be created by building multiplexes in existing single-family neighborhoods, which have been planned, developed, approved, and maintained to accommodate single family density; and
5. Lastly, and most importantly, it is a violation of deeply rooted and long-standing expectations of 134,000 single-family homeowners who purchased a home in a particular neighborhood in Montgomery County based on the zoning and complimentary covenants in place at the time of the purchase.

A particular point in opposition is that the Initiative would allow multiplexes 'as a matter of right' in existing single-family neighborhoods. The character and charm of a particular neighborhood would be forever lost.

· Olney Civic Association, Inc., is the representative organization of approximately 33 condominium and homeowner associations in the greater Olney area of Montgomery County, Maryland.

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Furthermore, we ask the Council to halt the efforts to create a Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) or otherwise rezone or change the definition of the current zone terms in our existing communities. There appears to be neither a reasonable basis nor a clear necessity for doing that.

Instead, the Planning staff should be directed to incorporate the desired multiplex-styled residential alternatives into the development of existing parcels of land yet to be developed or parcels to be redeveloped, such as White Flint Mall, Lake Forest Mall, Burtonsville Shopping Center, Viva White Oak, the GEICO headquarters, Discovery Center, etc.

With this preferred alternative approach, the Planning Department could implement the concept of the Initiative in completely new communities, beginning 'from the ground up' with all the necessary and compatible infrastructure. To attempt to do so with existing single-family home zones, create a haphazard redevelopment plan imposed on existing zones with the existing infrastructure ill equipped to handle the increased density.

As for affordable housing, Montgomery County has more than 20% vacant office space. The County should look to the lead of our neighboring central city, Washington, D. C., and seriously consider the conversion of some of the vacant office space to affordable housing. In closing, the Initiative should not proceed further.