

April 7, 2022

The Honorable Marc Elrich
Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street, 2nd Floor
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: Chevy Chase Library Building Project

Dear County Executive Elrich:

The twenty-one undersigned organizations urge you to redevelop the Chevy Chase Library with mixed-income housing. We believe this is an opportunity to model the future of Montgomery County by mixing housing and a public facility in one location near transit, services, amenities, and jobs. This project is key to meeting the county's goals to achieve racial equity and social justice, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

The county's ownership of the Chevy Chase Library site creates one of the best opportunities to build a high percentage of affordable housing — allowing for many more income-restricted units than what would be required by the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program. We urge the county to seek a minimum 30 percent set-aside of below-market rate units and offer housing for households making 50 percent and less of the area median income.

We understand that you are not considering redevelopment of the Chevy Chase Library site and that the branch has instead been reinserted into the list of libraries to be refreshed in future years through the Library Refurbishment Level of Effort Capital Improvements Program (CIP).

However, according to DGS, the library was built in 1965 and is in need of major repairs. Anita Vassallo, Director of Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) wrote in a March 24, 2020 [letter](#) that Chevy Chase Library “has structural deficits beyond what could be remedied in a refresh/refurbishment project.” This followed Director Vassallo's more detailed [letter](#) dated March 17, 2020 that enumerated specific defects including the roof, elevator, HVAC, moisture at the lower level, and lead paint, and concluded that “a refreshment/refurbishment project would not achieve the needed or desired results.”

This site is ideal for housing for many reasons and not redeveloping it is a lost opportunity. First, the Chevy Chase Library is a short walk from the future Connecticut Avenue Purple Line station and located near several Metrobus and Ride On lines. Housing policy is climate policy, and this is a prime location where residents of this potential new building would not need to rely on a private vehicle to get around, or would be able to take very short car trips. The county would also make the best use of its investments in the Purple Line, Ride On, and other infrastructure by making sure that many potential riders can live near its stations.

Montgomery County needs more housing, especially more affordable housing. Chevy Chase is one of the wealthiest areas in the county with a median household income of \$192,273. It also lacks diversity, being over 80 percent white. The median home sale price [exceeds \\$800,000](#) and the [average rent is \\$2,409](#). This is an area that was kept out of reach for people of color through redlining, restrictive covenants, and other public and private policies. The government must take intentional steps to reverse this history. Thus, we applaud the work of the Housing Opportunities Commission, the county, and partners to deliver mixed-income housing at The Lindley in Chevy Chase. Montgomery County needs more projects like this to break down its racial and socioeconomic east-west divide and achieve housing justice.

Mayor Muriel Bowser in Washington, DC recognized the need for intentional investments in affordable housing in wealthier, whiter neighborhoods, which is why DC is [rebuilding](#) its Chevy Chase Library and Recreation Center to include housing. But this is not a new concept — there are many examples of co-location of housing and libraries across the country and world, including in Cornelius, OR; Milwaukee, WI; Portland, OR; Chicago, IL; and Brooklyn, NY. Nearby Alexandria arranged for a developer to build affordable housing on top of a new fire station for the Potomac Yard redevelopment. Even though it is not on top of the library, The Bonifant at Silver Spring senior housing apartment building was a part of the new Silver Spring Library development.

There are also numerous potential benefits to the MCPL system. Housing co-located with the library could increase usership of this branch, defray the cost of a new library while also increasing its interior space by adding 4,000 square feet, and improve accessibility for seniors and families. New housing and residents would also help to grow the county's tax base to pay for other needed services.

We believe it is important to maintain a library in this location and would not want to see the library relocated. Therefore, we urge you to work with the existing community to understand how their needs can be best met with the library's redevelopment, while also addressing the significant housing needs of residents who have been kept out of Chevy Chase due to high housing costs and a history of exclusionary policies.

The county has missed previous opportunities for co-location of public facilities and affordable housing, such as on top of police stations, firehouses, and other libraries. The redevelopment of the Chevy Chase Library can be an example of how Montgomery County needs to reimagine public facilities for the county in the future, to the benefit of the entire county.

We ask for your leadership to take the necessary steps to redevelop the Chevy Chase Library with mixed-income housing. We would like to see the county move forward on this as quickly as possible due to the urgency of the housing, climate, and racial equity crises, and we would be happy to discuss the details of this request.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this appeal.

Sincerely,

Action Committee for Transit
Action in Montgomery
Affordable Housing Conference of Montgomery County
Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Enterprise Community Partners
Environmental Justice Team of Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church
Glen Echo Heights Mobilization
Housing Initiative Partnership, Inc.
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington
Kaiser Permanente
League of Women Voters of Montgomery County
Montgomery County Branch of MDC Democratic Socialists of America
Montgomery County Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
Montgomery for All
Montgomery Housing Alliance
Montgomery Housing Partnership
Sierra Club Montgomery County Group
Takoma for All
Washington Area Bicyclists Association
Young People for Progress

CC: Montgomery County Council
Ronnie Warner, Chief, Office of Planning and Development, Montgomery County
Department of General Services
Greg Ossont, Deputy Director, Montgomery County Department of General Services
Anita Vassallo, Director, Montgomery County Public Libraries
Meredith Wellington, Land Use Policy Analyst, Office of the Montgomery County
Executive