

April 28, 2023

Hon. Jolene Ivey
Chair, Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee
Prince George's County Council
1301 McCormick Drive
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building
Largo, MD 20774

RE: CB-052-2023 - Position: Neutral, recommend different approach; suggested amendments

Dear Chair Ivey:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG). CSG is the leading non-profit organization in the Washington, D.C. region dedicated to making the case for smart growth. Our mission is to promote walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to make those communities flourish.

We understand the goals of CB 52 in terms of ensuring growth is directed to the right places. We have also read and concur with the issues and concerns raised by the MNCPPC-PG staff report regarding CB 52. Therefore, we recommend a different approach to achieve key goals stated in the bill.

It is a fact that Plan 2035 is not achieving its goal to allocate most growth to Transit Districts and Centers. Too much growth is going to areas of the county with inadequate transportation and other services, increasing traffic and other impacts on the community. Much of this has been due to the numerous inappropriate zoning text amendments approved by prior County Councils for higher density residential development in areas of the county not intended for this level of growth. A key step would be to halt further such ZTAs.

In addition to the recommendations in the staff report, we believe that the county should directly address the permissive residential zoning in the county that is allowing growth in rural areas and "established communities" outside the beltway where residents will be far from transit and many services. Too much land is zoned for low density residential development. Single family detached zones account for 27% of the County's land area, and more than 76,412 acres. Much of this single family zoning is outside the beltway.

We recommend that the Council work with the Planning Board to assess significant portions of areas outside the Capital Beltway where residential zoning could be limited to the Reserved

Open Space (ROS) Zone, which provides for a 1 dwelling unit to 20 acres zoning density. At this density, we can preserve both agricultural uses for local food production and more continuous forests which will help protect natural areas and water quality. We also recommend discontinuing “Future Water and Sewer Service Areas” and rezoning these areas to ROS. The county should focus future water and sewer service investments on inside the beltway communities rather than expanding service to future areas.

At the same time, we also recommend reviewing and revising residential and mixed use zones inside the Beltway to facilitate a variety of housing types including townhouses, but also different types of multifamily housing, accessory dwellings, and other missing middle housing types, with greater densities focused closer to transit stations and bus corridors.

We also urge the Council to work with the Planning board to conduct an assessment of impediments to achieving the planned growth in Transit Districts and Centers, and the role of moderate and middle density housing types such as townhouses, especially inside the Beltway in achieving housing, TOD, and climate goals.

If CB 52 advances, we recommend that townhouses be permitted inside the Beltway in general, or not banned in areas not inside Transit Districts or Centers. Higher density Transit Districts and Centers should have multifamily buildings at the core, while townhouses could be an appropriate housing type at the edges.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cheryl Cort', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director