

May 1, 2023

Hon. Thomas Dernoga
Chair, Prince George's County
Wayne K. Curry Administration Building
Largo, MD 20774, via: Clerkofthecouncil@co.pg.md.us

RE: Prince George's County Proposed FY 2024 Operating Budget & Six-Year CIP -
Support continued affordable housing funding; implement complete, transit-supportive streets

Dear Council Members:

My name is Cheryl Cort. I am the policy director for the Coalition for Smarter Growth. Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading non-profit 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 are also supporters of [RISE Prince George's](#), a group of county residents and allies advocating for policies and practices that build shared, sustainable prosperity in Prince George's County by creating safe, walkable, inclusive and transit-oriented communities.

Support the Housing Investment Trust Fund (HITF)

The trust fund is a fundamental commitment that a jurisdiction makes to a local affordable housing preservation and development program. Robust, dedicated funding for the trust fund is essential to leveraging other tools such as Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other federal and state programs. We applaud the County Council's recent commitment to funding for its trust fund. We support the budget focusing on the top priorities for the County's affordable housing production goals by funding the Housing Investment Trust Fund (HITF) and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT). While the funding of \$15.7 million is less than last year's HITF, the reduction reflects the removal of a state grant. We ask the Council to continue to build the HITF to make it an ever more effective funding tool to preserve and build affordable housing to better meet the needs of Prince George's residents.

Continue Right of First Refusal (ROFR) successes

Second, we commend the County for its effective use of the Right of First Refusal program that is preserving naturally occurring affordable housing through covenants. We support the new ROFR Preservation Fund and an expanded ROFR developer roster. This is a highly successful program that deserves greater recognition. It is a critical tool to avert displacement of vulnerable renters.

As we fund these important tools, we also ask the Council to continue to work closely with the Executive and Planning Board to address the non-funding impediments such as zoning or other requirements that can stall mixed income and affordable housing developments proposed for inside the beltway communities and sites near transit. While the new zoning code is a major step forward for the county, it requires many refinements to ensure it is encouraging development in the right places -- around transit hubs, centers and inside the beltway.

DPWT - implement safer street designs

The complete streets and roadway improvement projects in the CIP continue to perpetuate roadway designs that fall short of the safer, low speed design standards for transit districts and centers. Instead, roadways -- even those right at Metro stations - are oversized, with too many travel lanes, slip lanes, and other features that encourage dangerous higher speeds for cars. Multilane crossings and higher speed designs lead to risk and tragedy for people walking and biking in the public right of way. We urge the Council to work with the administration and the Planning Board to wholly reconsider the road designs that are proposed in the CIP. At minimum, the 2017 Urban Street Design Standards should be implemented in Transit Districts and Centers -- achieving a 25 MPH speed for motor vehicles in those areas.

For one specific example: we note that the Addison Road project is still listed as a project to expand to a 4 lane roadway. We urge the Council and administration to reconsider these outdated plans that do not embrace national best practices, or 2017 Urban Street Design Standards. Overdesigning this road does not support the Blue Line corridor strategy to create a dynamic, truly walkable place at the Addison Road-Seat Pleasant Metro station.

Better buses - safe access and bus lanes

Another dimension of complete streets is streets designed to provide safe access to bus stops and transit stations, including buffered sidewalks, crossings, and bus stop amenities like benches and shelters. The CIP should put greater emphasis on upgrading access to bus stops and bus stop amenities. Roadway designs should also include bus priority treatments including dedicated bus lanes. We ask that the Council ensure that the Silver Hill bus lane plan, spearheaded by WMATA, be funded and implemented for this high-ridership corridor.

Blue Line corridor - support complete streets & an equitable strategy

We support the investments proposed for the Blue Line corridor. We ask that the complete streets project be given additional review to assess if it truly fulfills the intention of the 2017 Urban Street Design Standards, and national best practices for urban places. We also ask that the county support establishment of a Blue Line corridor coalition to build community engagement, and ensure equitable outcomes for stakeholders.

We support the administration's funding focus on building the Central Avenue Corridor Connector trail. We are encouraged that the administration is working to break through the log jam that has delayed the trail from moving through the project process.

Rethink I-495 at Medical Center Drive Interchange Project

The I-495 at Medical Center Drive Interchange Project does not fit the goals for the Blue Line Corridor economic development strategy. It will spend millions of dollars to add more vehicle capacity that further puts at risk people attempting to walk and bicycle in the area. We recommend that the Council work with the administration and the Planning Department to revise the traffic performance measures that are driving this costly project. This expansion of road capacity runs counter to the effort to create a mixed use, walkable, transit-oriented environment. The funding could be reprogrammed to retrofit overly wide roads and enhance walk, bike and transit infrastructure in the area.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Cort
Policy Director
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