

Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights

October 24, 2020

By email

Council President Katz
Councilmember Albornoz
Councilmember Friedson
Councilmember Glass
Councilmember Hucker
Councilmember Jawando
Councilmember Navarro
Councilmember Rice
Councilmember Riemer
Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

RE: ZTA 20-03, Townhouse Living - Conditional Use Standards

Dear Councilmembers,

I am writing on behalf of the Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights (CCCFH) to express our opposition to ZTA 20-03, which would relax the “Household Living” conditional use standards of Zoning Code section 3.3.1.D regarding development of townhouse projects in detached single-family zones.

CCCFH includes 18 communities in and around the Friendship Heights and Westbard areas, and over 20,000 residents in those communities.

CCCFH certainly supports policies that incentivize development of physically accessible home environments. However, the County already provides substantial property tax credits of up to \$10,000 a unit to townhouse developers whose homes include certain levels of accessibility. In addition, developers who meet specified accessibility standards in new single-family attached and detached homes are also eligible for a credit against otherwise applicable development impact taxes.

Moreover, developers of new townhouse developments are already including significant “Design for Life” features in response to market demands. The largest demographic purchasing units in new and existing townhouse developments are downsizing seniors who already have disabilities and need accessibility features, or who are concerned that they may need such features in the future.

Given the existence of property and impact tax credits for providing accessibility design features in townhouse developments, and the fact that developers of townhouses are already including these features in their projects, it becomes clear that this ZTA is not necessary to incentivize accessibility. Instead, ZTA 20-03 achieves the opposite result by making traveling by public transportation or automobile more burdensome, enjoying public parks and recreational amenities more challenging, and finding handicapped parking spaces more difficult.

Representing the Communities of Brookdale, Chevy Chase Village, Chevy Chase West, Drummond, Kenwood, Kenwood Condominium, Kenwood Forest II, Kenwood House Cooperative, Little Falls Place, Somerset, Somerset House Condominiums, Springfield, Sumner Village, Village of Friendship Heights, Westbard Mews, Westmoreland, Westwood Mews, and Wood Acres

Specifically, ZTA 20-03 would significantly relax the conditional use standards for townhouse projects in these neighborhoods by:

- Deleting the current requirement that an “accessible” townhouse project abut a road with public bus service, thereby all but eliminating ease of access to public bus transportation for disabled townhouse owners and/or their disabled visitors who do not drive;
- Changing the requirement that the townhouse project be located “within 2 miles” of a Metro station to a requirement that it be located “within a 2 mile radius of the site,” thereby deleting an “on the ground” measurement of the real-time travel distance to the station and substituting in its place an “as the crow flies” standard bearing no relationship to the actual distance a disabled person must walk or drive to reach the station;
- Increasing by 50% the distance within which a public recreation or park facilities must be located from “within 1,000 feet” to “within a 1,500-foot radius,” thereby substantially adding to the distance a disabled person will have to walk or drive to reach these public amenities; and
- Reducing by 75 percent the number of handicapped parking places the townhouse project must provide from one such space for each townhouse unit to one space for every four units, thereby removing easy access to vehicles used by disabled owners or visitors.

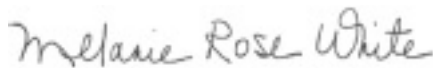
The sponsor of ZTA 20-03, Councilmember Riemer, has acknowledged that this ZTA is necessary to accommodate a single developer who wants to construct its next townhouse project on land in the Derwood area because it can’t meet the current conditional use requirements for townhouse developments in single family detached zones. According to Councilmember Riemer, this ZTA merely relaxes the current standard “a little bit” in order to ensure that this “terrific vision” of more “accessible” townhouse units can be achieved.

Contrary to his “terrific vision” of providing more accessible housing opportunities, each of Councilmember Riemer’s proposed changes is contrary to accessible living, because each will make it more difficult – not easier - for disabled individuals to access public transportation, public amenities and handicapped parking spaces.

This ZTA would have negative impacts on single-family neighborhoods. The impacts are not fairly described. The ZTA is wholly unnecessary and not justified.

This ZTA is simply the top of a slippery slope down which the standards for townhouses throughout the County’s single-family neighborhoods, including those represented by CCCFH, will slide “a little bit” by “a little bit” until there are no meaningful standards left. We thus urge the Council to reject this anti-accessibility proposal.

Sincerely,



Melanie Rose White, Chair
Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights

Cc: Jeff.Zyontz@montgomerycountymd.gov