

## Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights

June 1, 2020

Mr. Sidney Katz, President  
Montgomery County Council  
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear President Katz:

The Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights, which represents 18 communities that include over 20,000 residents, supports our County Executive Marc Elrich in his thoughtful recognition of the Council's tradition of maintaining essential citizen involvement in public hearings and testimony in the decision-making process of county government. We strongly support the County Executive's request that the Council set the same priorities for the Planning Board's work program. There have been troubling instances when the public has not been able to participate fully during Planning Board presentations on controversial matters. Although the Planning Board has provided a way for the public to participate to some extent, it is very restricted and given to technical shortcomings. Testimony is truncated and sometimes involuntarily silenced.

We echo the County Executive's concern about issues of critical interest to the citizenry that have been discussed before the Planning Board without adequate public participation. Issues that have been discussed and decided without acceptable participation were held on March 26th, April 2nd, and April 23rd. Residents were and are limited to computer systems with development application documents containing unreadable, photo-reduced, miniscule print that cannot be magnified, except in the center area of the document. The "Microsoft Teams Meeting" platform is awkward, ineffective, and dependent on the planning staffer to make the documents clear. The meeting on April 23rd allowed public discourse in only one direction by pressing \*6 on a phone in order to be recognized and heard. There was no discussion, just a question given with a one-word answer "yes or no." There was no discourse.

We strongly feel that the Board should postpone such decisions on these controversial issues that impact public policy and the environment until such time that the Planning Board can put in place a format whereby citizens can have a voice in the policies that impact their lives. Decision-making without fair representation from impacted communities during this stressful and unusual time is not appropriate or efficient. It is not democratic. Has the Planning Board considered having meetings outside with seating 6 feet apart? This time of year through the fall season would be optimal for using an outdoor setting.

We support our County Executive, Marc Elrich, and his recommendation that such hearings be held at such time when the Planning Board and the County Council have systems in place that allow essential and optimal citizen involvement.

Sincerely,



Melanie Rose White, Chair

cc: Chair Anderson and Commissioners of the Montgomery County Planning Board

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