



THE VOICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY BUSINESS

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Public Hearing on Subdivision Staging Policy
Planning Department Draft
June 2, 2016
Testimony by Ilaya Hopkins, Vice President Public Affairs
Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce

MCCC members are concerned about their ability to attract and retain workers in the County due to transportation challenges and housing affordability. Therefore, the Chamber believes that the outcome of the Subdivision Staging Policy (SSP) is critically important to the vitality and well-being of the business community.

In the coming months, the MCCC Business Environment Council, chaired by our incoming MCCC Chair-Elect of the Board of Directors Dusty Rood, will focus on the Planning Board recommendations and prepare comments for the public hearings that will take place at the Montgomery County Council in the fall. Last year's focus of our council under the leadership of Jim Young was regulatory reform and tax structure at the state level which will continue as there is still much to be done. This new focus reflects the economic imperative to make sure the SSP supports broader policy goals of economic development and sustainability. We provide some general thoughts on the draft below and look forward to providing more specific comments throughout the process.

Growth produces more access to more opportunities for residents of Montgomery County and the Metro Maryland region. The Subdivision Staging Policy determines the policy tools used to manage the growth and evolution of our community. In planning for that growth, investment in the transportation network and the quality of K-12 schools must be considered. In this latest version, new issues like environmental considerations and urban parks emerge for future discussions.

As none of this planning can be realized in a vacuum, it would be most useful to have an inventory of all the existing laws, regulations, and strategies that impact growth and development to better align policies with goals and objectives. Specifically, we encourage you to review the County's Comprehensive Economic Strategy that is in the process of being finalized for review by the County Council as a way to align planning policy with economic development goals.

For example, it is an economic imperative for Montgomery County to attract young professionals and families. However, one of the greatest impediments we face is housing affordability. While much of the issue is due to an imbalance of supply and demand, recent studies have shown that a significant

percentage of the cost of new housing is attributable to governmental fees and taxes. For many years, we have placed a disproportionate share of the costs of public infrastructure on new and future residents. As our community ages and the pace of growth slows, we need to carefully consider the consequences that our policies will have on housing affordability and the impact it will have on the economic activity that supports our quality of life.

While there needs to be better coordination between policies and goals, it is also true that a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer suitable for an increasingly diverse county. This is acknowledged in the draft. In fact, we see the diversity in land use from our office at the Chamber every day – from views of Sugar Loaf Mountain and the I-270 Corridor to downtown Rockville, 355, and White Flint. We can even see the tip of the Washington Monument and Tysons Corner. It shows us what we know. Montgomery County is a diverse county and is in a region that faces increased competition to remain relevant in a global marketplace.

The choice made decades ago to set aside one third of the land mass and concentrate development along key corridors is seen clearly today in development patterns and has consequences for our options going forward. The choice made then and confirmed in this document makes clear that a bedrock of the quality of life in Montgomery County is the “sanctity of single family neighborhoods” and the Agricultural Reserve and open space. Utilizing existing infrastructure like water and sewer as well as transit areas therefore makes good sense and will necessarily concentrate development along these assets.

In conclusion, the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) is a long-time supporter of investment in infrastructure and capital projects. Dollars spent on capital projects means short-term opportunities for businesses and jobs for our residents. When businesses succeed they grow, add more employees to the payroll, and contribute to the economy. We also support long-term efforts to generate more diverse economic activity in job centers like White Oak and the Great Seneca Science Corridor.

We sincerely appreciate all the effort that has gone into addressing challenges with the current system. We encourage you to connect the policy tools with the strategic goals for the economic development of the county to produce the kind of sustainable development that is vital to our community’s continued success.

About MCCC

The Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) accelerates the success of our members by advocating for increased business opportunities, strategic investment in infrastructure and balanced tax reform to advance Metro Maryland as a regional, national and global location for business success. Established in 1959, MCCC is an independent non-profit membership organization and is proud to be a Montgomery County Green Certified Business.