



January 26, 2024

Good Evening,

My name is Talisha Searcy, and I am the Mayor of the City of Takoma Park. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight on behalf of our residents regarding the Minor Master Plan Amendment. I also want to thank the Montgomery County Planning Board and staff who worked on this Plan.

The City of Takoma Park's housing and economic development goals are threefold: preserve, protect, and produce. We want to preserve existing businesses and affordable housing in Takoma Park, including in revitalizing areas; produce more housing and opportunities for businesses to start and grow, allowing the City to meet our diverse housing and economic needs; and protect renters, homeowners, and local businesses from discrimination and displacement, and our environment from destruction.

With the unexpected relocation of the Washington Adventist Hospital, the Minor Master Plan Amendment opens a door for our community to realize what is needed to advance its housing and economic development goals as well as support the advancement of vital City resources such as its affordable housing stock, schools, parks, and municipal buildings. I am pleased that the Montgomery County Planning Board took the City's recommendations, and the Plan now better reflects the City's values, including incentivizing the creation of a range of housing types, retaining and improving existing affordable housing, and protecting the most vulnerable among us from potential displacement due to development.

However, now is where the real work begins, and we need the Montgomery County Council to take four actions to ensure that the vision outlined in this Plan is realized.

First, references to modifying the City's rent stabilization law should be removed from the Plan. The City of Takoma Park contains 4 percent of the County's housing stock, but we make up 9 percent of the County's affordable housing units. It is vital that we protect affordable housing in the City. In

light of the County's new rent stabilization law, the Montgomery County Planning Board used the Minor Master Plan as an opportunity to opine on the City's rent stabilization law. The Board should not use such plans to comment on municipal laws, and I urge the County Council to remove this language from the Plan.

Second, the County Council should require the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) Superintendent to review the Plan and amend the 2025-2030 MCPS capital improvement plan (CIP) to fund Piney Branch Elementary construction. Piney Branch Elementary school was built in 1973 and has not been revitalized nor received a major capital project. Piney Branch is also the smallest school site in the entire County at 1.9 acres, with no room for temporary class space in its current configuration. MCPS acknowledged in previous CIPs that the school has "current and projected overutilization" and needs "a comprehensive facility upgrade to address the aging infrastructure." Moreover, planning for capital improvements for the school began in 2017. However, the current CIP noted that construction was delayed until the Minor Master Plan was finalized.

Since my November testimony before the Board of Education on this matter, the City has learned that MCPS did not provide formal comments on the Minor Master Plan. Additionally, they were under the impression that the Plan would provide opportunities for the identification of an alternative space for the school. Meanwhile, the Planning Board did not appear to be aware of any of this and was expecting formal comments from MCPS. In the end, our students continue to suffer. Please act now to add funds to the CIP for the Piney Branch Elementary School construction. Also, consider modifying the process to ensure that MCPS provides formal comments on master plans in the future.

Third, the County Council should review the Plan using a race equity and social justice lens. The City recognizes the Planning Board is required to consider the racial equity and social justice impacts of the master plans that they review. However, the City was under the impression that an additional Equity Review by the County's Office of Legislative Oversight was going to happen. We have since been told that this review is required for Zoning Text Amendments to implement the approved Plan but not the Plan itself.

The City Council wants to encourage the County Council to review this Plan using a race equity and social justice lens.

Lastly, the County Council should work with the County Executive to ensure county funding is available to support the proposed infrastructure improvements recommended in the Plan. The Plan includes many wonderful additions to the community, including new public spaces and bike lanes. However, the City needs financial support from the County to create this infrastructure, which will benefit all of the County's residents.

The City of Takoma Park supports the re-envisioning of the Washington Adventist Hospital campus and the enhancement of critical civic, economic, and housing resources in the surrounding neighborhoods along the Maple Avenue corridor. The Plan is a vital step towards realizing this shared goal and we look forward to working with the County to ensure that the vision is realized.