

Testimony

- I am Matt Pacinelli. I am a real estate professional. I live in Brookdale, just southwest of the Friendship Heights Metro Station. I am speaking today on behalf of the Citizens' Coordinating Committee for Friendship Heights. The CCCFH includes 18 close-by neighborhood associations and about 20,000 people.
- We appreciate the opportunity to be heard. We support the effort to address the housing shortage crisis.
- Brookdale and many other CCCFH neighborhoods already embody the concepts outlined in the AHSI's recommendations with large, medium, and small scale homes in concentric circles around Metro stations.
- Substantially more housing in line with these recommendations is already in development in our area. For example:
 - Friendship Heights is already adding over 1,100 new housing units, including 156 moderately priced homes, more commonly known as Affordable Housing or Inclusionary Zoning¹.
 - A preliminary plan for the GEICO site, which borders Brookdale, called for 200 townhomes and single-family attached units. The plan's approval has expired. It presents a perfect opportunity for the Missing Middle housing contemplated by AHSI.
 - Four hundred single family homes in Brookdale are immediately adjacent to the GEICO site. Some have accessory dwelling units that contribute to the variety and attainability of housing in our community.
- More could be done if needed. Additional sites where Large Scale housing could be built without zoning changes include:
 - The Saks Fifth Avenue property.
 - River Road between Little Falls Parkway and Westbard Avenue, now occupied mostly by gas stations, convenience stores, self-storage, and an abandoned bank.
 - Wisconsin Avenue in the District from Friendship Heights to Tenleytown.

¹ 5151 Wisconsin Avenue (210 units, 23 affordable); 5300 Wisconsin Avenue (320 units, 40 affordable); 5333 Wisconsin Avenue (310 units, 48 affordable); 5500 Wisconsin Avenue (300 units, 45 affordable);

- We support the development projects underway and those that could be undertaken on additional commercially zoned sites. As suggested in Thrive 2050, however, more ambitious public transit options must be developed concurrently to minimize harm and encourage development.
- To further help expedite the construction of such projects, the County could offer incentives - tax credits, expedited entitlements and permitting, and reduced proffer requirements. These are consequential steps to increase the supply of housing quickly to meet the crisis.
- In contrast, the contemplated zoning changes would make, at best, a long-term, incremental increase in housing in CCCFH neighborhoods:
 - Any actual housing growth in these areas will take years. An Urban Institute study found that relaxing zoning restrictions was associated with an increase of only 8/10^{ths} of one percent in the housing supply over 3-9 years.¹
 - Nor would any new Medium Scale housing units likely be truly “attainable” to those without access to these neighborhoods now, because of their cost:
 - The Planning Staff’s 2019 study of Silver Spring found that the economically feasible *per unit* price point of Missing Middle housing would be higher than the average price of existing single-family homes in the same areas.²
 - As the Staff acknowledge in their recommendations: “Due to the high cost of land and high cost of construction new attainable housing may be more expensive than existing single-family detached units.”
 - This conclusion aligns with actual sales data. For example, the Crest II condominiums on Western Avenue sell for about \$1 million, nearly \$250 thousand more than the median price of single-family detached homes in the County.³
- Our primary concern is that the proposed zoning changes will harm mature existing neighborhoods without effectively addressing the attainable housing crisis. Those neighborhoods simply were not designed for additional density.
- For example, in my Brookdale neighborhood, the streets are unusually narrow:
 - Too narrow for sidewalks according to the Department of Transportation, which denied the residents’ request for sidewalks.

² Land-Use Reforms and Housing Costs: *Does Allowing for Increased Density Lead to Greater Affordability?*, March 29, 2023, Christina Plerhoples Stacy, Christopher Davis, Yonah Freemark, Lydia Lo, Graham MacDonald, Vivian Zheng, Rolf Pendall

³ Silver Spring Downtown & Adjacent Communities Plan – Missing Middle Housing Market Study, February 25, 2021, Tables 1 and 7.

- A number of streets are less than three cars wide.
- The County Council recently eliminated all parking requirements within a half-mile of a Metro Station, which will encompass most of Brookdale.
- The Staff further proposes to allow new Medium Scale projects with only one off-street parking space for every two units in the remainder of Brookdale.
- These measures will increase street parking. They will make my neighborhood much less accessible to emergency vehicles and dangerous for pedestrians, cyclists, and children.
- If increased density is even possible in such areas, it will not succeed without planning focused on the needs of each community.
 - We agree with County Executive Elrich that “complex planning issues are best done through small, context-sensitive plans.”
- Large-scale development as in Friendship Heights is accomplished through master and sector plans. Neighborhoods like ours should get the same consideration and care.
- CCCFH is eager to participate in a planning process that works for all, while also moving forward with actions that can expand housing opportunity and diversity more effectively.
- Proceeding in isolation with the proposed county-wide zoning changes threatens to cause more harm than good. Please avoid this unnecessary action.
- Thank you for your attention and consideration.