



County Council Strips Communities of Their Voice on Development Matters

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Council Bill (CB)-15-2024 was enacted on July 16th to make updates to the new Zoning Ordinance, and the Council voted 6-4 to strip out critical protections for communities. Voting FOR were Council Chair Ivey, Vice Chair Harrison, Fisher, Olson and Watson. Voting AGAINST were Blegay, Burroughs, Dernoga, and Oriadha. **As a result, there will be less community input in development affecting them, more sprawl development that adds to our infrastructure deficit, increased traffic, loss of rural land, more strains on public safety staffing, and more.** Again, the Council voted contrary to the policies it adopted in the Climate Action Plan and Plan Prince George's 2035.

Since the new Zoning Ordinance was adopted a few years ago, communities have been upset that the Council largely cut residents out of the process. Most development projects only need a Detailed Site Plan, and the issues considered in approving a site plan are not the ones communities care about: the type of use, density, traffic impact, lack of infrastructure or public safety staffing, etc. Thus, communities were out of meaningful input.

Last year, I got an important **amendment enacted** that requires Detailed Site Plans to be consistent with Master Plans. For example, if the Master Plan consistency rule had been in effect a few years ago there probably would not be a 7-11 gas station on the Behnke's property. An amendment to CB-15-2024 (Ivey, Franklin and Hawkins) repealed Master Plan consistency which will allow for more unwanted poor-quality development. The loss of this provision will likely be the way for unwanted development that the residents of Vansville and North Creek have been fighting.

CB-15-2024 was also **amended** Tuesday (Ivey, Harrison, Hawkins, Fisher, Olson, and Watson) to remove another critical protection that I put in the bill to give communities a voice around the new CGO Zone (Commercial-General-Office). Generally, the CGO zone (previously C-S-C) is the zone for shopping centers. Under the old ordinance, only commercial uses were allowed, not residential. When these properties were given the new CGO designation, they were allowed to convert to apartments or townhouse developments without useful community input. For example, there is a CGO townhouse proposal in Vansville and an apartment project in Calverton.

To give communities a voice in these developments, I inserted a provision in CB-15-2024 that would have required special approval by the Council for residential uses. **The Council stripped this provision out of the bill. The Council stripped this provision out of the bill over my strong objections.** So, development of apartments and townhouses in CGO Zones may be developed by right merely by filing a Detailed Site Plan and there are no meaningful issues that communities can raise to stop an unwanted residential development.

In the face of the action to amend CB-15-2024 to delete provisions that gave a voice to the public, **I argued** that the Council is legally required to get Park and Planning comments and hold another public hearing on substantive amendments. As expected, one of the Council's attorneys presented frivolous arguments to justify denying the public an opportunity to speak to this amendment.

I will continue fighting to give communities a voice in development near them, but this latest example of fealty to low-quality development demonstrates that the majority of the Council continues to put special interests before community interests. Since the At-Large seats were created in 2018, I do not recall either member supporting communities over special interests in land use and environmental matters. This reinforces the adage that elections have consequences.

Sincerely,

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