

CB46-2016

Josh Wolf [joshwolf@chesapeakestrategies.com]

Sent: Tuesday, July 19, 2016 10:32 AM

To: CouncilMail

Cc: Feldmark, Jessica

Attachments: CB 46-2016 Costco Statemen~1.pdf (134 KB)

Good Morning,

Please see the attached copy of Erich Brann's testimony, on behalf Costco, from last night's hearing. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Cordially,

Joshua A. Wolf

Public Affairs Manager



11426 Rockville Pike, Suite 304

Rockville, MD 20852

Office - 301.570.4582

Mobile - 443.857.1686

www.chesapeakestrategies.com



HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

Council Bill 46-2016

July 18, 2016

STATEMENT FROM ERICH BRANN

Good evening. I'm Erich Brann, Real Estate Director for Costco Wholesale. Our Howard County warehouse is located in 6675 Marie Curie Drive in Elkridge.

I am here this evening to voice Costco's opposition to Council Bill 46.

Costco's Columbia warehouse has served Howard County residents since 2007. We have more than 113,000 members living and working here, who shop at our warehouse and enjoy access to the safe, high quality affordable gas we provide.

I would like to thank Councilmember Ball for his leadership in establishing the Fueling Station Task Force and for taking the time to meet with us throughout this process.

Costco has monitored the work of the Fueling Station Task Force since day one. We attended all Task Force meetings and provided comments to the Task Force as they continued their work. We publicly expressed our concerns about the Task Force's final recommendations last year so I won't take the time to go over them again.

Thankfully, the Planning Board brought a reliance on facts into the equation. Costco believes that their recommendations protect the public interest on many levels – perhaps most importantly protecting residents from being forced to pay inordinately high prices for gasoline.

I am told that CB 46 represents the results of negotiations between all parties. However, we were not aware of any discussions about the language in this bill until it was introduced two weeks ago. Upon seeing this new language, we have identified several areas of concern.

First, CB 46 requires a 1,000-foot buffer between gas stations in the New Town zone. We would like to know the purpose of this requirement because, from our standpoint, this buffer only serves to protect the high prices being charged by some gas stations. Simply put, if a customer can't see what neighboring stations are charging for gas, they won't be able to decide on the best choice for their needs. With a 1,000-foot buffer, the signs will simply be too far away. When the prices of competing gas stations are visible as a group, prices charged by all of those stations become more competitive.

And this is not a small issue. Columbia already has the highest gas prices in Maryland and the prices in Howard County as a whole are second highest in the state according to the Towson University Regional Economic Studies Institute. Let's not make it worse.

Second, the bill's 20% landscaping requirement is impractical and costly. There's a lot of car and pedestrian activity at gas stations. Any landscaping plan must take into account blind spots and

Costco CB 46-2016 Statement
July 18, 2016
Page 2

clear lines of site. Plus, every site is different, with varying topography and surroundings. Imposing a strict one-size-fits-all landscaping requirement is unnecessary. This is easily addressed by the Hearing Authority as provided in the bill.

Third, CB 46's requirement for landscaping the outside of all wood or masonry walls is also impractical. These requirements and details should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Hearing Authority, as already provided for in the bill.

It is already near impossible to open or expand a fueling station in Howard County. Why make it harder? Adding additional across the board planning requirements will decrease the likelihood that a station will locate in the County.

With all the problems this bill creates, I ask you, "What problem does this bill solve?"

Council Bill 46 will create price protections, increase the price of gas, and ultimately have a negative impact on Howard County businesses and consumers alike. I hope you will support consumer rights & economic competitiveness by opposing this bill.

Thank you for you time and consideration.