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Letter in opposition to CB16-2017

ML Morgan Lakey <morgan_k@verizon.net>
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CB16-2017

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Dear Howard County Council,

Please find attached our letter from the Audubon Society of Central Maryland in opposition to CB16-2017, the proposal to amend PlanHoward 2030.

Thank you,
Morgan Lakey
President
Audubon Society of Central Maryland



March 1, 2017

Howard County Council
3400 Courthouse Dr.
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Dear Howard County Council:

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland, a chapter of the National Audubon Society with territory that includes Howard County, opposes CB16-2017, "An Act Amending Plan Howard 2030." The 1615 acres of farmland that is under consideration for rezoning functions as important wildlife habitat, as a source of clean water for the Chesapeake Bay, and as a resource of agricultural productivity to support sustainable food production, agro-tourism, and high life quality throughout our region. Farms are irreplaceable resources, increasingly so as urban centers become more dense and rural areas shrink. In contrast, housing developments add burdens to our roads and waterways, and irreversibly degrade the natural productivity of the land. This bill, unfortunately, would also set a precedent that would lead to continuing efforts to remove more properties from Tier IV classification. Farmland is an essential asset to our community, and the current designations need to be maintained.

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland is a 501(c) (3) organization with over 1,000 members. Our territory includes Howard, Carroll, Frederick, and part of Montgomery counties. An all-volunteer group, our mission is "to protect and restore birds, other wildlife, and their habitats through education and action, for the benefit of people and the earth." Our symbol, the American Kestrel, is a bird that relies on the type of open, rural habitat imperiled by the rezoning proposition. Suburban sprawl is one of the key reasons why Kestrels, along with other iconic American birds, mammals, and other species are declining throughout the U.S.

We recognize that farmers face significant economic challenges, and we support efforts to assist them through conservation easements that reduce tax burdens, and other creative measures. But we are also convinced that the true value of farmland lies not in its conversion to additional sprawl developments. Instead, the value of productive agricultural land will escalate in the coming years as it becomes increasingly scarce, and as society recognizes the intrinsic importance of sourcing food from local farms, orchards, and livestock operations. Local food availability is a key feature of resilient communities, and Howard County's recognition of the need to support community resilience is to be applauded and supported. Rezoning would

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undermine resilience, and in fact contract the Resource Protection initiative aspects of Plan Howard 2030. The housing developments would undermine the rural character of the area and greatly diminish its value as a sustainable source of the vital human commodity: food.

We urge the county to resist the short-term pressure to develop this land and instead look to the long-term future of our county. We need to maintain the rural west as an irreplaceable source of food, habitat, economic strength, and beauty, and oppose its conversion to yet more sprawling residential development.

Yours truly,

Morgan Lakey, President
Audubon Society of Central Maryland

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I oppose cb16

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CB16-2017

Please vote against cb16.