

SAO3-FY17

SG Susan Garber <buzysusan23@yahoo.com>
Today, 12:57 PM
CouncilMail

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How come no one was l...
4 MB

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Dear Council Members,

I appreciated the opportunity to share some of my concerns about SAO 3 Fiscal year 2017, the Enhance Nutrient Removal Grant at the March 20, 2017 public hearing.

I certainly wouldn't want you to turn down money that we need to meet standards which we are obligated to meet. However I did want to add a word of caution that expansion and upgrading of the Little Patuxent Wastewater Reclamation Plant (LPWRP) alone will not be sufficient.

Excess nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorus, lead to degraded water quality, which negatively impacts plant and animal life in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. These excess nutrients can flow into the Bay from wastewater treatment plant discharges, storm water runoff and from rainfall. I believe we are falling woefully short of our control of storm water run-off in Howard County.

There is an old adage that if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. Perhaps we need to immediately stop allowing development on steep slopes on erodible soils near our rivers! There are some truly deplorable current situations in the county (which I include with photos and excerpts from a recent blog.)

If you read the news you know that there's a good chance our Bay clean-up funds are going to be cut and cut severely. It might be in a very perverted way this will be a wake-up call to us all. Perhaps it will prompt us to reexamine our own development procedures; how they affect storm water management as well as the pace of population growth. Perhaps we need our county to admit, as our state has in their winter 2017 issue of Nutrient Management News. "Sometimes environmental laws and regulations look good on paper but prove impractical in the field five years down the road. The department has found this to be the case....." As I heard at a recent Planning Board meeting when an engineer was being questioned about storm water management techniques under state regulations, "So you are saying that it will be **cleaned** water that will cause the erosion???"

I also hope you will carefully examine Howard County's operation of the LPWRP in the future and will remember that people live near the wastewater treatment plant,

including some who have been long-term Savage residents living in beautiful hundred and fifty year old historic homes just across Route One. They unfortunately have the wastewater treatment plant "visit them," particularly in the summer. It also visits numerous homes throughout Savage and in Bowling Brook. I hope you'll protect US, as well as the Chesapeake Bay.

Susan Garber

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Please see the attachment for photos and comments

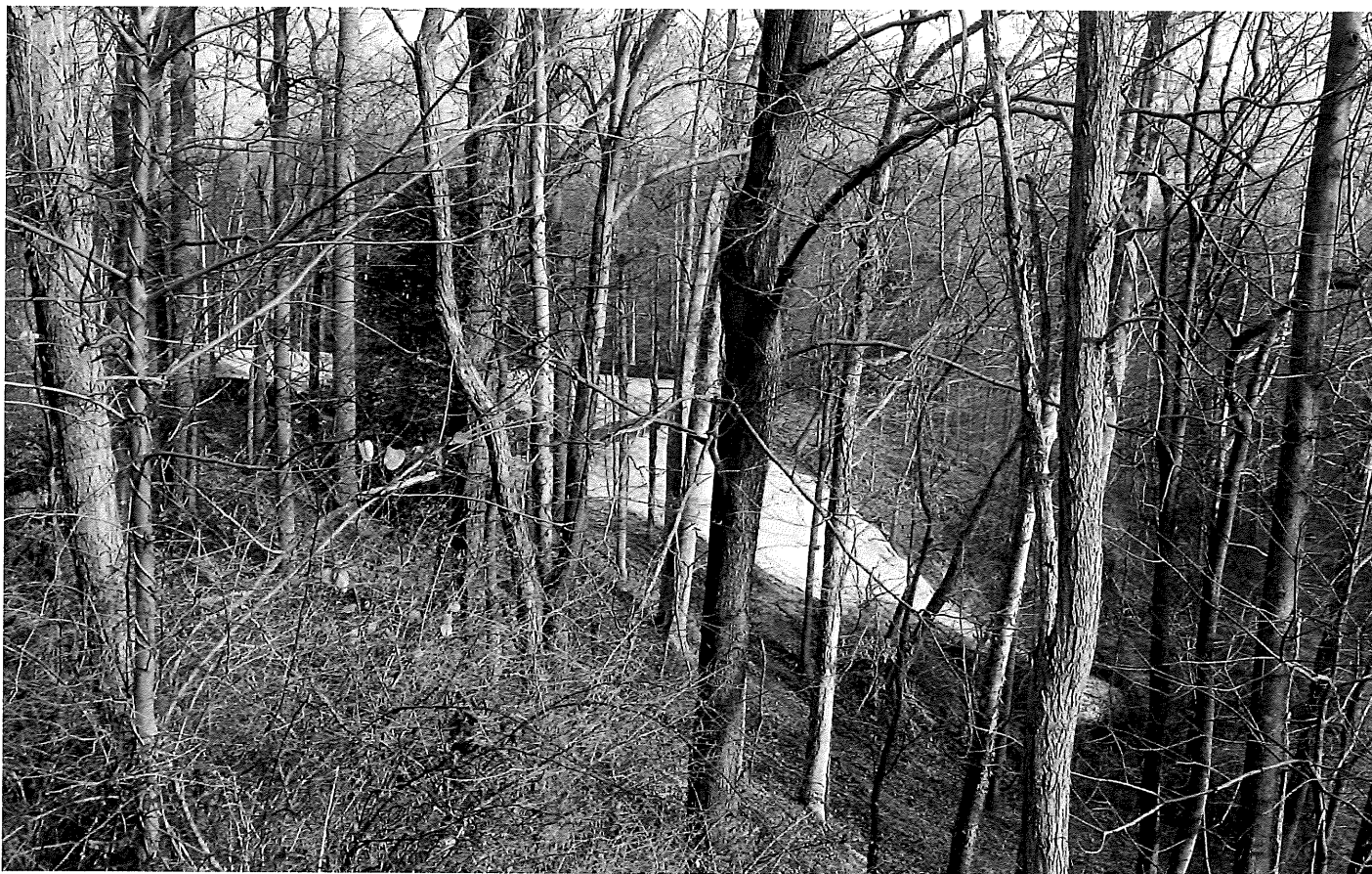
How come no one was looking over what was being permitted at the Patuxent Overlook development? How come we continue to spend huge sums of money on Bay clean-up and local projects to correct past mistakes from inadequate storm water management practices; yet we continue to permit truly bonehead practices?



Shame on YOU Howard County

Just when one thinks that they have seen it all when it comes to development abuses in Howard County one will drive by an example that defies the imagination, an incident of truly jaw dropping proportion!

In an earlier post I commented that I pitied the fool who lived downstream of HoCo. I commented what a horrible neighbor we are, how we ignore the impact of our poorly regulated development practices on our downstream neighbors. I wonder just what the residents of the City of Laurel think when they look across the Patuxent (PAX) River (the border between HoCo and PG County) from the vantage point of Main Street and Route 216.



HoCo appears to have permitted the total stripping and regrading of a parcel atop the steep slopes which lead to the Patuxent River below. That section of the Pax River has been known to flood with some frequency and especially any time the dam above it needs to be opened. I suspect the thinking is that there is little development subject to flooding on the Howard County side-- somehow making it okay to flood out the lower developed Prince George's County side --not to mention properties along the Anne Arundel portion just downstream.

What makes the site which they have stripped and regraded so reprehensible to me personally is that the situation there in North Laurel very closely parallels the situation we are facing in Savage. If the DPZ has permitted such poor development practices along the Patuxent River, then clearly our fears that they would allow the same along the Little Patuxent are well founded. Both parcels sit on ridgelines above steep slopes to park trails below which follow along waterways which feed the Chesapeake Bay.

Both Parcels were fully wooded; all trees 'must' be removed to "accommodate the density" desired. Both parcels have waterways which need protection on **two** sides. In Laurel, it is the Patuxent River and a branch which feeds into it. In Savage, it is the Middle Pax and the Little Pax. In both cases the HoCo Department of Recreation and Parks is accepting steep slope property unsuited for recreation as 'open space' which comes with significant future on-going maintenance costs.

Both parcels are infill situations at their worst. In Laurel, a single home snuggled amongst the trees is being replaced with NINE single family homes with a common drive/flag lot arrangement. In Savage, land originally zoned R-20 (2 residences per acre) was previously rezoned to B-2 (business), and now to R-H-ED (a zone whose intent is to provide special protection to the

environmental and historic resources of the area yet permits 10 residential units per acre). A total of 35 units are proposed to include singles, duplexes, and townhouses.

We will never recover the cost to correct the misguided storm water management practices being allowed. When parcels are stripped of established trees and vegetation they are made vulnerable to run off and erosion. If the top soil is removed during regrading and the soil is compacted to prevent uneven settling throughout the development, then the growth of anything replanted (reforested?) will be severely retarded. It could easily take decades to restore the stability of soil near slopes which have been disturbed. The best possible practice is to leave slopes and land proximate undisturbed. I found it disturbing (no pun intended) that our HoCo regulations re: steep slopes differ significantly from those of the Howard Soil Conservation District (HSCD), the MD Dept. of the Environment (MDE), and the MD Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Our HoCo DPZ is concerned only when steep slopes exceed 25% or more of 20,000 sq. ft. of contiguous land. The other organizations define steep slopes as those of 20% or greater regardless of the acreage. They also have higher standards for erodible soils.

It has become a thinly veiled plan of developers to 'give' or 'dedicate' to the County as their open space requirement, those lands which aren't buildable. By giving the County all of the steep slopes and wetlands for example, they can assure that the Technical Staff Report for the Planning Board will indicate "There are no steep slopes or wetlands affected by this development" despite the fact that the buildable parcel may now be surrounded by or immediately proximate to slopes and wetlands. While an entire parcel may be stripped of mature forest, HoCo only addresses preservation of specimen trees (those 30 inches in diameter or 75% of state champion trees,) rather than considering 'tree cover' as recommended by the MD DNR and as codified by several MD counties.



We clearly need to do more to prevent problems rather than fix them. While it is often said, it may

not be true that “There’s never enough money to do something right the first time, but always enough money to do it over.” Strict enforcement of best practices and a healthy dose of common sense are required. For example we must think beyond the initial installation of mini and micro storm water management (SWM) facilities on each lot. Will the future homeowners have the resources, knowledge, and time to maintain them? Think beyond initial installation of larger “dry ponds.” Will the new Home Owners Association (HOA) actually maintain them? or will it be up to the County to intervene and remediate at taxpayer expense in order to meet State standards?

Hopefully two actions by the County will help to prevent the continued degradation of our waterways:

1. The long overdue rewrite of our zoning code and subdivision regulations which is scheduled to begin soon.
2. The proposed FY18 capital budget item to provide Rec & Parks with some funding to purchase sensitive land which become available along waterways.

The outcomes of either of those efforts is as yet unknown, but in the interim, tighter adherence to our existing regulations should be the way forward (i.e. interpreting zoned density as MAXIMUM density, not GUARANTEED density, and granting fewer waivers.) HoCo needs to be less generous in accepting those steep slope, wetland, or SWM areas which are sure to have subsequent on-going issues and costs. The advice of the Howard County Soil Conservation District and that of the MD Departments of the Environment, Natural Resources, and Natural Resources Conservation Service should be respected and enforced.

Just as we need the many different law enforcement entities (FBI, CIA, HSS, state and local PD) to work cooperatively to protect us from terrorism, so too do we need government agencies (DPZ, DILP, SCD, DNR, MDE, NRCS) to protect us from what amounts to eco-terrorism by the development process. And of course, good leadership and a vision of what we want the future HoCo of our children and grandchildren to be like, would help tremendously.

Insist on better oversight and outcomes—and meet me on the high road—

Susan

<http://howcome.md/no-oversight-on-the-overlook/> Published 3/12/17

Howard County OverDevelopment...HoCo's future depends on Depends

How come a burgeoning Senior population desiring to age in place may complicate development and redevelopment plans? How come the insatiable appetite for more and more development is taking us ever closer to the day when we may need to ask Seniors to make 'the ultimate sacrifice'? How come you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?

I hope everyone had a nice holiday break and that you are ready to resume your efforts to create a better Howard County. Information is key and Enuhfa is back to share more of her quirky perspectives on information she has gathered over the years. She will weave her observations into a tale she considers the “Great Secret Plot,” or alternately, “HoCo’s future depends on Depends.” S.

Howard County Overdevelopment

Greetings. My tale begins in the dark, dark days when the former director of Planning and Zoning controlled the development (destruction?) of the HoCo Kingdom. While she worked to preserve lands near her home in another county, she never met a square inch of land in HoCo that she did not seek to see developed. Under her reign increased density spread throughout the land like a plague. The complexity of the zoning regulations and subdivision codes grew with the same rapidity as the population. The more complex the regulations became, the more "special powers" she assumed as the 'Final Decider'.

Although she is gone, her legacy remains. It sends shivers up my spine to hear that her name is still being invoked by DPZ staff members in the context of "Well this is the way we always did things under....."

I've always been concerned that there is far more emphasis on Zoning than Planning going on in HoCo. The creation of "floating zones" and "density exchanges" is a dead giveaway that there are NO real zoning categories, especially since everything is ultimately subject to 'conditional uses' to boot. Even more frightening than this lawlessness regarding development is the not-so-secret secret plans for redevelopment. When a zone which allows residential-buildings-of-infinite-height-as-long-as-the-ground-floor-is-commercial-space was proposed, it became clear that citizens needed to wake up and pay attention. When townhouses began to be built on top of townhouses I felt like the child in front of a small black and white TV set watching Mickey Mouse Club "Anything Can Happen Day."

Now only the challenging lots are left, those on steep slopes, or near wetlands. But we just keep on building without regard to erosion: not just the type of erosion that sullies our waterways, but the erosion of those things which drew us here, the erosion of our quality of life. At the APFO meetings much discussion of allotments has occurred, i.e. the number of units to be developed in each category each year. There seems an almost feverish dash to build every unit allotted as soon as possible without regard to the fact that eventually there will be no allotments remaining. We will have used up all the land, removed all of the trees, and to quote Joni Mitchell, "Paved paradise. Put up a parking lot."

Once all the land is developed, then in the dark scheme of the former director, existing houses on half or quarter acre lots (most of Columbia) --and larger ones-- can be torn down and replaced with more dense forms of housing. Flag lots, that blight on established neighborhoods justified as Smart Growth, will continue to proliferate. Common formula: one single family house comes down and 6 singles or townhouses replace it. [How infuriating to see the developer who holds the dual titles of King of Historic Site Destruction AND King of Flag Lot Development tried to increase the APFO standard for schools to allow 120% of capacity rather than the existing 115% before development is delayed. Thankfully intelligent task force members voted the proposal down! Be sure to thank them.]

Citizens are told by DPZ that people no longer desire single family homes and that is why we should build more apartments. I'm not convinced-- even though I once lived in both garden and high-rise apartments as a young adult. They were great-- before children came into the picture. Isn't HoCo's reputation built on being "a great place to raise a family?" Why would we want to convert wonderful homes with yards into more and more multifamily dwellings? To me, having great recreation and park facilities is no substitute for one's own backyard. Won't we just be contributing to childhood obesity.....?

And now that which had me on a twisted path brings me around to Seniors. Many developers and politicians would prefer that empty nesters 'get out of Dodge', freeing up their suburban homes-- not

for other younger families but for more dense, urban-like redevelopment. But there are problems, real problems with that thinking.

When people who are 50+ respond to surveys that they want to “age in place,” a vast majority mean in their OWN place. They do NOT mean in a high-rise “Senior Reservation”. Many want to enjoy hosting family gatherings, having sufficient room for the grandkids to stay for a few weeks during the summer, enjoying the shade trees and gardens they’ve worked so long to establish. They want an integrated community with people of all ages. Developers need to STOP coveting the homes of today’s 50+ population.

Picture the scenario where the remaining land in Ho Co is developed---every last available space. Available space doesn’t just mean acreage. It also means available sewer capacity. The Public Works staff has made it very clear to the APFO task force that our sewer capacity is finite. There is no technology to increase it. There is no additional land to expand the plant. [You may not be aware that the waste from septic tanks in the western part of county is also brought to the one and only sewage treatment plant in Savage.] Yet development proceeds as if we can simply develop and redevelop at ever increasing density levels. But wait. The day will come when not a single “flusher” more can be served. What then???

To support an ever increasing tax base through population growth will we have to ask Seniors to make “the ultimate sacrifice?”

to roll themselves over a cliff???

to leave friends and family behind???

No, any Senior not taxed into moving out of the County will have the option to remain, as long as they take up no sewer capacity. In other words, **no more flushes!** This means another kind of ultimate sacrifice--mandatory use of Depends. [I suppose Ho Co Seniors could cross over into surrounding counties for the luxury of a flush toilet, but they may fear being exposed as illegal immigrants.]



So you see, Ho Co’s future may indeed depend on Depends.

Unless, of course, a new administration and a new planning director lead us out of the darkness.....

Keep your feet on the high ground (it’s drier)---

Euhfa Diza

<http://howcome.md/howard-county-overdevelopment/> first posted

How come even Baltimore City has recognized Howard County's declining quality of life? How come THAT news story won't be repeated on any politician's facebook page? How come the Howard Housing Authority is only making things worse?

I've recently, and often, complained about the declining quality of life in HoCo's Southeast and the Route One Corridor. Alternately neglected or dumped upon, ie. selected to be the depository for things the rest of the county doesn't want, this corner of Howard County was mentioned in a December 13 Baltimore Sun Investigates article, *Escaping the housing trap*, as well as the on-line version. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/bs-md-housing-segregation-20151212-story.html>

The article absolutely validated my comments about the declining quality of life in this area. But rather than feeling vindicated by that validation, I just feel 'dissed'—disrespected by both Baltimore City and Howard County.

It's one thing when residents of our area acknowledge their status as 'the ugly stepsister' or even the "armpit" of the county. It's another thing altogether when **Baltimore City**, with its myriad of issues, **considers the Laurel area to no longer be suitable for their Housing Authority's "mobility" campaign.**

[Please note that while the Sun Investigates article referred specifically to Howard County's Laurel my comments will be equally applicable to other regions of the county such as Oakland Mills, Running Brook, etc. where there are also high concentrations of poverty and subsidized homes. HoCo's DPZ has a very broad definition of 'Laurel' just as it does for the other 6 regional planning districts. So it is challenging to determine if ALL of North Laurel, High Ridge, Savage, and Jessup have been "rejected."

The 'mobility' campaign aims to relocate the City's public housing residents to better neighborhoods in the suburbs to improve their chances of escaping poverty. How come HoCo's Laurel is no longer considered a 'better neighborhood', a suitable alternative for relocation?? **According to the Baltimore Housing Authority the area is no longer classified as an "opportunity area" due to increased concentrations of poverty, subsidized homes or minorities.**

Wow! I would consider that statement a wake-up call to our HoCo government—and the very independent, but publicly funded HoCo Housing Authority. Stop and think. Try to reverse the previous administrations' density-intensifying future plans for the Laurel area. When your nationally prominent problem-riddled neighboring urban jurisdiction declares a part of **your** accolade-rich jurisdiction to be in a state of decline, perhaps you should be listening and rethinking.

As Will Rogers advised, if you find yourself in a hole, STOP DIGGING. For example, is it really wise for the HoCo Housing Authority to develop additional low and moderate units on the Beechcrest Property overlooking Route One in North Laurel? (Let's pray the Housing Authority isn't the winning bidder on the neighboring Hurst property as well.) Similarly, perhaps it is unwise to be locating additional low and moderate units off Guilford Road just west of Route One at the same time you're developing 35 efficiency apartments for the chronically homeless with mental illness and substance abuse issues on Guilford Road just east of Route One??? If the Baltimore Housing Authority considers Laurel's **current** concentration of "poverty, subsidized homes or minorities" **too great**, is it wise to **increase** that concentration even more in the **future**? Ya' think?

The HoCo Public School System also needs to sit up and pay attention. For decades you've refused to proactively secure desperately needed additional school sites in the greater Laurel area. You've ignored parents' pleas for improvements. You've watched test scores decline as overcrowding

increased with disproportionately high populations of students with special needs and non-English speakers. **How do YOU feel about Baltimore City rejecting the schools HERE as offering no better an opportunity for students than what they do? Baltimore City? Doesn't that just reveal the Emperor-has-no-clothes reality that HCPSS is only The Best in affluent neighborhoods?**

Additional information in the Sun Investigates article is equally disturbing and thought provoking at this time when the debate over low and moderate income housing in Downtown Columbia continues. "The 322 million in federal housing funds awarded this year to the region's 6 localities requires them to place subsidized homes outside areas with high concentrations of poverty and minorities." HoCo had better start making adjustments. They would appear to be out of compliance for their funding by locating additional impoverished folks in Laurel, Oakland Mills, Running Brook, etc.

"The housing need is clear: More than 100,000 people are on waiting lists for about 37,000 units for public housing complexes and rent subsidies" among the 6 localities (Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard Counties.) Howard County has a total waiting list of 5,210 and provides local rent subsidies for 1,267 units. I was surprised to see that the Baltimore "mobility" rent subsidies provide housing for an additional 963 families here in Howard. In addition the Baltimore City housing authority owns 6 homes here. By my rough math that's $\frac{3}{4}$ as many City residents as Howard residents are occupying subsidized units here. (So does HoCo's affordable housing woes translate to not enough units OR not enough subsidies?) Perhaps HoCo's laudable policy of barring landlords from rejecting rent subsidies explains why, despite HoCo's much high rental costs, so many "mobility" rent subsidies are used here. By comparison "mobility" program units in the other Counties are as follows: AA: 242; Balto. Co 1,131, Carroll: 2; Harford: 194.

Participating in a program of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership and the City Housing Authority is proving lucrative for some in HoCo. Burgess Mill Station in Ellicott City has received more than \$1.7 million to set aside 20 units for the 'mobility' programs special rent subsidy. At \$85,000+ per unit it sounds like someone just made a big profit. One would hope they could make some of those units more affordable for Howard County's low income residents. I'm sure they'd all enjoy the indoor pool, climbing wall and other luxury features of the taxpayer-supported Roger Carter Recreation Center on site at Burgess Mill. Those 'public amenities' are not available in Laurel.

All too often those involved in the development and leasing of properties seem to be benefitting disproportionately. As long as HUD continues to provide those large rent subsidies there is no incentive to keep rental rates more reasonable. How often do we hear that our homeless population in HoCo often results from families being unable to continue to meet rents they truly can't afford because they are too great a proportion of their income? HO much does the guarantee of subsidies keep rental rates high? Perhaps we should also consider getting off our high horse and building something other than 'luxury' units. Sound, functional, easy to maintain, attractive-without-being-quite-so-feature-rich units could house many more on the waiting list.

Let me be perfectly clear. I do not object to families being relocated from the City. Indeed we must seek solutions to the grinding cycle of multi-generational poverty.

- Every child deserves a chance for a quality education. Doesn't that include the children in Laurel?
- No one should fear for their safety and that of their children. Doesn't that include the families in Laurel?
- No one should be denied the opportunity to live in a healthy, diverse community with economic opportunities, parks and recreation facilities, clean air and safe streets. Doesn't that include the residents of Laurel?

Indeed it would be a wonderful world if there was no poverty, no 'haves' and 'have nots'. Howard County's high median income does NOT warrant praise if those incomes continue to be used to establish 'poverty free' enclaves. The time is here, no, overdue, to open Downtown Columbia, River Hill, Maple Lawn and the like to some subsidized units for Howard Countians. I know I won't make any friends in those communities by suggesting such, but unless we do, HoCo is destined to follow the path of less 'enlightened' districts racing headlong into 'urbanization'.

As you write your end of year tax deductible check to charities serving the homeless or hungry I hope you'll examine your own conscience. Are you truly thinking, "There but for the grace of God, go I"? OR "Thank God I don't have to deal with this in MY neighborhood"? Resolve in the new year to be a change agent for those less fortunate among us.

Happy holidays and meet me on the high road (where you'll know me by my red nose)--

Susan

First published 12/21/15 Declining Quality of Life in HoCo-- Newest Indicator

<http://howcome.md/215-2/>