

September 16, 2018

TO: Howard County Council

FROM: Joan Lancos
6110 Covington Road
Columbia, MD 21044

RE: Council Bills 71-2018, 70-2018, 69-2018

I am unable to attend the County Council Hearing on September 17, 2018. Below is my testimony on three bills up for your consideration.

Council Bill 71-2018

Council Bill 71 would require that Planning Staff be available for questioning under oath at quasi-judicial Planning Board hearings. I am not sure what this bill is trying to accomplish. As a former Planning Board member, I often questioned Planning staff without fear that their responses were not truthful. Based on recent observations of public hearings, I don't know that allowing questioning of staff under oath by Planning Board members, lawyers representing petitioners or opponents, or the General Public would accomplish anything other than to delay and prolong cases before the Planning Board. In any event, any change of this significance should only be considered as part of the on-going Zoning Regulation Assessment. I request that you vote "NO" on Council Bill 71-2018.

Council Bill 70-2018

Council Bill 70 amends certain posting requirements for proposed community meetings. I attend many pre-submission community meetings. I think the meetings provide valuable insight and opportunity to neighbors regarding proposed development. Providing additional information that makes the sign posting more useful could be helpful. If the pre-submission process will be part of the Zoning Regulation Assessment, it may be beneficial to wait to make changes under that process. However, I am not opposed to Council Bill 70-2018.

Council Bill 69-2018

Council Bill 69 would require the Zoning Counsel appear at Planning Board hearings in support of adherence to the Downtown Columbia Plan. The NT zone was created to allow flexibility in final plans for the development of the planned community. The Planning Board was given the role of determining whether submitted Final Development Plans met the goal of the original design. The Section 125.0.E.4 specifically calls for flexibility in the review of FDPs in the Downtown Plan. I do not understand the need for the Zoning Counsel to appear at Planning Board hearings on development plans to assure adherence to a plan that is supposed to be flexible in its implementation. As a former Planning Board member, I believe this bill usurps the original intent and power given to the Planning Board when the NT zoned was first approved and re-affirmed under the Downtown Columbia Master Plan. I strongly encourage you to vote "NO" on Council Bill 69-2018.