CR 104 - 2021

PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS
OF HOWARD COUNTY

Introduction

Howard County's major economic engine is its school system. Over the past two decades, as schools became overcrowded, the county has struggled to maintain the quality of its schools. The disparity in outcome is apparent as the county continues to cut programs year after year due to budgetary impacts.

The county's budget has been severely impacted due to its poor growth management practices. The county's department of planning and zoning as dictated by the county's politicians functioned more like facilitators of development rather than regulators of it.

Consequently as school overcrowding was not mitigated by the right level of school surcharge fees and appropriate wait times for residential development projects in an overcrowded school area.

The result has been staggering levels of debt every year as the taxpayer credit is leveraged to cover shortfalls created due to poor growth management. The intangible impacts due to deteriorating quality of schools compounds this cost.

School overcrowding creates inequitable learning conditions as students from poor families are unable to access proper attention and help to perform in schools. For a given class size, the larger the number of students from difficult socio-economic conditions, the poorer the instructional outcome.

We consider the updates made to the county's adequate public facilities ordinance in 2018 a positive one as it restricted school capacity. It also added the testing of high school capacity, where previously it was not required.

Unfortunately, after two decades of unmitigated growth, the county's school system and other infrastructure will need much stronger actions to recover.

Let's start with CR104-2021:

First we do not agree with the fiscal impact analysis that this resolution does not have a fiscal impact. When housing units are allowed to proceed from the Waiting Bin regardless of school capacity they have direct adverse fiscal and economic impacts on the county.

The county's housing unit allocation per APFO requires a residential development to be held in the housing unit allocation waiting bin only for three years if a school is overcrowded. In the fourth year, the project is allowed to advance whether the school is over capacity or not.

We commend councilmembers Liz Walsh and Deb Jung for voting for CB17-2019 (introduced by Liz Walsh), which would have increased this wait time to seven years. We urge the county council to reintroduce this legislation.

We also think that after the wait time, a project should not be allowed to proceed without paying an adverse economic impact fee if the schools are overcrowded.

Next, CR105-2021:

The middle school and high school capacity limits are too high. We think the maximum allowable capacity should be reduced to 105 percent for both middle and high school instead of the current 110 and 115 percent, respectively.

It has been recently revealed that the county does not account for student yield from apartments, resales, and new construction in a clear, transparent, and accurate way. While developers and various elected officials including county agency representatives have claimed that resales contribute more to our schools, how the county evaluates what is considered a resale versus new construction is not clear. We urge the county to clearly explain how this accounting is performed and rectify the erroneous methodologies.

The county's new general plan and other housing task forces would encourage approval of residential development regardless of school capacity by short-circuiting APFO. They do this by calling for approval of higher income homes in attendance areas of low socioeconomic status and approval of lower income homes in attendance areas of higher socioeconomic status even if the attendance area is overcrowded. As a matter of principle we encourage economic integration and call for it. However, any attempts to short-circuit APFO hurt school quality, which affects children from poor families more.

We disagree with the fiscal impact report that indicates that the cost to the county due to approval of 68 units of single family attached and detached homes is $390,000. Assuming that student yield projections are accurate, the incremental impact of a one student in a school of fixed capacity warrants further study. It is not a matter of pulling up a chair for a new student. As the capacity is reached and exceeded, the cost of an incremental student would also increase due to the fiscal and economic impact. Furthermore we are not convinced that the student yield projections are accurate as such projections continue to underestimate the actual yield.

Indivisible HoCoMD

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